

All About Pets

The national pet care information service



HOUSE-TRAINING AN ADULT DOG



THE BLUE CROSS

Britain's pet charity

Through no fault of their own, some pet dogs reach adulthood without being fully house trained. Fortunately, with time and patience, it is possible to establish new habits and teach your dog to stay clean in the house.



Not all dogs are housetrained

Although it is quite easy to house train a puppy, things can and do go wrong with this process if not carried out correctly. With some dogs, it may not have been attempted at all if, for example, they were kennelled outside. Consequently, some pet dogs reach adulthood having not been fully house trained. Luckily, in most cases, it is a simple matter to housetrain an adult dog and new habits can be established quickly. However, it does require time and patience, and a dedicated owner determined to succeed. How long it takes depends on:

- how well the owner keeps to the routine
- how quickly the dog learns
- how old your dog is
- what experience your dog has had in the past

Other reasons for not being clean in the house

As well as not being house trained, there are many other reasons why a dog will go to the toilet in the house. Some of these are:

- stress and tension in the household
- anxiety about being left alone
- territory marking

Symptoms of lack of house training

Usually just a few areas in the house are used as the toilet. These are usually near the exit or entry points of the rooms used and the dog will return to these sites again and again.

Some dogs may urinate and defecate in the house, or urinate in the house only and defecate outside, while others will defecate in the house but not urinate. Usually, but not always, the dog will sneak away to go to the toilet, rather than go in front of humans. The dog may do this at any time, not just when left alone in the house. Even after a walk, the dog may come back to the house and go to the toilet.

What to do

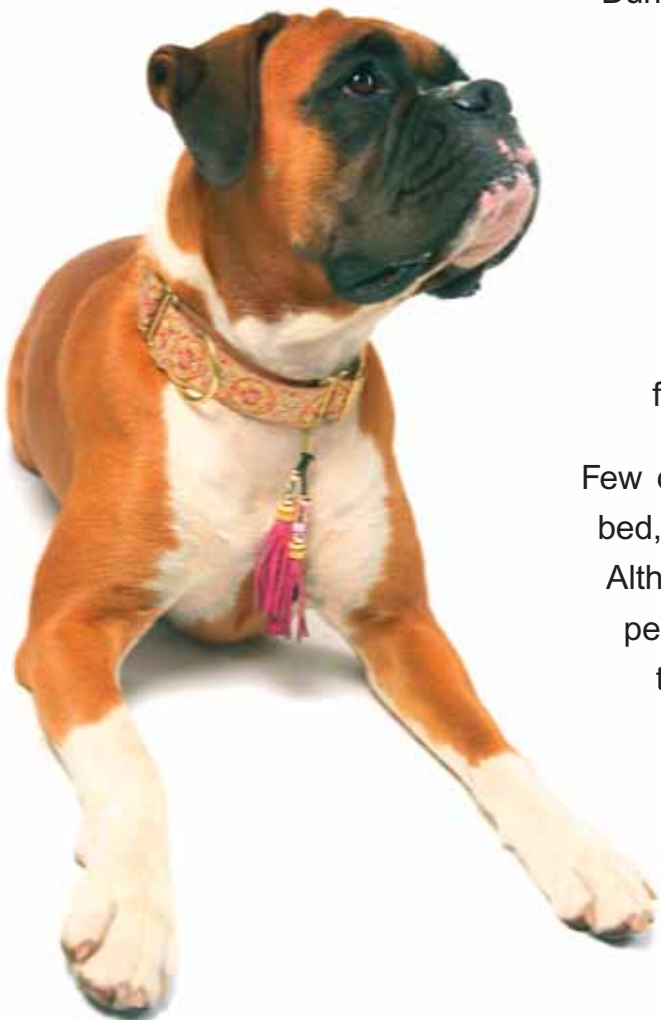
Before starting the new routine

Carefully clean all areas your dog has previously soiled using a warm solution of biological washing powder (for example, a teaspoon of powder dissolved in a cup of warm water) or a specially formulated product from your vet, which will remove all traces of the smell from your house.

Every day

When you first wake up, last thing at night and every hour during the day, take your dog outside to a place in your garden that you have chosen and let your dog walk up and down or run about and sniff the area (both exercise and sniffing helps stimulate elimination).

Put soiled newspaper or faeces in this area so that the smell tells your dog where to go next time. Stay out with your dog and patiently walk up and down for at least five minutes. If your dog starts to go to the toilet, give praise. It is important that, for the first two weeks, there is constant supervision so that your dog cannot go to the toilet in the house.



During the times that you cannot supervise your dog or when you go to sleep, confine the dog to bed. You need to find a suitable way to do this, either by restricting them to bed with a barrier, or investing in an indoor kennel. A dog will become accustomed to this, without making a noise or trying to break out, when left there for short periods of time.

Few dogs soil their own bed and, if confined to bed, they are unlikely to relieve themselves. Although it is unfair to confine them for long periods, this does provide a way of preventing them from soiling the house for short periods when you cannot supervise. This avoids perpetuating bad habits at times when you need to concentrate on other things.

Between trips to the garden, supervise your dog continually when in the house. This means keeping your dog in view at all times and being aware of what the dog is doing. When unable to supervise, confine them to bed, but do not leave your dog there for long periods of time.

When you see your dog about to toilet in the house

If about to go to the toilet indoors, take your dog immediately to your chosen place in the garden and praise the dog by giving a food treat or a game with a favourite toy. It is essential your dog associates going to that place with a reward. Catching in time means your dog will still need to go. Wait until the dog has performed and praise well.

When you find a puddle or mess

Do not punish your dog for any “accidents” discovered too late. It may make you feel better but it is most unpleasant for your dog and ultimately does not teach anything. Consider that these accidents are now your fault rather than the dog’s since you were not supervising closely enough.

You need to continue with this routine for at least two weeks. During this time, your dog learns about getting praise for going to the toilet outside and, since there is no chance to go inside, the habit of going outside develops. Throughout these first two weeks and for a while afterwards, continue to go out with your pet to the garden in order to praise them until the training is firmly established in your dog’s mind.

After two weeks of the above routine, gradually increase the time between visits to the garden. Your dog will eventually want to go to the toilet at a time other than the one you select. At this time, your dog will probably become more active or may wander over to the door. Watch for a change in behaviour and take the dog out quickly. Gradually, as you begin to be able to recognise the signs that mean your dog needs to go, you can relax your supervision in the house.

Specific signals that indicate that your dog wants to go out may include running to the door, whining or just being generally restless. Reinforce these signals by letting your dog out and the dog will soon be asking to go out whenever the toilet is needed. Housetraining will happen more easily if you keep to the same pattern of feeding and exercising each day.

At night

The easiest solution is to position your dog's bed somewhere outside your bedroom door and confine your pet in the usual way. Leave your bedroom door open so that if your dog wakes up and needs to go during the night, you will hear whining or moving around. Get up and take your dog outside, following all the daytime procedures. Confine your dog to the bed once more when you come back in.

Do not leave a dog confined to bed all night without you being available to go out when the dog really needs to go. Not only is this unkind but, if you force your dog to mess in the bed, the dog may develop a habit of doing this and you have lost the chance of teaching your dog to be clean.

If your dog is likely to bark when left in the bed at night, either allow this for a few nights and ignore the barking (your dog eventually learns barking is not rewarded and ceases to do it) or teach your dog to get used to being confined to the bed more gradually, during the day, so that your dog can tolerate it at night.

When you go out

If going out for less than two hours, you could leave the dog confined to bed in the usual way, but ensure the animal cannot be hurt when confined. Make sure your dog had the chance to exercise and go to the toilet before doing so. If you will be out for two hours or longer, do not confine your dog. Leave the pet in one room only and cover as much of the floor area as possible with a large sheet of polythene covered with newspaper. This does not teach your dog to be clean but makes any mess easier to clean up and prevents the house becoming soiled. Do not scold or punish if you find that your dog has gone to the toilet on the floor when you return.

“He knows he has done wrong!”

Some owners comment, “He knows he has done wrong, because he looks guilty”. In fact, the dog has learned that if humans walk into a room where there is a mess on the floor, a telling off or punishment follows. Your dog is actually showing submission to you, hoping you obey the law of the pack and stop your aggression. Unfortunately, a submissive posture can look like a guilty one to us and we often mistakenly believe the dog knows what they have done is wrong. We then conclude that any mess in the house is done on purpose or because the dog is too lazy to go outside. We are likely to punish more as a result, which often makes the problem worse.

“Don’t go when humans are around”

Some dogs learn just one thing about house training – that it is wrong to go to the toilet in the house in front of their owners. This is because they would have been scolded or punished if caught in the act of going in the house. Puppies are often put out into the garden and left there. Once outside, a puppy that finds being alone very uncomfortable concentrates on getting back inside to the owner, rather than learning to go to the toilet outside.

Hence, dogs often learn that it is wrong to go in the presence of humans but never learn that it is wrong to go in the house. Consequently, the only option is to wait until the owner is not looking or sneak away into another room when they want to relieve themselves.



All About Pets

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All About Pets provides expert advice, information and support for pet owners. It aims to ensure the welfare of Britain's pets by promoting responsible animal care. For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit www.allaboutpets.org.uk. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is a service of The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity, which provides practical support, information and advice for pet and horse owners. Through our network of animal adoption centres we rehome thousands of animals each year. Our hospitals provide veterinary care for the pets of people who cannot afford private vets' fees.

How you can help

The Blue Cross is a registered charity and receives no government funding. We rely entirely on the generosity of pet lovers to help support All About Pets and other vital animal welfare projects. Any contribution would be most welcome. For more information on how you can help call us on 01993 822651 or visit our website at www.bluecross.org.uk.



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