Puppies, what to expect your first week

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When parents find out they are going to have a child they make all sorts of preparations. A room is set aside and possibly the walls are covered with an appropriate wallpaper or paint, a supply of formula fills the pantry, baby bottles and diapers are purchased in huge quantities, toys and pacifiers are picked out, the baby's doctor is selected, etc. You need to make the same preparations for the puppy, and think about the equipment you will need, the car ride home, and the puppy's activities, feeding, and health care check-up.

Essentials

Your puppy is going to need a room or at least a place he can call his own, and a cage or crate will fill this bill. You are better off getting one that is big enough for him to use as an adult. The pup will need food and water bowls, toys to chew on and play with, a collar and leash, a bag of a good quality dry puppy food, and plenty of newspapers or training pads. The bills are starting to add up!

The car ride home

The big day arrives, and it is off to pick up the puppy. Many people worry that this is a traumatic event for the puppy, but it probably is not as bad as you might think. Coming home will start out with a car ride from the shelter or breeder's home. Try to keep this from being a terrifying experience for the pup. The main problem dogs have with car rides usually is not what we humans refer to as motion sickness, but simple anxiety about the vibrations, sounds, and to a lesser degree, the movement. Many dogs that have developed problems with car rides get nervous or even nauseous before the engine is even started. It is important that this first trip not be a bad experience that regresses into a repetitious behavioral pattern.

Before you leave the kennel, try to get the pup to go to the bathroom so there are no floods or surprises stimulated by all the excitement of the ride. On this first trip home, we break a cardinal rule about traveling with pets. We do not put them in a crate for traveling. Remember, they are small and easy to hold. Rather, we have someone other than the driver hold the puppy in a blanket or towel and talk or in some way try to distract him from the ride. If you have a long way to go and need to stop for the puppy to relieve himself, do not use a highway rest stop. At his young age, the puppy has very little, if any, protection from common dog diseases, and these areas can easily be contaminated with the organisms causing these conditions. We never recommend these facilities for pets of any age, but if you must use them, wait until your puppy has completed his vaccination series.

Being with people the first day home

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Leaving her mother and littermates will probably bring about some form of separation anxiety. However, this can be greatly diminished if you plan your schedules so that you are with the puppy constantly for the first 3 to 4 days. Some authors suggest leaving the puppy alone and give her time to herself to adjust to the new surroundings. We disagree. In our homes, we plan for this introductory period by keeping the puppy involved with plenty of attention from children and other family members through every one of her waking moments. When we are not with the puppy, she is eating, sleeping, or going to the bathroom. You will be amazed how time spent in this manner will speed up the housebreaking process. If the children are young or are not familiar with how to handle puppies, you should spend some time with them during these first few days explaining common sense rules on how to play with the pup.

Getting a health check

One of the first things you need to do is get the puppy into a veterinarian for an initial puppy examination. You will want to make sure the pup is in perfect health, free of any congenital traits or other medical conditions. Also, find out exactly what the breeder (or humane society) has done for the puppy. In all probability, the puppy has had some puppy vaccinations given by the breeder or shelter. She probably has also been placed on a deworming schedule and may even be on a heartworm preventive. Depending on the breed, the tail may have been docked and the dewclaws removed. It is common for all or some of these to have been done. This helps to explain some of the initial cost of your puppy regardless of where she was obtained. Your veterinarian will need all of this information along with the puppy's approximate birth date.

Feeding the puppy

What, when, and how to feed puppies becomes a major issue on the first day. Many new owners worry that without his mother's milk, their pup is going to have a hard time adjusting to his new home. Hopefully, where you acquired the puppy will give instructions on what he has been eating. It is a good idea to continue feeding the same type and brand of food for at least a few days. Most people are soon surprised how well puppies make it through this transition because they do not understand how far along dogs are in their development at 7 weeks of age.

Through our clinics and catalog business, we work with hundreds of breeders and animal shelters. It is common practice for most of these individuals to start feeding their puppies a commercial food at 21 days of age. Some of the toy breeds will start 3 to 4 days later. Even though their eyes did not open until 11 to 13 days old, just ten days later, puppies are ready to start on something in addition to Mom's milk. Most breeders take dry puppy food, soak it in warm water for thirty minutes, and then give it to the litter when they are 21 days old. The first day, they may only stick their noses in it and try to lick some of the liquid. But after that, they eat and they eat very well.

After a week or so, the puppies are getting these feedings twice a day. This takes a huge burden off the mother, especially when she has a large litter. Puppies fed on this sort of a schedule grow rapidly and with fewer problems.

As soon as possible, the amount of water mixed in the food is decreased, and then finally eliminated. This depends on how fast the teeth are coming in and is done on the judgment and experience of the breeder. We always tell all new puppy owners to use a dry food formulated for puppies. Most 7 week old dogs can eat this, as it comes from the bag without any problem. A few, especially members of the toy breeds, may need it moistened for one to two additional weeks, but that is all.

Suggested Puppy Supplies:

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Dry Puppy Food Formula

Collars & Leashes

Cleaning Supplies

Cages, Crates & Kennels

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