

UNDER THE WEATHER

Puppy Love: Part I

My friend walked into the clinic with his little puppy, beaming like a proud father. "Just look at her," he said, "isn't she beautiful? And she knows so much." And he continued like a typical new parent, extolling her virtues till I asked him, tongue-in-cheek, "Can she sing classical music?" "Not yet," he said, without missing a beat, "that will be after her dance lessons". All new pet parents think theirs is the sweetest, smartest puppy on earth, and many think of the first day as a life-defining moment. From that day, till the day they are with you, their life is in your hands, and it is important to know how to start looking after the puppy so that they are smoothly integrated into your life.

Feeding:

I cannot stress enough about the importance of nutrition in this crucial phase. As opposed to human growth, pups achieve adult weight in about 6 months to a year, and this kind of intense growth needs a perfectly balanced diet, with just the right amounts of protein, fats, minerals and vitamins. Look for quality protein foods such as fish,



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chicken, lamb, and/or eggs. Feed your puppy small amounts of specially-formulated puppy food several times a day. Dry food is best as it cleans teeth and lessens gum disease. The amount of food for each feeding depends on the breed; look up the recommended breed-specific amounts. If you are feeding home-cooked food, a mixture of minced chicken or red meat with rice, vegetables and eggs should be fed. Initially puppies need frequent smaller feeds, as they grow older, the quantity increases and the frequency decreases till they reach adult age. Make sure your puppy always has access to fresh, clean water. Watching her is a good way of bonding, and also tells you if something is wrong. Do not feed table scraps; grapes, raisins, tea, alcohol, garlic, onions, avocados and chocolate, among other things, are toxic to your dog.

Training:

It starts the day your pup comes home. Like babies, pups have to be watched a 100% of the time they are awake. If you cannot watch them, they should be kept in a small, safe area. Teach your puppy where to eliminate by frequently taking her to the desired area and allowing her to sniff around. Your puppy should go out shortly after she eats, plays, wakes up from a nap, before confinement and whenever she sniffs around like she has to eliminate. When she does, praise her. When you see her eliminate in the wrong place, say a sharp 'no' and take her to the desired area immediately. Make sure to clean up the soiled area and eliminate odours to prevent her from soiling there again. In terms of behaviour or obedience training, just let the pup be familiar with your voice first. Start with calling out her name, and then as she recognises her name and your voice, start with the basic "come here" command. The other commands like sit, shake hands, fetch, stay etc. should follow later. Spend at least 10 minutes daily 'home schooling' your puppy. This will go a long way in ensuring a rewarding relationship.

Puppy proofing your house:

Puppies love to explore things by smelling and chewing, so go over your house to make sure it is safe. Keep electrical gadgets and cords out of reach, as well as anything they can bite or chew, like shoes or cleaning supplies.

Air out your puppy's bedding daily, and wash weekly. House-train when appropriate, and immediately replace your puppy's bedding if he or she has had an accident in it.

Get rid of harmful plants that are actually toxic for your little one to chew on. Ensure she stays far away from those such as lily of the valley, oleander, azalea, yew, foxglove, rhododendron and rhubarb.

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