



# **The Complete Owner's Guide to the Labrador**

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# 1

## ALL ABOUT THE LABRADOR



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### **HISTORY AND EARLY BEGINNINGS OF THE LABRADOR**

The Labrador Retriever originally came from Newfoundland, Canada, and was known as the “St. John’s Dog”, “St. John’s Newfoundland”, or “Lesser Newfoundland”. Although there are several different accounts of the early history of the breed, it is most widely speculated that the Labrador’s origins can be traced to the Greater Newfoundland dog or to the French St. Hubert’s dog.

The name Labrador was first given by the Earl of Malmesbury ,as a way to differentiate the breed from the Newfoundland dog. The Newfoundland dog was primarily used for hauling, while the Labrador was used for retrieving and was known for its smaller size and short black coat. Malmesbury wrote that his dogs were “known by their having a close coat which turns the water off like oil and, above all, a tail like an otter.”

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Early Labradors were trained to swim through icy waters, in order to haul the fishermen's nets into shore or to retrieve fish that had fallen off the fishermen's hooks. The dogs were seen as "workaholics" and were excellent not only at retrieving birds and fish, but also at pulling small boats. The strong swimming dogs were small enough for the two-man "Dory" boats, and had short coats that repelled water and ice. Also adept at hunting, the Labrador was able to help the fishermen supplement their fish diet with fowl.

Ships coming from Labrador (located to the Northwest of Newfoundland) brought the dogs to England in the early 1800's, where the breed continued to evolve by learning the fine retrieving instincts for which Labrador Retrievers are known today. English sportsmen were very impressed with the Lab's excellent hunting and swimming ability, and as organized shooting events became more popular, the gentry replaced their pointers and setters with the Labrador Retriever.

Labrador Retrievers in England almost became extinct at one time, mostly due to political reasons. With the introduction of the English Quarantine law and the heavy dog tax, the importation of Labradors into England practically stopped. As a result, other types of retrievers were eventually interbred with the dogs. Fortunately, however, the strong Labrador characteristics stood out, and eventually an anti-interbreeding law was written.

Early on, Labrador breeders weeded out chocolate and yellow labs, preferring only black ones. Eventually all three varieties were accepted. The Labrador Retriever breed was first recognized by the Kennel Club of England in 1903, when the decision was made at that time to give classes at the Kennel Club Show for Labradors as their own, separate breed.

The Labrador Retriever was recognized by the American Kennel Club in 1917. However, in 1927 there were only 23 registered Labradors. But in 1928, the magazine American Kennel Gazette ran an AKC article entitled "Meet the Labrador Retriever", making the breed more popular. After World War I, many of the English Labradors were imported, and they eventually formed what is now known as the American variety.

In 1938, the black Lab "Blind of Arden" won the top US Retriever honor, and was the first dog ever to appear on Life Magazine's cover. In 1959, a famous black Lab, "King Buck" was the first dog to appear on a U.S. stamp. Other famous Labs include "Buddy" and "Seamus", U.S. President Bill Clinton's two pets, and Russian President Vladimir Putin's "Koni". A black Labrador named "Sadie" detected a bomb in Afghanistan, saving the lives of a number of soldiers. She in turn received the Dickin Medal of Honor.

Labs have evolved into a popular American breed, effective as service animals in both competition and drug detection. By 1991, Labrador Retrievers were listed as the top breed among AKC registrations. In 2005, the American Kennel Club registered more than 137,000 Labrador Retrievers, putting the breed well ahead of Golden Retrievers - who hold second place in registrations.

As in the early days in England, once they are trained in hunting and retrieving today's Labs continue to be a hardworking breed. It is not uncommon for the dog to break ice to go after a bird and then return to his owner, waiting for the next bird to fall. In warm weather, the dog may tend to work beyond his physical stamina and overheat if not watched carefully. Labs continue to be wonderful family pets, as well as renowned sporting dogs.

## **BREED STANDARDS FOR THE LABRADOR**

The Labrador Retriever is a balanced dog, able to function as an efficient retriever of game, diligent hunter of fowl, quality show dog, and faithful family companion. The Labrador's most distinguishing characteristics are its clean-cut head, "otter" tail, short, water-resistant coat, friendly eyes, powerful jaws, expressive character, good temper and intelligence.

### **SIZE**

- The Labrador's height is 22 ½ to 24 ½ inches for a male; 21 ½ to 23 ½ inches for a female.
- Weight in working condition is 65 to 80 pounds for males; 55 to 70 pounds for females.
- The dog's length from shoulder to rump is equal or slightly longer than its distance from withers to ground.
- The distance from elbow to ground should be one-half of height at the withers.
- The dog's length should permit an efficient, straight stride, but never cause the dog to appear tall and leggy, or low and long. A Labrador's substance and bone should be in proportion to his overall size.
- Labradors are to be well muscled, and without excess fat when shown in working condition.

### **HEAD**

- Labradors should have a wide skull, with the skull and foreface of equal length on parallel planes.
- The head is to be clean-cut and without fleshy checks.

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- Lips should curve away toward the throat, and never be pendulous or squared-off.
- The nose should be black on yellow or brown dogs, and should be brown on chocolate Labs.
- Teeth are to be strong and regular, never misaligned.
- Ears should hang close to the head, and be set far back slightly above the level of the eyes.
- Labradors are known for their kind, friendly eyes, which show their inherently good temperament.
- Eyes should be medium in size, and set well apart without protruding or being deep set.
- Black and yellow Labs should have brown eyes, while chocolates have brown or hazel.

### **BODY**

- A Labrador's neck should be muscular, with a moderate arch and at a length that allows easy retrieval of game.
- The topline should be level when standing and moving and the back strong.
- The Lab's body should be neither narrow nor wide spreading. Rather it should be short-coupled with a moderately wide chest.
- The hindquarters should appear powerful and well developed, and the loins wide, short and strong.
- A Labrador's "otter" tail is one of his most distinguishing features. Very thick at the base, it should taper gradually to the tip.
- The tail is to be medium in length and extend no longer than the hock. It should be thick all around with the Lab's short, dense coat.
- A Labrador should appear to have a flowing line from its head to the tip of its tail.
- A Labrador's forequarters should be well coordinated and balanced with its hindquarters.
- Its shoulders should form a 90 degree angle with the upper arm. The length of shoulder blade and upper arm should be equal.

- A Lab's front legs should appear straight with very strong bone.
- Legs should also be well under the body and perpendicular to the ground.
- The elbows should be close to the ribs and directly under the withers.
- Pasterns are to be short, strong and slightly sloped from the leg.
- A Lab's feet should be compact and strong, have well-developed pads and well-arched toes.
- The Labrador's hindquarters are muscular and broad. They should be well-developed with strong short hocks.
- A Lab's hind legs should be parallel and straight when viewed from the rear. Hind legs should be strong, and thighs should be powerful and clearly defined.
- Hock joints should not slip or hyper-extend when moving or standing.

## **COAT**

- Another distinctive feature of the Labrador Retriever is its coat.
- The coat should be very dense, straight and short.
- It should feel quite hard to the hand. The undercoat should be soft, and resistant to water, cold and ground cover.
- Coat colors are black, chocolate and yellow.
- Though not desirable, a small white spot on the chest is permitted.
- Blacks are to be all black, with no brindle or tan markings.
- Yellows range from light cream to fox-red, with variations on the dog's underparts, back and ears.
- Chocolates may vary from light to a dark chocolate shade. Chocolates may have no tan or brindle markings.

## **MOVEMENT**

- The Labrador Retriever's movement should be effortless and free.

- Elbows are to be held neatly and close to the body, with no sign of elbows being out when approaching.
- Viewed from the rear, hind legs and front legs should appear to be parallel. Hocks should give the appearance of both power and strength.

The Labrador's kind temperament is the breed's hallmark. Labs should be outgoing and eager to please, never aggressive toward any man or animal. The gentle ways, adaptability and intelligence make the Labrador Retriever an ideal dog.

## **WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT A LABRADOR?**

The Labrador Retriever is a balanced, incredibly versatile dog. It has been the #1 AKC registered breed for over fifteen years. Always eager to please their masters/mistresses, Labs make kind, loyal companions. They fit in well with large families with young children as well as one-on-one companions for older adults.

High-spirited and good-natured, Labs love to play, especially in the water. They are great swimmers and love to play "fetch". Labs are affectionate and patient, with other dogs and children alike. Always devoted and very obedient, Labs are neither aggressive nor shy and they make great watch dogs. Labs also have no trouble getting along well with dogs and other pets.

With proper diet, nutrition and regular health care, most Labs can be healthy and live for about 12 to 13 years. Their short, dense, water resistant coat is very easy to maintain. Regular brushing and occasional bathing is all that is needed.

Labs enjoy long walks with their master, as they need and want a great deal of exercise. Labs are content to play outside all day, but will also nap in the shade, or snuggle up indoors with their owner at the end of the day.

The Labrador breed was originally developed for hunting. They will brave any type of terrain, weather condition or danger in faithful service to their master. Labs possess the ideal body for working on land or in water. Their coat sheds burrs easily, and its "otter tail" makes an effective rudder for moving through the water. A number of United States organizations have developed a wide variety of training and testing methods for Labrador Retrievers.

Because of their high intelligence and the fact that they are easily trained, Labrador Retrievers are able to perform a variety of complex tasks in a number of settings. Approximately sixty to seventy percent of guide dogs for

the blind are Labs. These dogs are adaptable, confident, calm and hard working.

“Signal dogs” alert their hearing impaired owners to specific sounds which inform and protect the hearing impaired. Labradors can also assist those with mobility limitations or health conditions by opening and closing doors, turning lights on and off, retrieving objects, and even pulling wheelchairs.

Therapy dogs possess advanced obedience skills, and pass behavior tests and are specially trained to help in the treatment of a number of disorders, such as autism. It is becoming more and more common for children’s hospitals and nursing homes to have a therapy Lab on site to work with residents.

The Labrador, “Endal”, exhibited the initiative and self-direction typical of Labs in an emergency situation. In 2001, he placed an unconscious human in the recovery position (a first-aid technique to aid people who are unconscious but still breathing) without prior training. This is considered to be the first instance of a dog performing this task without training. He fetched a blanket, and barked for assistance from neighbors. Loyal and intelligent, the Lab can aid or even save their owners from danger.

Labrador Retrievers have a rich history of service jobs. They can be trained to detect illegal food and plants, narcotics, explosives, toxic waste, oil or gas leaks, arson agents and many other harmful substances. The high energy and perseverance of Labs serves them well as service animals.

Because the original Labs were bred as retrievers, they make excellent search and rescue “SAR” dogs today. Labs can detect human scents from long distances. They can cover a much larger area in a shorter amount of time than a human ground crew, or even a “tracking” dog who has to follow a human guide.

Show Labs must be well groomed and at optimum health. They must move well, and be overall fine examples of their breed. In competition, they must be able to deal with crowded conditions and be comfortable with being handled by strangers. Because of their desire to please, Labs do well in Obedience Trials. Labs excel at the “Long Jump” competition where they jump off of a dock into water. Winning jumps in this competition are over 22 feet, truly a remarkable distance.

With such versatility and balanced temperament, it is easy to see why Labrador Retrievers continue to top out on the list of popular canine pets.

## 2

# IS A LABRADOR RIGHT FOR YOU?



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### **IS A LABRADOR RIGHT FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY?**

The Labrador is a very active and highly intelligent dog, that does need to have space to get out, exercise and explore. They are naturally very curious and love to be into everything that the family is doing, even if it is not particularly relevant to a dog. The breed is really a people dog, needing to be with humans more than it is on its own, although they can adjust to being left alone during the day while the family is away at school or work.

Before considering a Lab, as with any breed, there are some special considerations you should make. These considerations relate to the various attributes and needs of the breed, and will help you understand if a Lab is a good match for you and your family.

## **EXERCISE**

The Lab is a hunting dog and, as such, needs a considerable amount of exercise. These dogs can self-exercise to a fair extent if they have a large, fenced yard, but they are often rather more inclined to find a comfortable spot to sleep while they are outdoors. The Lab that is kept in a small sized yard or in a house will absolutely require a couple of long walks per day, ideally with a place to run and play off the lead.

Since they are a very friendly dog when well socialized, they do well in a dog park or off leash area. Labs that do not get enough exercise tend to have problems with excessive weight gain and obesity as they mature. Labradors will be more difficult to train when young dogs than when slightly more mature, as they tend to be rather rambunctious and hyperactive without enough physical exercise.

Labs will exercise themselves in a yard if they have a companion dog, or have a family member that will come out and romp and play with them. They are excellent retrievers and love to play fetch for as long as their owner will keep up the game.

## **LIVING SPACE**

Labs need space to stretch out and to move, as well as to investigate their surroundings. They do not do well in small, confined spaces such as dog runs or kennels unless for very short periods of time.

A Lab that is placed in a confined space during the day will often spend his or her time figuring out how to climb, dig or chew his or her way out. They can also start barking or chewing other items as a way to show their boredom and anxiety about being caged in too small a space. Labs can do well in a house once they are trained, and are usually very calm and sedate as long as they have the proper amount of exercise.

## **HIGH ATTENTION NEEDS**

Labs are very people oriented dogs, and potential owners should understand that this breed needs to be actively involved with the family. They love to be the center of attention, and can be almost clownish in their attempts to get owners to play with them or to spend some time petting and interacting with the dog. This behavior doesn't usually change too dramatically even as the dog matures.

They will naturally come over and place their head on your knee, gazing longingly at you until you stop what you are doing and go for a walk or throw

the ball. If you cannot commit to spending time with your dog, a Lab is definitely not the right breed for you and your family.

## **BEING INVOLVED**

Besides just needing attention, the Lab loves to be engaged and involved in the day to day events in the family. They will want to spend time in the house, in the room, and even in the car with you.

This is an excellent breed to travel with although they are large. They will eagerly learn how to travel and also enjoy getting into boats and watercraft. Since they have no fear of the water and love swimming, hiking and being outdoors, these make excellent dogs for active families that love camping and being outside.

## **TRAINING**

The Labrador is a training intensive breed when it is young, but once trained they are very well behaved and love to work. They can be good watch dogs, and will bark when strangers approach, but they are usually not good guard dogs as they are simply too friendly. Most Labs that are well socialized as puppies are accepting of new dogs and people, but occasionally males can be somewhat dog-aggressive and very protective of their home and territory.

A Labrador is a wonderful all round breed of dog, but they do have special requirements and a commitment from the owner. Deciding if you can fulfill the requirements for the breed is the first step in being a responsible dog owner, and ensuring the best possible match between your family and your pet.

## **CHOOSING A MALE OR FEMALE DOG**

One of the first decisions that a prospective dog owner (regardless of breed) has is determining if a male or female dog is the best match. There are certain characteristics that most male and female dogs will have, and knowing these characteristics will help you make the best choice.

Even if you plan to spay or neuter your Labrador, it is still important to consider the characteristics of male and female dogs, as they will still be present even after the procedure, although the characteristics will not be as pronounced. Avoid the temptation to just pick the "cutest" puppy or older dog, and try to determine which gender will be the best possible match for you and

your  
**MALES**

family.

One of the most obvious physical characteristics of the male dog is that it is generally larger than females of the same breed, and eats more. Males are heavier, taller and stronger than female dogs, although this may be particularly of concern more in the larger breed dogs. Usually the size difference will only be a few inches in height, but it may be more substantial in weight. Male dogs tend to eat significantly more food than non-pregnant females.

Male Labradors may be more aggressive and independent than female dogs. Again, this is a more important consideration in larger breeds than smaller breeds. Some male dogs tend to be more difficult to manage in small, confined areas and often do not socialize well with other males. This will be particularly true if there are female dogs in the area that are in heat.

A male dog often will form a closer bond with one person, whereas a female dog tends to bond equally with many people.

Male dogs tend to develop quicker sexually than female dogs, and will display sexual tendencies at a younger age. This is a concern if there are other dogs in the house or in the neighborhood that may come into heat. The male dogs will tend to roam, as they can smell female dogs in heat for many miles and if allowed, may even be gone for several days in a row in pursuit of females. Neutering your male Labrador will eliminate this problem.

If you choose a Labrador male dog and plan to use him for breeding purposes it will be important to construct a solid fence to contain him, even though he may be small! If you purchase a pair of dogs for breeding purposes, it will be important to monitor how aggressive the male becomes when the female is in heat.

You may find that the male becomes very possessive of the female - even towards humans. This may be a concern if you have small children in house, or do not have the dogs kenneled. In addition, the male may become aggressive towards the female if she is not receptive to his advances. Any breeding pair of dogs needs to be carefully monitored.

Male dogs tend to be more difficult to train than female dogs, and are more independent in nature. They also tend to be friskier and require more exercise. Males may be more difficult to socialize with other animals and other dogs, and need to begin socialization training at a young age.

## **FEMALES**

Female dogs tend to be smaller than male dogs of the same breed and are often less aggressive. However, a female dog protecting a litter of puppies

can be just as aggressive as a male. A female Labrador with her first litter should be carefully monitored for the first few weeks, to see how protective she becomes of the puppies.

Females will come into heat at least twice a year for approximately three weeks. During this time there will be a noticeable discharge of fluid from the female, that is designed to attract the male dog. Spaying the female dog will prevent this from occurring. If the female is to be used for breeding purposes, there are products on the market designed to address this problem.

Female Labradors tend to be less excitable and easier to train. They can, however, become easily cowed or shy if treated harshly, or scolded in a rough or angry tone of voice. Female dogs tend to bond with many people. They may be less protective in general than male dogs, however are also easier to socialize with other animals.

Female dogs will fight with other females, but tend to get along generally well with male dogs. Usually a group of female dogs will establish a hierarchy, and will bond with each other after the initial pecking order is established.

## **SIMILARITIES**

With both male and female dogs, it is important to consider the amount of time, attention and effort that will be spent in training the dogs and socializing with them afterwards. Both male and females require the same amount of exercise, training, feeding, general care, and love. In addition, regular veterinary checkups and yearly vaccinations will be required for both genders.

**Deciding on a male or female Labrador is largely a personal decision. Unless the dog is being used for breeding purposes, consideration should be given to spaying or neutering the animal as soon as recommended by your veterinarian, to prevent unwanted pregnancies and puppies. If the dog is to be used for breeding purposes, it is the responsibility of the owner to keep the dog away from other dogs to prevent unwanted pregnancies.**

# 3

## GETTING A LABRADOR



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### **DECIDING ON A PUPPY OR ADULT LABRADOR**

There are so many decisions to make prior to getting a new dog. First you must decide the breed, the place you will purchase the dog from, if you should choose a male or female, as well as decide if a puppy or an adult dog is right for you. Taking the time to make these decisions is important for both you and your pet.

In making a decision between an adult Labrador and a puppy, there are several questions you should ask yourself:

- How comfortable are you in training a puppy?
- How much time do you have to set aside for training?
- Can you spend time with the puppy for the majority of the day and night?

- Do you have patience to work with young animals?

The following sections will discuss the positive aspects and the difficulties of purchasing a puppy or an adult dog. Thinking your options through will help you determine the best choice given your situation and environment.

## **THE BENEFITS OF A LABRADOR PUPPY**

Anyone who has ever seen, held or played with a puppy can quickly tell you the biggest benefit of getting a puppy. Their cute, loveable and energetic personalities are wonderful, and they bring a smile to everyone's face.

Puppies are great for families and individuals that want to spend time with the young dog, to bring it up and train it specifically as the family wants and needs. Raising a puppy allows the owners to provide the training and socialization to make the puppy into a happy, healthy and well-behaved dog.

Purchasing a Labrador puppy from a reputable breeder or shelter ensures that the dog will be with the family for the longest possible time, as the owners can provide proper care, nutrition, and veterinary treatment for the life of the dog.

Watching the puppy playing with its littermates may also give an indication as to its temperament as an adult dog. Puppies in the litter that tend to be more aggressive and assertive are more likely to be independent, and potentially more difficult to train as they grow. The puppies that stay more isolated are usually more quiet and shy as adult dogs, and may have difficulty socializing and interacting with strangers and in strange situations.

## **THE DIFFICULTIES WITH A LABRADOR PUPPY**

While the opportunity to train a puppy is a benefit, it can also be a difficulty for some people. The time and effort needed to successfully train a puppy is more than many individuals can manage, especially if they already have a family to raise and a job to go to every day. Raising a puppy is a lot like having a baby in the house, especially for the first few months. It is a twenty-four hour, seven day a week responsibility.

Besides training in the house it is important to socialize the puppy to new people, new environments and other animals. Puppies, just like children, go through difficult stages, and may damage or even destroy household items. It is important to be able to puppy-proof your home as much as possible, particularly during the chewing stage.

Housebreaking is another difficulty on the horizon with a puppy. Housebreaking can be easy or difficult, depending on the type of training, breed of dog, and time that the owner has to spend with the puppy. Many trainers now recommend crate training for housebreaking puppies, but this still requires consistency and time to complete.

When you are getting a Labrador puppy from a shelter or other pet adoption service, you may not be one hundred percent sure of the breed or history of the puppy. There is always a chance that the puppy described as a Labrador may not be pure bred, and may grow to be a larger breed than you are able to keep. This is an unfortunate situation that is difficult for the dog as well as the family.

## **THE BENEFITS OF AN ADULT LABRADOR**

Choosing an adult Labrador allows you to know the size, appearance, temperament and behavior of the dog. Adult dogs will already be trained and housebroken, so this will save both your household items and your patience.

Adult dogs will know how to behave in the house, car and on the leash - so will be less time-consuming from the training aspect. They will still require your love and attention, but less emphasis will need to be placed on training new concepts.

Adult Labradors tend to be calmer and less stressed by new environments. This is just a generalization, and watching how the adult dog responds to you and your family will give you clues as to how socialized and well behaved the adult dog is.

Adult dogs can bond to new families and individuals with good care and lots of attention. It may take a few days for the dog to settle into the new home, but within a week or so there should be a comfort level and trust. In a month the dog will be right at home with its new family.

## **THE PROBLEMS WITH AN ADULT LABRADOR**

Perhaps the biggest problem with any adult dog is the bad habits that the dog may have learned from the previous owner. While not impossible to correct, it will take some time to re-train the dog to behave in a way that is acceptable in your house. Often it will be a bit confusing for the dog, and it requires special attention and positive rewards to encourage the dog to use the new behaviors.

Adult Labradors may be uncertain in a new environment, and may have a period of adjustment where they do not listen well to new owners, or where

they regress in their behavior. Positive attention and time will allow the bond to develop between the dog and the new family.

Adult dogs may have more difficulty in socializing with other animals already in the household and attention should be given to introducing the dog to other pets.

Whether you decide that a puppy or an adult dog is the best choice for you, it is important to consider how much time you have to provide training and socialization. Generally the smaller the amount of time you can provide to train the dog the older the dog should be. If you have lots of free time a puppy is an excellent choice. If you have limited time to train an animal consider an adult dog.

Either a puppy or an adult dog will still require your love and attention and will quickly become a member of the family.

## **WHERE TO BUY A LABRADOR**

If you have made the decision that a Labrador dog or a puppy is the best choice of a pet for you and your family, your next decision is where to buy the animal. There are a wide range of options to consider when determining where to get your dog or puppy. Depending on the type of Labrador that you would like (if you want to use the dog for breeding or showing or not), and how long you are willing to wait for a dog or puppy will probably influence which option is best for you.

### **RESCUE SHELTERS**

A rescue shelter is a good option to get an adult Labrador that is going to be a companion animal for you and your family. Usually the shelter will allow you to spend some time with the dogs that they have for adoption and purchase, and this will give you time to check on their temperament and behavior.

Often shelters will agree to take the animal back if it does not adjust to your home or family. Many of the adult dogs from the shelter are already trained, and this can be an asset when you do not want to go through the training process.

When getting a Labrador from a shelter, be sure to check the following:

- Ask for any information available about the dog.

- Make sure the animal has had a complete check-up and that the vaccinations are up to date.
- Ask if the dog has any behavioral issues or other concerns such as eating or barking.
- Does the dog appear healthy and energetic?
- Will the rescue shelter allow you to spend time with the dog prior to taking it home?
- What is the policy on spaying or neutering the animal?
- Can you return the dog if, for some reason, the adoption does not work out as planned?

### **Drawback to rescue shelter dogs**

There are some drawbacks to getting a Labrador from a shelter:

- The dog may have learned bad or negative behaviors and will have to be re-trained.
- You have limited choice over the breeding, size and gender of the dogs available.
- You have little information on their lineage or medical history.
- Shelters are more likely to have adult Labradors than puppies.
- Most animals will have to be neutered before leaving the shelter, or you will have to agree to neuter or spay the animal.

### **PET STORES**

Pet stores usually offer both purebred and non-purebred puppies. Usually a pet store does not sell full grown dogs as they have limited space. It is possible to order a specific breed of puppy through a pet store, and you can usually indicate the color and gender that you would prefer.

There are, however, a couple of major concerns when buying a Labrador puppy at a pet store. The first concern is that most reputable breeders will not sell to pet stores, so often the purebred puppies offered are from “puppy mills”.

These puppy mills are kennels that simply breed dogs to produce large quantities of saleable puppies, rather than trying to selectively breed to specifications and positive attributes of the breed. Often these purebred puppies will not be show quality, and the buyer will not learn of this until they attempt to register or show the dog. Unless you are familiar with the top lines of the breed, it is difficult to know a good quality purebred from a poor quality or line.

The second concern is that there may only be one puppy of a breed to choose from. This limits your ability to compare the puppy with littermates or other puppies of the same breed. Puppies in pet stores are also stressed, as they are away from their home environment. They may be exposed to different pet diseases, and will need a thorough vet examination as soon as possible after purchase.

## **BREEDER**

While probably the most expensive choice, buying from a Labrador breeder is generally the best option if you want a purebred puppy from a reputable line. Most breeders offer a guarantee of health, as well as detailed information on the breed. A breeder will often interview you as a potential owner, and may even want to come and visit your home before agreeing to sell a puppy.

Most breeders encourage you to come and see the litter several times before choosing the puppy that is right for you. They will often provide recommendations on food, veterinarians in the area, trainers, problematic issues with the breed, as well as other points of interest. Most breeders will also discuss issues with spaying or neutering the pets, unless it is agreed upon that the puppy will be a show dog or future breeding stock.

Before visiting a Labrador breeder, it is important to ask for information on the line of dogs that they are breeding, as well as any relevant health information on the parents. Do some research both on the breed and on the line the puppies are bred from. Calling other kennels that are breeding the same type of dogs or contacting the breed association may be helpful.

Getting this information prior to visiting the breeder is essential as it is all too easy to get caught up in the excitement of getting a new puppy.

Make sure that the Kennel Club in your country or location recognizes the breeder. Ask for information on shows or events that the breeder has participated in and where his/her dogs have been entered. If the breeder is unable or unwilling to provide this information, it may be wise to consider trying another breeder.

Be aware that puppies from championship lines may be difficult to purchase and you may have to wait for a puppy. Good breeders will not produce litter after litter; rather they will breed their dogs based on the health and well being of the female.

Purchasing a puppy from a Labrador breeder is the option that allows you to know the temperament and lineage of the parent dogs, as well as the medical background of the puppy. It also insures that you will get a quality animal that can be shown or bred if desired.

## **FINDING A GOOD LABRADOR BREEDER**

Being a dog breeder is not like being a doctor, lawyer or teacher; there are no set training or educational requirements to the job. Rather the health, temperament and adherence to breed standards of their animals are the measure by which a breeder is judged.

Most Labrador breeders have a genuine love for their animals, and breed them responsibly and in the best interests of the individual animals – as well as the breed as a whole. After all, breeders' reputations are based on the ability of the puppies they sell to develop into champions of the Labrador breed. Unfortunately, as with most things, there are those who consider themselves breeders who are more interested in making money than raising dogs.

In order to get the puppy that you want and to be satisfied with the dog both now and in the future it is important to do some research on the breeder that you are considering.

### **WHY GET A PUPPY FROM A LABRADOR BREEDER?**

Purchasing your puppy from a Labrador breeder provides you with:

- Peace of mind as to the medical background of the puppy's parents in current and past generations.
- Quality assurance that the puppy that you purchase will meet breed standards and specifications.
- Support in understanding and working with the breed of your choice – the Labrador.
- Advice as to vaccination regimes, medical concerns associated with the breed, local trainers and handlers, and other questions you may have.

The breeder's role is to continue to choose dogs to breed that will enhance the most desirable characteristics of the breed, and minimize any undesirable characteristics. A Labrador breeder will usually be active in showing animals, and will be very aware of the current trends in the breed, so they will be actively pursuing the breed standards.

In addition to being aware of current and future trends, a good breeder will also be aware of the history and lineage of each individual dog that they have, and will be aware of any potential problems in breeding into another line.

## **WHAT SHOULD YOU ASK A LABRADOR BREEDER?**

Breeders that are concerned about advancing the breed, and who care for each of the puppies they have will be more than happy to answer any questions you may have. They will, in fact, probably want to ask you several of their own before deciding if you are right for their puppy.

As the buyer you should consider getting the following information from the Labrador breeder:

- Does the breeder have a contract to purchase that clearly outlines the guarantee of health and a return or refund policy?
- Does the breeder know or has he/she worked with both the parents of the puppy?
- Can the breeder provide a lineage chart for the puppy tracing back several generations?
- Will the breeder let you see the other animals in the kennel and is the kennel clean, well maintained and animal friendly?
- Are you allowed to see other adult dogs and puppies that the breeder owns socialize together?
- Does the breeder limit the amount that you handle the pups?
- Does the local, state or national breed organization or club recognize the breeder?
- How often does the breeder allow the female and male to breed and reproduce?

A good Labrador breeder will be concerned with the safety and health of the puppies, and will only allow serious buyers to handle the puppies. If you are just enquiring about the breed you may be able to see them from a distance

and may be able to interact with the adult dogs. A breeder may also limit how long you are in the kennel with the puppies at any given time, even if you are a serious buyer.

## **WHAT SHOULD A LABRADOR BREEDER ASK YOU?**

Many people who are buying a puppy from a breeder for the first time feel a bit overwhelmed by the information that the breeder requests. It can seem rather gruelling! This is done to ensure that the puppy will be properly cared for and treated once it is sold.

Answering the breeder's questions and making any recommended changes in your arrangements will increase your chances of obtaining a puppy.

The Labrador breeder may typically ask the following:

- What is your home and yard like? The breeder may ask to home and visit your home, just as you are visiting the kennel or the breeder's home.
- What are your intentions for the dog? The breeder may require that you spay or neuter the dog, or only breed to animals that they approve.
- They may ask for a history of your pets, and may require you to sign an agreement regarding how you will train, use or show the dog.
- They may ask the situation and schedule of your family, and may want to know how many people will interact with the dog, and how old any children are in the family.
- The breeder may require that you train the puppy at a particular trainer, or using a particular method.
- The breeder may require that you return the dog to them before selling or giving the dog to someone else, in the event that it does not work out for you to keep the dog.

The more information that you know about the breeder and the breed, and the more information the breeder knows about you, the better the match will be. Discuss your concerns or issues with the breeder, and take the time to do some research before making the first visit. Attending some dog shows or events may help you to determine which breeder you would like to work with.

## **HOW MUCH WILL A LABRADOR COST?**

There are a huge number of factors that can influence the cost of a Labrador. One of the biggest factors is the line, or breeding lineage that you are looking for. A Labrador that is not a proven show dog, or is not from championship lines will be far less expensive than a puppy from two proven champions. In addition, it also makes a difference in the price of the puppy as to which kennel it is from. Well-known kennels with championship lines and many different awards and types of recognition will usually charge considerably more for their puppy than a smaller kennel that is breeding less well known dogs.

When considering how much to pay for a Labrador puppy or dog, it is important to keep in mind what you wish to do with the pet. If they are going to be shown either in obedience, in the show ring or in hunting trials you will need a dog that meets breed standards and is from a line that has proven themselves in the respective show area. If you wish to have a dog that is a companion, pet and friend it may be less important to look at the specific champions in the line as long as they are healthy, well dispositioned and genetically sound animals.

There are three basic places to obtain a Labrador puppy. The most desirable is a reputable breeder that is actively engaged in promoting and preserving the quality and standards of the breed. These breeders are often located in smaller centers, in areas where the dogs have room to run and be active, since the breed does require a lot of space. Usually breeders will show their dogs or will enter them in various competitions and events ranging from obedience to agility, show, or even in hunting events and trials.

A reputable breeder may have a waiting list for puppies, and often does not advertise puppies for sale as they have potential buyers already waiting. Typically, a breeder in the United States or Canada will sell a puppy from an average line for between \$400 to \$1000, with males and females typically priced very closely. In the United Kingdom, a Labrador puppy will sell for £350 to £900, although championship lines in any country will easily be double these prices.

There are also breeders known as backyard breeders. These are individuals that may have one or two dogs, often that are purebred, that occasionally have a litter. They often are not as aware of the various conditions within breeding lines, and may not be aware of all the breed standards, meaning that even though you may purchase a puppy that is a purebred, he or she may have serious faults or even disqualifying features that will prevent them from entering the show ring.

Many backyard or private breeders have excellent puppies that are well cared for and socialized, vaccinated and health checked, but they often don't offer the same guarantees that a larger breeder will.

The other great option, especially if you wish to own a more mature Labrador that will not require special training and housebreaking, is to obtain a mature Labrador from a rescue. Dogs from rescues are typically adopted to families that meet certain criteria, and are usually adopted out at less than \$200.00 per dog in the United States and Canada or £125 to £150 in the United Kingdom.

A dog from a rescue will be spayed or neutered, vet checked and vaccinated as well as have some information on the dog behaviors, how well socialized it is, and any particular habits or tricks that the dog already knows.

Many people still buy puppies, Labradors included, from pet shops. While it is tempting to get emotionally caught up in all those cute faces peering through the cages, it is important to keep in mind that ethically reputable breeders do not ever sell through pet stores.

Most of the puppies in pet stores come from puppy mills, horrible, crowded dog farms where female dogs are bred over and over to produce as many puppies as possible. There is little consideration to the breeding lines or health issues, and most puppies are ill, genetically inferior, and often well below breed standards. Even though all pet stores sell their puppies are purebreds, there is often difficulty in registering the puppies and very few ever make it to the show ring.

By spending a little more, and buying from a reputable breeder or getting a full grown dog or puppy from a rescue, you can be assured that you are bringing home a health dog that will become a part of your family. Determining if you want a purebred or Labrador mix is also another consideration, and again, the future of the dog and what you would like to do with the dog is very important in making this decision.

## **CHOOSING A HEALTHY LABRADOR**

One of the most expensive aspects of owning a dog is emergency or necessary trips to the vet, to deal with health issues that may be genetic in nature. Dogs are typically very healthy, and do not get flu, colds and other illnesses that people get, but problematic hereditary conditions are possible in any breed. Labs are no different, so making sure that you choose the healthiest possible Lab is important for financial reasons plus peace of mind for you and your family.

## **ADULT LABRADORS**

One of the most important aspects of choosing a healthy Labrador puppy or dog is to only buy from a reputable breeder or rescue shelter. This will ensure that the dog or puppy has been vet checked, vaccinated and that any possible immediate health concerns have been addressed. There may be health issues that develop in the future, but the breeder or rescue will provide information on their policies regarding any potential future issues.

Since adopting a dog from a shelter usually means an adult Lab, there are some specific issues that prospective Lab owners should look for. These include:

- **Eyes**

Labrador Retrievers may be prone to several different eye conditions that are typically more noticeable and prominent in older dogs of the breed. These include PRA or progressive retinal atrophy, a hereditary condition that results in blindness. Different dogs will have shorter or longer periods before they lose their vision, but they will adjust and lead happy lives with a little additional care. Cataracts are also a common condition in Labs, and these can usually be treated through various drug treatments in the early stages, on through to surgical procedures if necessary.

- **Canine Hip Dysplasia**

Almost every larger breed of dog (and most small and medium breeds) can have CHD problems. Hip dysplasia is another genetic disease that occurs when the hip joint is affected and starts to degenerate. Often the disease results in pain, lameness and extreme discomfort for the dog. CHD may start when the puppy is very young and get progressively worse. New drug therapies and surgical procedures are being used to correct this problem. It is important to note that this is an inherited condition, and is not caused by injury to the hip.

Adult Labs should be within the average weight range which is about 60-80 pounds, with males occasionally being heavier. The dogs should be alert, friendly, and have no bad odor to their breath or any type of discharge from their eyes, nose or genital area.

## **HEALTHY LAB PUPPIES**

The breeder should provide the potential owner with a health certificate that indicates the puppy is clear from any current health conditions, and has been checked for PRA and CHD and is clear.

In addition, a prospective owner should look at the overall condition of both the puppy they are planning to buy, as well as the mother and littermates. If the mother looks very unhealthy and is very thin or sick looking, it is unlikely that the puppy will be well nourished and healthy itself, even if it appears so at the time.

A Lab puppy is a very curious and naturally friendly. Watch for Labrador puppies that are energetic, without being overly aggressive. They should be careful about approaching new items or people, but should also be willing to investigate new things in their environment.

The puppy should be well proportioned, although he or she may be a bit clumsy, depending on their age and stage of growth and maturing. They should not appear to be limping or favoring one leg, nor should they appear stiff or uneven or jerky in their movements.

The puppy should look towards sounds in the environment, and should track movement within their area. The puppy should not have a "pot belly", as this is a fairly good indication that there is a significant worm infestation. Avoid picking an extremely small puppy, as this can be a sign of growth or nutritional problems.

Regardless of the breeders' information, it is always a good idea to have your own vet check your new puppy or dog as soon as possible once you have it home. Most vets recommend isolating the puppy from your other pets or common areas until this check-up is complete.

## **REGISTRIES, REFERRALS AND CONTRACTS**

In almost every country there will be a kennel club or national organization that acts to enforce the standards of each breed of dog that it recognizes, as well as to keep records of registrations of new puppies to the breed.

The national organization will also host and sponsor dog shows and events, and will provide an opportunity for breeders to show their dogs for championships. These registries will also keep a point total, that can help breeders and other interested individuals determine the strength of various lines within a given breed.

In Canada, the governing body is the Canadian Kennel Club (CKC). In the USA it is the American Kennel Club (AKC) and the United Kennel Club (UKC). In the United Kingdom there is The Kennel Club (KC). In addition to these major registries, there is also the Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI), which is the World Canine Organization. It is different from the kennel clubs in that it does not register animals or provide pedigrees; rather it recognizes dogs of a particular country.

## CONTRACTS

A breeders' contract is more than just a bill of sale for a Labrador puppy or a dog. It is the agreed upon rights that both the buyer and seller have with regards to the dog. It is important to realize that the contract is a binding agreement, and if you have any concerns with the contract, you should get them clarified before signing and finalizing the document. At the very minimum the contract should include:

- **A bill of sale**  
This bill of sale is important to prove ownership of the animal. Make sure that you understand the legal aspects of buying a dog or puppy. Many areas require that the animal have basic health vaccinations and a clean veterinarian's report. There may also be laws that require the seller to take the animal back if it is found to be unhealthy within 48 hours of purchase.
- **Registration Application**  
This will be partially filled out by the seller. The seller will need to complete the sections for the breed, color, sex and identifying features of the dog or puppy, the date of birth, the registration numbers and names of the sire (father) and dam (mother). The breeder will also have to indicate their name or the name of their kennel, as well as their signature.
- **A basic health guarantee**  
This indicates the responsibility the breeder has to ensure the animal is free from disease. This includes hereditary and genetic conditions that may not be visibly present at the time of purchase.
- **Lineage**  
The breeder should also provide a lineage chart or guarantee of lineage statement. This will be important if you plan to show or breed the dog or puppy.

In addition to the basic clauses listed above, many breeders will also require the following ADDITIONAL clauses:

- **Breeding restrictions**  
The breeder may indicate that the pet must be spayed or neutered if not shown. They may also state that the dog cannot be bred until the age of 2, and only in consultation with the breeder. This is done to ensure strong bloodlines, and to prevent people from breeding the dogs inappropriately. In addition many breeders require that the dog be spayed or neutered if it does not meet breed standards.

- **Showing dogs**  
The breeder may indicate that the dog must be shown so many times per year. In addition, as the buyer you will want to confirm that the contract guarantees that the animal can reproduce, and is free from genetic concerns.
- **Health notification**  
Many breeders that are concerned with improving the lines and developing the breed will require that they be notified of any health issues that develop with the dog after the purchase. They may also require that in the event of the dogs' sudden or unforeseen death, an autopsy be performed and the results sent to them.
- **Selling or giving away the dog**  
Most reputable breeders will insist that, if for any reason you decide not to keep the dog, it be returned to them. This means that you cannot sell or give the dog away without consulting with them. Again, this shows the commitment that the breeder has to the individual animals, and his/her love of the dogs they have bred.

Choosing the correct Labrador breeder, and carefully reading the contract will help you feel confident with your purchase. A good breeder will spend the time that you need to understand the contract. Don't be afraid to ask questions and get clarification on all issues prior to signing the contract and paying for the dog. Make sure that the contract is available when you pay for and pick-up the dog or puppy, as it is your written agreement regarding the animal.

# 4

## BRINGING YOUR LABRADOR HOME



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### **BRINGING HOME A NEW LABRADOR PUPPY**

It is very exciting to get a new puppy and to be able to bring him or her home. Often people are not aware of how challenging this process can be. It is important to plan for the arrival of your new Labrador to avoid frustration, damaged items and to provide the safest possible environment for your puppy and family.

Spending a few hours to puppy-proof your house and to insure the proper introduction of the puppy to the home will set the tone for your relationship with the puppy.

While there are several things that you need to consider, one of the first aspects of bringing a puppy home is to have the correct supplies. In addition to the supplies, you'll need the right attitude to work with the puppy, a space that is designed for the puppy to stay in, as well as a schedule for feeding and exercise.

You should also have a basic idea of the training methods you are going to

use with the puppy, as well as a good grasp of how you were going to start this process.

## **BASIC SUPPLIES**

Before bringing your Labrador puppy home it is important to have all the basic supplies to make the puppy feel at home. Talk to the breeder or the previous owner if it all possible, to determine what type of food the puppy was eating and any special dietary requirements that the breed may have. The basic supplies are:

- A good book on Labrador puppy health, care and training methods. Check with your breeder to see if they have a particular book or author that they recommend. If the puppy has begun a training method, make sure that it continues as much as possible with the already established commands.
- A wire or plastic dog crate that is the correct size for the Labrador puppy that you have purchased. A small dog will require a smaller crate than a larger dog, naturally.
- Good quality bedding material for inside the crate that cannot be easily chewed or destroyed. It is important that this material be washable, as there will be times when it will need to be cleaned.
- A special puppy collar that is of a soft fabric or woven material. The collar should have a buckle fastener and should not be too tight for the puppy's neck. You should be able to easily insert two fingers between the puppy's neck and the collar. If you cannot, the collar is too small and a larger size will need to be purchased. A good lead will also be needed when walking the puppy. Many people use a retractable lead to make walking the dog much easier.
- Purchase an identification tag that can be put on the collar. A Labrador puppy purchased from a breeder may already be microchipped or tattooed with identification. While this is an excellent way to identify the dog, it is also important to have an easy to read tag in the event that the puppy wanders away or becomes lost. Make sure your phone number and name is on the tag.
- You will also require any grooming supplies that the dog may need. A shorthaired dog will require a simple brush, comb, or soft cloth, but a long-haired dog will require more grooming, and you may wish to purchase clippers to be able to trim the coat.
- It is important to talk to the Labrador breeder to find out at what age you can begin to clip your dog. Most dogs do not get their full adult coat until after 10 months of age and it is important to not clip prior to the time. Check with your breeder, groomer or veterinarian to understand the

specifics for your breed.

- To keep your Labrador puppy busy and entertained when you're not able to play with them, it is important to get some puppy toys. They should be hard plastic and without any parts that can be chewed and swallowed by the dog. Remember, if the puppy has toys to play with they will be less likely to chew on household items.
- You will need to have good quality dry puppy food ready when the puppy arrives. Ask the seller what type of food they have started your puppy on, and begin feeding that at your home. You can then gradually change over to a different kind of food, by combining the new food with the old food until the puppy adjusts. This will prevent sudden shocks to the puppy's digestive system that could result in diarrhea or other stomach concerns.
- One stainless steel or heavy plastic bowl for water and one for food. Make sure that you buy a bowl style that cannot be easily tipped over. Puppies will need clean water at least twice a day. Some people choose automatic dispensing feeders and water bowls. While this does make it easier for the owner, it is not essential.
- If you have stairs in your house or you would like to keep the puppy confined to one area, you may wish to consider purchasing baby gates. These can be used to prevent the puppies from being able to enter or exit different rooms of the house.
- You may also wish to consider purchasing a spray-on no-chew product. These can be purchased commercially from any pet store. If you wish to use a homemade spray, you can mix one part of apple cider vinegar and one part of water. Be careful with this spray as it may cause discoloration to furniture. It is also important to test the commercially available products prior to spraying.

## **SAFETY**

Just like having a new baby in the house, it's important to make sure that the home environment is safe for the puppy. Puppies are very inquisitive by nature, and often get into all kinds of things around the house.

Even something as simple as a cord hanging from a set of draperies can be a safety hazard for small puppy. It can become wrapped around the puppy's neck, or stuck in the puppy's teeth. When puppy-proofing your home check the following:

- Pick up all strings or cords. A small string can easily be swallowed by a puppy and cause digestive problems if it becomes wrapped up in the intestines.

- Remove all small objects that the puppy may swallow.
- Check houseplants to make sure that they are not poisonous. If they are, remove them to a room or area that the puppy does not have access to.
- As much as possible, keep electrical cords away from the areas the puppy is in. If the cords cannot be removed, try treating them with a no-chew spray or rub them with laundry soap to make them unpleasant to the taste.
- Keep the puppy confined to the kennel, crate or puppy safe room when you are not home or able to watch the puppy.

## **TRANSITION**

If the puppy has been living with its littermates and mother up to this time, it will feel lonely coming to a house where it is an only dog. Try having a hot water bottle, stuffed toy or ticking clock in the crate or kennel with the puppy.

Using a crate will really help the puppy feel that this is a space of its own, and will help you be able to confine the puppy at night or when you are not home. In addition, you may want to place a piece of clothing that you have worn in the crate or kennel with the puppy. This will allow the puppy to adjust to your scent.

## **ATTITUDE**

The best way to have a positive attitude when bringing your Labrador puppy home is to be knowledgeable. Read a book; ask friends, breeders, groomers and veterinarians any questions you may have before bringing home the puppy. The internet offers many suggestions and breed specific information for preparing for a puppy.

Schedule walks, exercise, feeding and play times as much as possible. This will help your puppy adjust, plus it will also make sure that the puppy is cared for properly. If there is more than one person caring for the puppy, make sure that everyone is using the same schedule and methods. In addition, take the puppy for a complete medical check up as soon as possible.

## **EXPECTATIONS**

While all breeds develop at slightly different rates, there are some common stages that all puppies go through. Below is a general chart indicating the ages and stages of puppy development. Be sure to check with your breeder or

veterinarian to get the specifics for your Labrador.

### **Birth**

At birth, puppies cannot control their body temperature, cannot eliminate waste from the body without stimulation from the mother licking them. Nor can they see or hear. They are born with a strong desire to suck from the mother, and they can smell, taste, and sense by touch. They are able to cry to signal hunger, fear or cold. A puppy will double in weight in the first week of life.

### **Weeks 1-7**

At approximately 12 days after birth the puppies' eyes will start to open. They are always born with blue eyes, and the puppies are very sensitive to bright lights at this time. Slightly before the eyes open, at about day 10, the puppy's ears will open and they are immediately able to hear.

Weeks 2-3 are known as the transitional stage. The puppy is now able to recognize his or her littermates and knows the mother dog. It begins to learn to recognize humans in its life between weeks 3-4. The puppy will also start to notice and respond to loud noises and negative events, so it is important to make sure that there are few if any stressful events in the puppies' life at this time.

From birth to 7 weeks it is important the puppy stay with the mother and the litter. This is the time the puppy learns about how to be a dog, how to communicate with other dogs, and how to respond. This is the very beginning of the socialization period, and helps the puppy to understand how to interact with other dogs and how to respond to correction.

The puppy learns that biting a littermate results in being bitten in response, and that crying will get a response from the mother dog. The puppies will play together, and begin to chew and mouth objects in an attempt to understand their environments.

The puppies should not be handled excessively or removed from their mother and littermates for more than 10 minutes at a time. They may become anxious and fearful if they are separated for longer than this.

Avoid punishing the puppy at this time, and focus on rewarding for positive behavior and appropriate response. Expect housetraining mistakes to be frequent at this time due to the small size of the puppies' bladders and their developing muscle control.

### **Week 8 – Month 3**

The period from 7 to 12 weeks is called the Socialization Period. This is the time to introduce the Labrador puppy to as many new positive experiences as

possible. Their nervous systems are developed at this time, and they are able to learn about the world around them, including humans, other animals, and new experiences.

This is the best time to change environments with a new puppy, as they will quickly adjust and will form bonds with people easily at this time.

The Fear period occurs with the socialization period. This is the time when the puppy begins to register fear of situations that cause pain or discomfort. The puppy will cower or hide from loud noises or harsh voices, and it is important to not punish the puppy at this time.

Every effort should be made to avoid any fearful situations at this time, as it can lead to difficulties in training or adapting to new environments for the life of the dog. The puppy will respond to praise and rewards, and will require constant contact and interactions with family members.

### **Month 3 – Month 4**

At this time the puppy is trying to determine who is the master, him or you. The puppy will be challenging to deal with at this time, and may be seen as difficult to work with. This developmental time for the puppy is similar to the toddler stage for humans.

The puppy may start to want to play fight or bite at you, and it is critical to stop this behavior as soon as it starts. A direct and sharp “No” command, followed by lack of contact or interactions for a few minutes will usually correct the problem.

It is important to be firm and positive when working with the puppy in this stage. They need to understand that the human is dominant and that they are to obey. This can be done very gently and positively, and does not require negative training methods or harsh punishment.

Avoid involving the dog in games that encourage fighting or aggressive behavior. Even a game of tug-of-war can be interpreted by the dog as a show of dominance and may quickly escalate.

### **4 to 8 months**

This stage is the independent puppy stage. The young dogs want to be on their own to explore, and many books refer to this as the “Flight instinct period”. The Labrador will want to get out on his own. He or she may not come when called, and may ignore commands that previously were responded to.

Labrador puppies will need to be kept on a leash when outside of the yard, as they may decide to ignore commands to return. It is important to deal with this immediately, perhaps through a puppy training class. In human terms this is

the adolescent period for the dog. There will be an increased need to chew and the permanent teeth will come in. The puppy, if a dominant type dog, will continue to try to become the leader in the family.

Small children should not be left without supervision with puppies at this age as they may jump or even bite in an attempt to show dominance. A puppy at this stage may also begin to show sexualized behavior, and it is important to isolate the puppy from any other dogs that have not been spayed or neutered. Plan to have your dog spayed or neutered at this time as well, to prevent unplanned litters now or in the future.

### **6 to 14 months**

This is the second fear imprint stage. The dog may appear to be shy or unwilling to try new activities. With extra positive rewards and time this stage will pass. The Labrador now looks like a mature dog, but they are still a puppy at heart. They love to play and socialize with other animals and family members.

The puppy will have lots of energy at this time, so it is important to provide exercise and socialization activities. Often people choose to take their young adult dogs to an obedience training class to enhance their skills.

Keeping active with your puppy will continue to build the bond between you and your pet. Staying positive and rewarding good behavior will keep your relationship happy and enjoyable. Continue to socialize your Labrador throughout the states of development and into adulthood to develop a calm, happy, well-rounded dog.

### **Maturity**

For the rest of the dog's life there will be a consistent behavior pattern. You may notice that there are issues that arise and have to be dealt with by re-training or reinforcing existing training. Generally, there should be no extreme behavior changes if the animal is well cared for and checked regularly by a veterinarian. Changes in environment may cause a regression in behavior, but a little extra attention and care at this time will usually resolve the issues.

Bringing home a new Labrador puppy is an exciting time, and the start to a wonderful relationship. Making sure that you have everything you need for the puppy at the house will get this relationship off to a positive and rewarding start for both of you.

## **PREPARING TO BRING HOME A GROWN LABRADOR DOG**

Bringing home a full-grown dog does not need quite as much attention to detail as bringing home a puppy. A grown Labrador will most likely be completely house broken, and will be trained to be in the house and behave appropriately. It is important to not take this for granted, however. Talk to the owner or to the rescue shelter workers and find out how the dog has behaved in the shelter or at the home.

## **SUPPLIES**

You will need basic supplies when bringing home a full-grown Labrador. The benefit is that you already know how big the dog will get, so hopefully you will only need to purchase one set of the basics. You will need:

- A good quality hard plastic or stainless dish for water and one for food. Make sure they are sturdy and do not tip easily.
- A kennel or crate for the dog to stay in at night. Many people prefer the dogs to have a crate, kennel or bed as opposed to sleeping elsewhere in the house. This is a personal preference, and may not be required.
- Washable bedding material for the bed, crate or kennel.
- A collar, identification tag and lead for the dog. The collar should be loose enough that two fingers can easily be inserted between the collar and the dog's neck. For larger breeds, a chain collar may be used, but care must be taken when using one. A retractable leash or lead is ideal for allowing the animal to roam while still maintaining control.
- High quality dry dog food. It is a good idea to start with the same brand that the dog is currently eating. If you wish to change brands, do so gradually. Start by adding 1 part new dry food to 3 parts of the old. Gradually over a two or three week period, increase the new food and eliminate the old food. Watch for changes in the animals eating and fecal production. If you notice any signs of diarrhea or other stomach conditions, discontinue the new food.
- A few sturdy dog toys are always a great idea to keep the dog entertained and busy when you are not at home.

## **PREPARING YOUR HOME**

If you have other pets in the home it is important to make sure that they are kept separate from your new Labrador until you can properly socialize the animals. This is important if you have dogs or cats, as you want their first contact to be positive and free from fighting or chasing.

In addition you may wish to dog-proof your house until you get a clear idea of how the animal will behave in your home. Remove any chewable or leather items from the area the dog will be in. In addition, remove any fragile or delicate items until appropriate behavior in the home is clearly demonstrated. Remember that this is a new home to the dog, and they will be excited or stressed, and may revert back to puppy-like behavior for the first few days.

Check for electrical cords, items hanging off tables and food items that may be tempting to dogs to chew on. Once the dog has demonstrated that it is able to behave in the house these items can be returned to the room.

It is important to talk to your children about the new dog. Children will naturally want to pet and play with the new animal. The dog may not be used to children, or may need time to adjust before being introduced to kids and other family members. Avoid over exciting or stimulating the dog for the first few days. Keep the people interacting with the dog to a minimum to allow them to get used to the house and their new family.

## **WHAT TO EXPECT**

When you first bring your new Labrador to the house, make the experience positive. Have all the basic supplies in the house and establish an area for the dog within the first few hours. Plan to have the dog examined by a veterinarian within the first day or two.

For the first week to two weeks, expect the dog to be slightly nervous and uncertain of commands. You may note that female Labradors tend to be more anxious and male dogs will be more aggressive at this time. It is important to quickly establish that you are the master, and reward all compliance in a positive manner.

Spend extra time with the dog, and ensure that they are walked, exercised and fed on a regular basis. Follow breeder or veterinarian-specific information on any special dietary needs they may have.

After the second week, the dog should have adjusted to the new home and family. At this time you may find that there is some re-training needed if the Labrador has bad habits that have not been corrected. Taking the dog to a trainer or a dog obedience class is an option to correct these issues.

Re-training is often harder than the original training, so it may be necessary to get some professional help. Research a good obedience trainer in your area, or ask for recommendations from the rescue shelter, veterinarian or individual you obtained the dog from.

Plan to spend as much time as possible with your Labrador. This is pleasant for you and the dog, and a strong bond will form over the weeks and months that follow. Many breeds respond better to one owner, and it may take longer

for the bonding to occur. Be patient and positive with your new dog, and you will soon have a friend for life.

## **INTRODUCING YOUR LABRADOR TO OTHERS**

Most people who love dogs also love other animals, and often have a variety of pets in the house. Even if you don't have any other animals, you will encounter other dogs, cats and wildlife while you are out walking your dog.

It is important to socialize your Labrador as much as possible, to avoid complications and negative behavior when your dog meets other dogs or other species. As with most activities with dogs, a bit of advanced preparation can make the introduction much easier and have it be a positive experience for the dog, the other pet and all humans involved.

### **INTRODUCING YOUR LABRADOR TO ANOTHER DOG**

Each Labrador, like each person, has its own temperament and comfort level with other dogs. There are some breeds that have been developed to be watchdogs or guard dogs, and they will naturally be more aggressive than a breed that has been bred for other reasons. Keep in mind the nature of your dogs breed.

If you are planning to add a new dog to your home it is also wise to keep in mind that spayed or neutered animals tend to get along better than intact breeding dogs. A spayed female and a neutered male will generally get along better than two males or two females. Keep in mind that a neutered male and breeding female will act the same as a breeding pair, and both dogs can become more aggressive when the female is in heat.

The first time the dogs meet, it should be in a place that is new to both dogs; such as a park or other location. Keep the dogs on a leash but have them interact with the human they are with. Gradually move the dogs closer, but keep the attention of the dogs on the handlers. When they become comfortable move them closer.

Avoid having the dogs on very tight leashes, as this tends to excite them more and the chances of aggression increase. Handlers should remain calm and relaxed. Introducing the dogs several times before having them play together will allow them to become familiar with each other.

Be prepared for any aggression by either of the dogs. They will most likely attempt to establish which dog is dominant, and this may be done by growling,

posturing or even fighting. Keep a close eye on the dogs, and have a way to separate and contain the dogs immediately if there is any aggression.

If you keep the dogs in crates, they can be placed closer together at night when both dogs are contained to allow them to become familiar with each other.

## **INTRODUCING YOUR LABRADOR TO A CAT**

Not all dogs are cat chasers, and not all cats are afraid of dogs. It is helpful if the Labrador and cat are introduced when they are young, or that at least one of them is familiar with the other species. Care should be taken when introducing a puppy to a mature cat, as the cat can seriously harm the puppy with its claws. Likewise an adult dog, even a small breed, can easily kill a kitten. Until they are safe together do not leave the dog and cat unsupervised.

More than one dog with a cat can lead to problems, as dogs tend to hunt in packs, and may become excited in the presence of another dog and kill or seriously hurt a cat they have been friendly with in the past.

Introduce the Labrador and cat slowly. Crate training the dog can really help as it allows the cat freedom without fear of fighting. It also allows the dog to become familiar with the cat. Remove the cat litter box and food from areas that the dog has access to. Not only will the dog eat both the food and the fecal material in the litter box but the cat will often start using other areas of the house as a litter box.

Keeping the Labrador on a leash when in the presence of the cat for the first little while works well. Don't be disappointed if the cat and dog don't actually socialize or play together, as long as they respect each other. Be sure to reward both the dog and the cat when they behave appropriately together.

## **INTRODUCING YOUR LABRADOR TO OTHER SPECIES**

Many dog owners also have birds, rabbits, guinea pigs or other small animals in the house. While you may be able to introduce your Labrador to these animals following the steps outlined for cat introductions, it is not recommended that there be interaction without human supervision.

There are some breeds of dogs that get along very well with other species, but most dogs have the hunting instinct. As dogs tend to react by instinct, when they become excited or scared they may react with aggression towards animals that they have previously interacted with.

## **INTRODUCING YOUR LABRADOR TO STRANGERS AND CHILDREN**

There will be times when you will want to introduce your Labrador to strangers. The best time to start socializing your dog with other humans is when they are puppies. Encourage people to come over and pet the dog, making the event a positive one for the puppy. Even trips to the vet should be positive, and all good vets will strive to make the experience as good for the dog or puppy as possible.

When introducing your Labrador to strangers or children, keep the dog on a leash. If they are barking or hiding, speak calmly to the dog and interact with the animal until they are calm. Have the child or stranger then step closer, moving slowly and speaking calmly to the dog. At any sign of anxiety have the child or stranger stop and let the dog calm down before moving closer.

Have the child or adult extend their hand towards the dog's nose, but stopping out of range of the dog's head. Allow the dog to lean forward and sniff at the extended hand. Gently begin petting the dog, continuing to speak in a calm voice. Have the child or stranger start petting the dog with you. Monitor any change in the dog's behavior.

## **CHILD SAFETY AND DOGS**

Many children are very familiar with dogs, and may mistakenly assume that all dogs will be as gentle as family pets. It is important to teach your children about dogs and to supervise your child's activity with all dogs, including your own. Most experts recommend that careful selection should be given to what breed of dog is most suitable for families with small children. Highly aggressive breeds or breeds trained for hunting are not advised.

In addition, children must be taught not to tease or torment a dog, even though the children may see this as play. Most dogs will attempt to move away from an uncomfortable situation, but children may not realize why the dog is leaving.

Occasionally, there is a misconception by adults that a child and a puppy will learn together. It is simply not true. Often having a child responsible for caring for or training a puppy is unsafe for both the child and the dog.

Children can be excellent caregivers for family pets, but will require adult supervision to make sure that the situation is safe. Even the calmest family Labrador may bite or snap if cornered or overly excited.

Teaching children how to properly play with and care for dogs is critical to making the relationship positive and non-threatening for both the dog and the child. Children will need to learn that dogs may interpret behaviors such as throwing a ball or picking up a toy as possible threats to them.

Children will need to be aware that all dogs are not safe. While the family pet may be docile and love to be petted and touched, strange dogs or strays may not like to be approached, and may react in aggressive ways.

Children should be taught to watch for the warning signs that a dog is becoming fearful or aggressive. Children should know to immediately leave a dog alone that growls, or attempts to run away when they approach. Young children should not be left unsupervised with puppies or dogs. They may accidentally hurt the dog or puppy, and this may cause the animal to respond with aggression.

Children should also be taught that dogs do not reason the same way that humans do. Children may assume that the dog will understand the child's intention is positive, and will become upset if the dog growls or tries to run away.

Food and feeding is another area of safety concern. A small child should not be responsible for feeding a dog, as there is a possibility of the dog knocking the child down to get at the food. Even a small dog jumping up on a child can knock them off balance and cause a fall. This is unsafe for the child as well as a very bad habit for the dog to develop.

Feeding time is a high excitement time for most dogs, and if the dog is being fed with other dogs it can also be a very competitive time. A small child is more likely to be seen as a threat to the dog if the child approaches a dog or puppy before it has been trained to understand that human's can interact with it while there is food present.

It is important to remember that dogs are creatures of instinct, and will act based on that instinct. If care is taken to socialize, supervise and interact with your Labrador in a positive manner, the relationship between your family, your dog and other pets will be a long-lasting and rewarding experience.

# 5

## YOUR NEW DOG'S NEEDS



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### **EXERCISING YOUR LABRADOR**

Just as exercise is important for human health and well-being, it is equally important for dogs. All dogs require some exercise, and some breeds require considerably more exercise than others. It is important to start your dog on a regular exercise routine to prevent obesity and other health-related problems. Regular exercise will help your Labrador:

- Stay more alert and content
- Sleep better
- Socialize better
- Live longer

- Build strong bones and muscles
- Improve the cardiovascular system

If you have a puppy it is great to start with walks, scheduled play activities, and allowing them time to run around in a yard or other enclosed area. Older Labradors may not self-exercise as much as a puppy, and owners will need to be more encouraging and participate more in the exercise program.

It is important to consider the energy level and exercise level needed for individual breeds. Many of the breeds of small dogs and very large dogs require limited to moderate amounts of exercise.

Mid-sized to large dogs require more exercise than either small or very large dogs. Terrier breeds, sporting breeds and working dogs are known for their love of exercise and their enthusiasm for games such as fetch and Frisbee. Often these dogs, if kept in pairs, will play for hours with each other and get enough exercise this way.

There are several factors that influence the level of exercise that your Labrador will need.

## **AGE**

Very young and very old Labradors will require special exercise to avoid exertion and strain. Try a slow walk with lots of stops for the dog or puppy to explore the area. Avoid excessive running or rough play with either a puppy or an older dog. If you have more than one Labrador, it may be necessary to keep the older dog or the puppy away from the more active dog unless you are there to supervise.

## **PHYSICAL CONDITION**

Just like humans, Labradors can become “couch potatoes”. It is important to start out slowly when exercising with your dog. Try a short fifteen-minute walk twice a day to get started. Gradually increase the length of the walk and the pace that you are walking at. Watch for any signs of distress in the dog such as panting, wheezing or other respiratory problems.

Avoid walking the dog right after eating, especially if the dog is not used to physical exercise.

If you are in shape, and your dog is as well, you can try slow jogging with your pet, but watch out for their shorter legs! It is a great way for you both to stay in shape and spend some time together.

If your Labrador appears to have difficulty exercising, it is important to see a veterinarian. They may require a weight loss program for the dog, or perhaps a change in food. Make sure that you check your dog's feet for cracking or damage to the pads of the foot. Cement, pavement, gravel or sharp stones can irritate the dog's feet and make walking painful and unpleasant for the dog. If walking in the winter check that ice and snow is not building up between the pads.

## **VARIETY**

It is important to stick to a routine of exercise with your Labrador, but it is just as important to add a little variety. Any of the following activities can add a little spice into your daily routine:

- Play fetch with a ball
- Take a walk in a new neighborhood or park
- Invite a friend with a dog to walk along
- Try some Frisbee chasing
- Try jogging for a few minutes and walking for a few minutes
- Use a retractable leash that allows the dog more freedom while still maintaining control
- Take the dog to an obedience or training class

## **DANGEROUS ACTIVITIES**

Occasionally you will see individuals exercising dogs in ways that are dangerous to both the dog and the owner. Please do not exercise your Labrador using a car, bicycle, skateboard or while roller blading. There is too much danger of the dog's leash becoming tangled and severe injuries to the dog or others resulting.

In addition, avoid exercising your Labrador in the heat of the day. A dog pants to cool itself, but this also causes dehydration. Make sure to bring water for the dog or plan the route to have water available. Labradors that overheat suffer from heatstroke, a condition that can be fatal.

The early signs of heatstroke are rapid breathing, heavy panting, staggering gait and salivation. The dog, if not taken to the shade and cooled by applying water to the neck and head, will begin to vomit and can start to convulse. Give

a dog that has overheated a bit of water at a time, as too much water will cause vomiting.

With a bit of care and planning you and your Labrador can enjoy exercising together. Make sure the exercise is appropriate for your dog's age and current fitness level, and gradually work towards a more rigorous exercise. Add some fun elements to your daily routine, and enjoy the health benefits that both of you will soon notice.

## **DIET AND NUTRITION BASICS**

Not all dog foods are created equal, and not all dogs' needs are the same when it comes to nutrition. It is important to understand what type of diet and nutrition is best for your breed of dog. If you consider this logically, it only makes sense that a housedog, such as a Labrador, would have different nutritional requirements than a working dog such as an Australian Shepard. Knowing some basic diet and nutrition facts will help you determine what type of a diet is best for your dog.

### **OMNIVORES NOT CARNIVORES**

There is a misconception that dogs are only meat-eating animals called carnivores. This could not be farther from the truth. In fact, most dogs enjoy vegetables and some types of fruit as much as they seem to enjoy their dog food. Labrador dogs require many of the same vitamins and minerals as humans to be healthy and maintain shiny coats, good teeth, bones and muscles, as well as keep energy levels up.

### **WHAT ARE THE DIETARY NEEDS OF A LABRADOR DOG?**

Labradors require a variety of foods that include all the building blocks of life, including:

- Vitamins
- Minerals
- Carbohydrates
- Proteins
-



- Amino acids

If you notice that your dog has any skin conditions, hyperactivity, listlessness, or poor coat quality, you will need to examine the label of the food that you are currently feeding. A veterinarian can advise you on the proper amounts of the dietary elements that your Labrador may need.

You should avoid foods that contain primarily corn or wheat, by-products or excessive amounts of chemical preservatives. To check if your food has more cereal components than protein, soak the dry feed in water for 20 minutes. If the feed becomes mush, it is mostly corn or wheat.

In addition, check the protein content of the food. A less active dog will need a lower amount of protein, with the base being about 21%. The more active the dog is, the higher the amount of protein that is needed in the diet. Puppies and pregnant females will require special diets to deal with the stresses that their bodies are going through.

Many diets are available for dogs, including the raw food diet. Just as expected, this diet advocates that feeding of raw meaty bones, raw vegetables and some offal. There are commercial diets available that encompass this diet, and many breeders and vets recommend the raw diet for active dogs and dogs in training.

Since it is difficult for most individuals to carefully control the amount of protein, complex carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals that their dog consumes in a day most people use a commercially prepared food. A good commercially prepared food will have all the vitamins and supplements needed for a healthy diet.

## **WHAT NOT TO FEED YOUR LABRADOR**

It is important to avoid feeding your Labrador excessive amounts of “human food” in the form of table scraps or little treats. While your dog may gaze longingly at you while you are snacking, it is in the dog’s best interest to avoid these morsels.

Dairy products such as cheese and yogurt may cause diarrhea in lactose intolerant dogs. A dog’s diet should never exceed 10% of the total amount as table scraps or human food. In addition, never give a dog human vitamins or supplements as they can cause health concerns.

Cooked bones of any kind can easily splinter in the dog’s mouth and cause damage to the gums, throat, and lining of the stomach and digestive system. In addition, the bones can lodge in the throat and cause severe damage. Raw

meaty bones are the best for dogs, and should be removed when the meat is removed.

Raw eggs may cause salmonella, or decrease the rate and amount of absorption of biotin - leading to poor quality coats and hair problems in adult dogs and puppies.

Salt may cause electrolyte imbalances and dehydration in dogs. It should be eliminated from the diet as much as possible. Onions and garlic contain sulfoxides and disulfides that can lead to anemia in dogs.

Avoid feeding your Labrador cat food or any other type of pet food. Cat food is designed for cats, and they have different dietary needs than dogs. Cat foods tend to be higher in sugars and proteins, and this can cause complications for dogs as they age.

Raw pork, lamb or rabbit should not be fed to dogs. These meats can contain various diseases such as tapeworms that can be fatal to dogs if not treated. In addition internal meats such as liver and kidney should only be given to dogs if it is organic, as there may be toxins concentrated in these organs.

Do not feed your Labrador candies or chocolates. Candies contain high amounts of sugars that are not healthy for dogs. Chocolate consumption can cause toxicity in dogs that can be lethal, even in small doses.

## **FEEDING YOUR DOG**

Going to the pet store to pick a brand and type of dog food can seem particularly overwhelming when you walk down the aisle and see the dozens upon dozens of varieties of foods available. If you take the time to read the labels and understand the basic needs of your dog, you will find that there are only a few feeds that meet your dog's needs.

During a Labrador's lifetime, the feeding requirements will change. A puppy should be fed at least three times a day until it is four months old. A young puppy must be fed more often, because it has a smaller stomach and is growing at a very fast pace.

After four months of age it is recommended to decrease feeding to twice a day. Some adult dogs only require feeding once a day, or may be given free choice food if they are outdoors or are not over-eaters. Any changes in feeding should be closely monitored to determine the effect that they are having on the overall health of the dog. Fresh water should always be available for all dogs and puppies.

Regularly scheduled feeding will help with housetraining as well. A schedule of feeding means a schedule for toileting.

## **WET VS. DRY**

The first decision that you have to make is whether you are going to feed wet, dry or a combination of wet and dry foods. There are advantages and disadvantages to both types of food.

Wet food is often more palatable for dogs of all ages, and can be particularly important to feed when your puppy is very young or your Labrador is very old. Dogs with dental or intestinal problems may need to be fed wet food at least for a short period of time on recommendation by a veterinarian.

Most breeders and vets do not recommend a diet of only wet food, as it does not have the same fiber and consistency as the dry food. Dogs that are fed only wet food often have issues with producing excessive amounts of gas and needing to go outside often to defecate.

Dry food is often rather unpalatable to a dog, particularly if they have previously been fed a diet of wet food. Increasing the amount of exercise and mixing a small amount of wet food in with the dry will gradually allow them to switch over. If a dog is on a diet of dry food, the food acts to clean the teeth and promote healthy digestion.

When feeding dry food, it is important to make sure the dog has free access to clean water at all times. Make sure that the major ingredient in the dry food is not corn, corn meal or wheat, as this is largely filler that will swell up in the dog's stomach when the food is consumed.

Check that veterinarians or breeders approve the food that you are using. This is usually indicated on the dog food bag. Your local veterinarians will be able to provide a list of premium dog food brands available in your location.

In addition in both wet and dry foods, check to make sure that the food contains the balanced nutrients your dog needs. It will need to have carbohydrates, proteins, essential fatty acids, minerals and vitamins.

By feeding this food based on the recommended serving size for your Labrador you can be assured that your dog is getting their basic dietary needs met. If your dog seems to be hungry or is not eating all the recommended amounts of food, always check with your veterinarian and adjust the amounts if necessary, based on the vet's advice.

## **SCHEDULED FEEDING VS. FREE FEEDING**

Once you have decided on the type of food you will be feeding, you then need to decide *how* you will feed. While, as the human, you may have a preference the final decision is really up to the dog, many dogs require a scheduled feeding. This simply means that the food is presented to the dog for up to twenty minutes and then is removed, whether eaten or not. This is a good habit to get in with indoor dogs, as it helps plan for exercise breaks and trips outside.

Free feeding is used for many dogs. It is simply placing an automatic feeder or bowl of food out for the dog, so they may access exercise choice of when and how much to eat. This is a good way to feed if the dog is not a glutton, or if there are dogs that get along well together.

If you have a dominant dog, it may prevent other dogs from accessing the feed, or may eat until it is stuffed to prevent others from getting any food! This is unhealthy for both the dominant and the submissive animals. Avoid feeding dogs together if they are in anyway aggressive towards each other.

## **HOME COOKING FOR YOUR LABRADOR**

If you have the time, there are some great home recipes that you can make for your dog. This allows you to ensure that your Labrador is getting fresh, high quality foods that are prepared in a clean environment. It is difficult to calculate the exact nutrient balance, however, so dry or wet premium quality foods should be used to supplement the home cooked items.

There are many different recipes for home cooked dog meals. Most include the following:

- Carrots
- Parsley
- Zucchini
- Celery
- Broccoli
- Cauliflower
- Beans (any variety)

- Beef (lean)
- Chicken
- Turkey

Any combination of the above can be added to a crock-pot, covered with water and allowed to simmer. This mixture is cooked until soft and then allowed to cool. It can be kept in the refrigerator for up to 5 days and then discarded. The meat is usually ground or cubed before cooking. Remember to avoid using onions, mushrooms or garlic in the food as this can cause a reaction with some dogs.

In addition, many home made dog food recipes call for brown rice or oatmeal to be added. This may be done, but do remember these should constitute the smallest amount of the total ingredients, not the largest.

## **PREMIUM FOODS**

If you don't have the time to make your own food, or are concerned about your dog eating a balanced diet, it is best to purchase premium brands of dog food. These brands are usually a little more expensive than the store "own-label" brands, but provide balanced nutrition for your pet. In addition, they contain all the supplemental vitamins and minerals that are essential for a healthy dog. Some premium brands of dog foods include:

- Eukanuba
- IAMS
- Science Diet
- Breeder's Choice
- Black Gold
- Hills
- Nutrience

All dogs will have a preference for the kind of food that they like. Most of the premium dog food manufactures offer different sizes of bags, and even samples. Check with your local pet store, vet or breeder to see if any samples or coupons are available for a trial of a food before buying a large quantity of an expensive food only to find your dog hates it!

# 6

## TRAINING YOUR DOG



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### **TIPS FOR TRAINING YOUR LABRADOR**

Training your Labrador does not have to be a difficult time in your life, or in the life of your dog. By following a few simple tips and strategies, the process can be pleasant and rewarding for all involved.

The major issue in training a dog is to make sure that your puppy is at the correct stage of its life to be able to understand and internalize the training.

As discussed earlier, there are seven distinct stages that a puppy goes through, and some stages will foster independence and assertiveness in the puppy, while others will be more "training friendly". By understanding these phases and stages you can avoid a lot of frustration and learn to work with the dog, rather than fighting nature.

For purposes of this discussion, the focus will be on training a puppy rather than retraining an adult dog. The strategies used will be similar however, and can be interchanged. Remember that different breeds respond differently to training techniques, and the individual personality of the dog will also impact on the strategies that are most successful.

In addition you should research your breed and talk to trainers about the different stages and temperaments of the breed. In general hounds and dogs from the working group tend to be high-energy puppies, and may be rambunctious and have difficulty focusing on training exercises.

Toy breeds can tend to be high-strung and prone to barking. The larger dogs such as Akitas, Shepherds, Rottweilers, Malamutes and Huskies tend to be very stubborn dogs and require firm and consistent training and work best with one trainer rather than multiple people. Small breeds can also be very stubborn, and usually tend to bond closely with one or two people initially. They can then come to respond to others appropriately later.

## **MAKE TRAINING FUN**

Make sure that you are in a positive and enthusiastic mood when you begin training sessions. If you are tired, stressed or unhappy this will be communicated to the dog, and it will make the session less pleasant and more difficult. Take time to praise the puppy when something is done correctly.

Small healthy treats and lots of verbal praise, pets and hugs make the dog feel positive about training sessions. Try to have a play session at the end of each training session when the session has gone well - this will help the puppy focus on the training.

In addition, always exercise your puppy before the training session starts. This allows their excess energy to be burned off and gives the puppy the opportunity to focus. If a puppy is not exercised before training, it may be focused on running around and having fun rather than on the business of learning.

Most puppies enjoy learning, being praised, and spending time with their owners. They will look forward to these training times if they are done in a positive atmosphere where the puppy feels successful.

## **MAKE TRAINING NATURAL**

Remember that Labrador puppies are not full grown, nor do they have complete control of their body functions. Take the puppy outside multiple times per day, and positively reward the puppy when it urinates or defecates outside. This process can also work when the puppy sits on its own or comes to you. Catch them being good and reward swiftly.

## **KEEP TRAINING CONSISTENT**

This is one of the most critical tips for puppies. It is very hard for the puppy to understand expectations if they change from day to day or between people in the house. Make sure that everyone is using the same commands with the puppy. For example if one person is using "sit" and another is using "down" to get the puppy to sit on its bottom, the puppy will be confused. This gets even more confusing if, when the puppy jumps up, he is told to "get down". Keep commands simple and consistent.

In addition to the command language, it is also important to keep the expectations the same between people in the home. If, for example, the children let the puppy sleep on the bed but the adults insist the puppy stays off the furniture, it will take much longer to teach the puppy.

Talk to other family members about the commands and expectations for the puppy. If you are attending a puppy training class, invite all the family to attend so they can see how the trainer is indicating the commands should be used.

## **PATIENCE IS THE KEY**

Remember that Labrador puppies are just like toddlers, and will need to be given lots of opportunity to learn. Housebreaking is one of the first lessons that most people would like puppies to learn, but it is also one of the hardest. Puppies have a small bladder and need to frequently urinate. Take the puppy out for a short walk or exercise break at least every hour or two during the day. By avoiding situations where the puppy will have to mess in the house, you can positively reward for good behavior.

Remember also that sound or movement easily distracts puppies. Try to plan training times in an area where there is a minimum amount of distraction. Avoid having the TV on, or the children playing in the same area. Allow the puppy to focus as much as possible on the task at hand. Remember also that puppies have a short attention span, so stop the training when you notice the

puppy is beginning to “tune out”. Short, frequent trainings will be more effective than long training sessions.

### **NEVER HIT A PUPPY**

A puppy bonds with a human, and through this bond learns trust and obedience. If there is negative physical contact between the owner and the puppy, this trust and bond is weak, or is not formed at all. A Labrador that is afraid of its owner will be very difficult to train, and may become extremely shy or very aggressive.

Rewarding for positives, and using a sharp “No” followed by withdrawing attention will be more effective than physical punishment. It will also strengthen your bond with the dog, and encourage the puppy to learn to work for your praise and attention rather than fear of punishment.

### **GET IN A ROUTINE**

Just as you schedule walks, exercise and feeding try to schedule a routine for training. This helps the puppy to understand the difference between play and training, and will encourage them to focus. Use natural training as well - when the puppy responds correctly to a command outside of the training session, praise them, hug them and give them lots of attention.

Have a positive attitude for the training, and be consistent with your commands and training methods. You will be amazed how quickly your puppy will respond to your commands. Remember that there will be good days and not so good days, and try to focus on the positives. Understand the characteristics of your breed and talk to a breeder, trainer or veterinarian if you are noting any unusual behavior.

## **THE BASICS OF DOG TRAINING**

After you have researched the Labrador breed, set your training schedule and routine and determined your course of action it is important to get started. The basic commands that most people would like the puppy to be able to respond to are:

- Sit
- Come

- Down
- Stay.

Once the puppy has mastered these commands and behaviours, you can advance to more difficult commands.

Starting training as early as possible is far more effective than allowing the puppy to learn negative behaviors and then trying to retrain them out of these and into the desired behaviors. Use naturally occurring events to reinforce training.

When the puppy walks towards you on his/her own choice immediately say "come" and then praise and reward the puppy when it arrives. Only do this if the puppy is headed towards you directly. After being with the puppy for a short time, you can easily determine if it is heading your way. This allows the puppy to pair the word "come" or "sit" with a natural behavior that the dog wanted to do anyway.

## **TEACHING YOUR DOG TO COME**

This is one of the most important commands for a Labrador puppy to learn. It is important for safety reasons, as well as allowing the puppy more freedom, because once you know that the puppy will come consistently, you can then allow off-leash walks in appropriate and safe locations without having to worry that the puppy may take off on you.

The first step to get the puppy to come is to understand the reasons that a puppy might not want to come. Perhaps they are really enjoying what they are doing, or are engaged in chasing or playing with another pet or family member. If the puppy is off the leash and having fun it will quickly learn that when it is called to the owner and responds, the owner will put on the leash and take it away from the fun.

If the puppy does not respond it gets to keep on playing, and quickly realizes that being free is infinitely more pleasurable than being on the leash. To avoid this response it is important to keep the puppy on the leash when out of the training area until training is completed.

To teach a Labrador puppy to come, the easiest method is to use food as an incentive. For this to be effective the puppy must be a little hungry, and interested in the bite of kibble or the puppy treat offered. By choosing healthy treats and sticking to limited feedings throughout the day, the puppy will be interested in the treat but also still getting the correct diet.

Make sure that you have the puppy's attention in a quiet and distraction free environment. When you first start this activity you will need to be only a few feet from the puppy.

1. Call the puppy, which we will name Bingo, by name, saying "Come Bingo" or "Bingo, Come!"
2. Show the treat.
3. Immediately reward the puppy when he arrives to you.
4. Make sure the puppy enjoys the treat. Pair the treat with petting and lots of praise.
5. Continue this training, gradually moving farther back.
6. Once the puppy is coming consistently and immediately, gradually start eliminating the treats, and rely on the praise.

The training sessions should be done in short periods, multiple times a day. Try moving throughout the house or yard, and play almost a hide and seek game with the puppy. If the puppy appears to lack interest, make sure that you are not training right after eating or during times of stress or distractions. Remember to verbally reward the puppy and give lots of attention when the puppy responds.

Once the puppy has the concept start adding distractions. When first training outside or in unfamiliar territory, keep the puppy on a leash and being firm but gentle, focus the puppy's attention on you. Use a longer and longer lead until the puppy is responding every time before taking the leash off.

## **TEACHING YOUR DOG TO SIT**

Sitting is a natural behavior for a Labrador puppy or dog, so take advantage of this.

1. Whenever you notice your puppy getting into position to sit, simply say "Sit". This allows the dog to understand that SIT means "put my bottom down on the ground". Once the puppy understands this, training is much easier.
2. You can also encourage the puppy to sit by using treats.
3. Simply get down on the floor with the puppy, and hold the treat over its head, moving it slightly backwards. The puppy will raise its nose to the treat and move the head back, causing it to sit.

4. As soon as the back quarters start to lower, say "Sit" and present the treat when the dog's bottom is on the floor. This happens very quickly, so be prepared.

Keep these training sessions very short. Remember to say "sit" when you notice the dog sitting outside of the training session. Avoid having the dog sit more than 3-5 times in any one session. Mix up the "come" and "sit" commands, so the puppy is kept thinking.

Praise the dog both verbally and with lots of petting when they do the correct behavior. As the puppy gets better at sitting, gradually fade out the treats and increase the verbal and physical praise.

## **TEACHING YOUR DOG TO LAY DOWN**

The command of "down" can be taught very similarly to the sit command.

1. Have the dog sit, and then place the food, in your fingers, on the ground in front of the dog. This will usually encourage the puppy to lie on his stomach.
2. If they do not respond to this, or if they stand up, try gently moving the dogs front legs out while giving the command of "down".
3. Immediately reward the dog with food and praise.
4. The puppy will want to stand up immediately, and allow this until he gets the idea of laying down on the command. Once he has mastered this, encourage the puppy to stay longer by petting the dog while it is down, as well as holding back the food reward for longer periods of time.

As with the sit command watch for times that the dog is naturally going to lie down and give the command.

## **TEACHING YOUR DOG TO STAY**

After the puppy has successfully learned to sit and lay down, it is important to get them to stay. This is a gradual training, and will not happen overnight, as the puppy will naturally want to go with you, not remain behind.

1. Start by having the puppy sit or lay down.

2. Give the stay command. Many people pair this command with a hand signal like the “stop” signal that is used in traffic.
3. Step back and reward your puppy even for the slightest amount of time spent staying.
4. Gradually increase the time and space. Once the puppy gets the idea of what you want they will stay for longer and longer periods of time.
5. Do not reward the puppy when they come prior to your request. Avoid punishing the puppy, as you do not want them to become nervous of coming to you.

## **WALKING WITH A LEASH**

The best way to prevent issues with a leash and collar is to not allow bad habits to form right from the start.

- Make sure that you are using a collar that fits correctly and is not too tight or too loose. A collar should allow two fingers to be inserted between the collar and the neck, and should be a soft fabric collar with the buckle for adjustment. A collar that is too tight will cause discomfort and the puppy will not want to have it on. A loose collar will allow the puppy to slip off the lead.
- Do not use a choke style collar with a Labrador puppy.
- Use treats and praise to keep the puppy walking in the same direction as you would like to go.
- If the puppy begins to pull immediately reverse directions given a quick tug on the leash.
- Do not drag or pull the puppy, as this will teach the puppy to pull on the leash.
- If the puppy does begin to pull, you can also stop walking, and not start again until there is slack in the leash.
- Keep the puppy on a short leash when starting the training. Give lots of praise and keep the leash loose with no tension unless the puppy begins to pull.
- Stop; allow the puppy to determine when the pressure comes off the leash. This will only happen when he comes close to you.

Labrador puppies will quickly learn that staying by your side keeps the walk going, and prevents any pressure on their neck.

Remember that a Labrador puppy has small, short legs and easily tires. Do not take long walks; rather short, frequent walks will work best. A harness may also be used with a puppy, and the same techniques can be used for training with a harness.

Work with your puppy on the leash in your home and yard before taking him out on the streets or in the park. Remember that it is easier to learn without distractions, rather than in a very new and interesting environment.

Training your puppy should be as natural as possible, and every effort should be made to ensure that the process is positive for the puppy. This makes the training more enjoyable for the owner as well. Avoid power struggles with the puppy, and reward them for responding correctly.

Treats are a great tool and should be used to get the process started. Once the behavior has been learned, continue to reinforce good behavior with praise and attention, and gradually eliminate the food treats.

## **HOUSE TRAINING YOUR PUPPY OR DOG**

Usually very high on the list of training priorities for a Labrador puppy or a dog is the issue of house training. Teaching your Labrador to avoid eliminating in the house is important for several reasons - the most obvious of which is the odor and mess that a non-house broken dog will make.

In addition, there are health concerns for the humans, dog and other animals if there is fecal material in the same area that food is prepared or consumed. Often dogs will eat their own waste, so keeping the animal away from this material is also important to prevent bad and unsafe habits from forming. The concerns with coprophagia (fecal eating) will be discussed in a later section.

### **CRATE TRAINING**

One of the most successful ways to train a puppy is to use the crate training method. The crate is seen by the dog as a safe area or den that he or she can use to sleep in, or just to spend time.

There are several benefits to crate training your puppy that will continue to be useful as your dog matures. A crate provides an excellent environment for transporting your Labrador, a comfortable yet confined place when you are not at home, a method to control challenging behaviors such as digging and

chewing, as well as a tool for scheduling toileting, sleeping and other activities.

It is important to allow your Labrador puppy to adjust to the crate and to learn that the crate is a good place to be, not a punishment.

1. Start by placing the crate on the floor, and place inside some dog treats and toys.
2. Close the door, and let the puppy sniff around the crate. The puppy will soon realize the treats are on the inside, and will whine or scratch to get into the crate.
3. Praise the dog for wanting in, and open the door. Leave the door open, but don't praise the dog for coming out. The puppy needs to learn that inside is better than outside.
4. To get the puppy to go back into the crate have a few more treats and toss them towards the back of the crate.
5. Positively reward the puppy for walking in and eating them.
6. Gradually begin to close the door behind the puppy. If the puppy does start to whine or bark make sure that you do not let him or her out until there is quiet, or you will be reinforcing the whining behavior.
7. Always have a treat or two inside the crate, and start saying "Crate" to alert the puppy to go in for a treat.
8. Never force the puppy into the crate or it will start to be seen as a punishment.
9. Increase the time in the crate but do not exceed thirty minutes to avoid any accidents or stress on the puppy.

Puppies can sleep in the crate, but should be taken outside if they cry or whine and need to toilet. If they are whining or crying for attention, do not take them out, or it will cause this behavior to increase.

Crate training can also be used when you leave the house. Once the puppy is comfortable in the crate, they will be happy to remain in there while you are away. Avoid any excessive amounts of time in the crate, as this can make housetraining more difficult.

Watch for any signs of separation anxiety while you are gone, and address these with a trainer to correct this situation as early as possible. Soiling the crate, excessive drooling or panting, or frantic behavior when you return may be signs that the puppy has some separation anxiety.

The crate can also be used to housetrain your Labrador. This method is based on the premise that the natural tendency of the puppy or dog is to avoid soiling its own area or den. The key factors involve being able to confine your puppy to the crate for short periods of time, so that the puppy is able to hold their urine or feces.

Remember that puppies have very small bladders, and that their control is not as good as a more mature dog. After a short period of confinement, the puppy must be taken immediately to the area that it is to use to relieve itself. Once the puppy does urinate or defecate in the selected area, it should be immediately praised for the positive behavior.

If your Labrador is kept in the crate for longer than the time it can control its bladder, it will begin to mess in the crate. This creates a bad habit and will seriously affect the ability of the puppy to learn to eliminate only when outside or in a designated area.

To start the crate training process, take the puppy out of the crate every hour and allow them access to the outside area. As soon as the puppy does urinate or defecate, provide immediate praise and attention. If the puppy does not do anything, return them to the crate and try again the next hour.

Keep a journal of when the puppy eats and when it needs to go to the bathroom. You should be able to see a pattern develop. Allow the puppy to have free run of the area until about an hour before they usually need to urinate. At this time put the puppy in the crate to prevent any accidents. At the appropriate time take the puppy out, and if the mission is successful, provide rewards and let the puppy have free run again.

If the puppy doesn't go to the bathroom, return him to the crate and try again in 5-10 minutes or so. Watch for any changes in food or water intake that might indicate that the puppy will need to go outside more often.

As the puppy gets older and has better control of bowels and bladder, the time between crating will increase. Usually in two to three weeks after starting crate training the puppy will be basically housetrained.

Be aware that mistakes and accidents will happen, despite the best scheduling and planning. Try to clean up the mess as quickly as possible. Avoid punishing the dog as this will lead to anxiety and more accidents. Make sure to reward and praise the dog for the next successful outing, instead.

Crate training should only be used if you are able to get to the puppy to allow them out when needed. If you are unable to be with the puppy at this time, crate training may not be the best method. Avoid using crate training techniques if the puppy is vomiting or has diarrhea, or if they have any difficulty controlling their bowels or bladder. Check with a vet and get medical support before deciding if crate training is right for your puppy if it is having control problems.

Crate training can also be used as a quick 30 second time out area if the puppy is overexcited or not listening. Avoid using the crate too often or for long periods of time as a punishment, as it will no longer be a positive and secure place for the puppy. Too much time in the crate will limit the socialization of the puppy, and will also decrease the amount of exercise the puppy has.

## **PAPER TRAINING**

Paper training is a great option if you are not able to be at home with your puppy to crate train. Start with a small area that you can confine the puppy to. It is important that there be no carpet in the area, and that the floor be easy to clean. Place a layer of newspaper or other paper over the entire floor area. The puppy will simply go where the urge strikes him, but he will always be eliminating on paper. Clean the paper every morning and evening, or more often if possible.

You should begin to notice that the puppy only messes in certain areas of the room. Begin taking up the paper that is in areas that the puppy does not mess in. Gradually decrease the amount of paper in the room until you have a small, manageable area. If the puppy messes outside of this area, simply cover that area with paper and start decreasing the size again.

Once the puppy is only using the paper that you have placed down, you can begin gradually moving it to the area of the house that you would like to use. Avoid allowing the puppy out of confinement until it is using the paper all the time with no mistakes.

## **LITTER BOX TRAINING**

This method is effective with small breeds of dogs, such as the Labrador. Dogs, unlike cats, will not use a litter box naturally; so will need to be taught. Start with the puppy in a confined space, and use the same method as the paper training. Spread the litter on the floor and have the puppy become accustomed to feeling the litter under its feet when it is eliminating. Gradually decrease the space the litter is spread in the room or area.

Move the litter to a box when the puppy is ready. Make sure that the litter box is the correct size for the puppy, as they may not be able to get in and out of the box. This method is practical, but may be more difficult to manage in the initial training stages.

## **TIPS FOR HOUSE TRAINING AN OLDER LABRADOR DOG**

Most older Labradors already have bladder and bowel control. If your dog continues to soil inside the house, have a vet check the animal for any disease or existing conditions. Start the dog in a living area or den. Play with the dog in this area and feed and water the dog here. Most dogs will not soil their living area, as they are naturally clean animals.

Provide a toilet area as well, usually an outdoor area. Watch where your dog naturally goes to eliminate. Labradors that have been trained on gravel or grass will naturally want to go to these areas. Take advantage of the dog's natural tendencies, and provide this area as the toilet area.

Take the dog out to the toilet area after eating, sleeping or exercise. Praise the dog for using the correct area and avoid punishment for accidents. If the dog is bored, it may drink excessive amounts of water, or may over eat if allowed free access to food.

Consider scheduling meals at regular times, and then taking the dog for a walk afterwards. It is important for any dog to have lots of fresh, clean water but you may want to remove water or limit the amount if they are drinking out of boredom. Try providing some toys or other distractions for the dog. Talk to your vet before restricting any water to the animal.

If the dog is messing in its living area, check to make sure that you are not unrealistic in your expectations of how long the dog can go without being toileted. Breeders, trainers and vets can provide appropriate guidelines for dogs of different ages and stages of development.

Remember that old dogs, like puppies, may experience difficulty in controlling their body functions. Special accommodations and frequent trips outside will be required for senior Labrador dogs.

# 7

## MAINTENANCE OF A HEALTHY DOG



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### **GROOMING YOUR LABRADOR**

The Labrador Retriever sheds slightly differently, depending on the type of Lab that it is. Yellow labs tend to be more constant shedders, but they still have the same seasonal heavy shed that the black Labs have. The very heavy shed of the black labs is typically in the spring and fall, and this heavy shed is known as "blowing" the coat.

The heavy shed is due to the loss of the soft and dense inner coat, as opposed to the coarse outer coat that is shed year round by both black and yellow Labs. All colors of Labrador Retrievers have a double coat. This means that the coat consists of a soft, dense and short inner coat under a coarser, water resistant outer coat. The outer coat is of a darker color than the inner coat, and typically only the outer coat is visible when the hair is in its normal position.

To groom the Labrador Retriever, it is important to have the right tools. Regular grooming year round will prevent much hair loss in the house, but there will still be some of the thicker outer hairs shed whenever the dog moves, shakes or scratches. Typically, the basic grooming tools that are required to keep your Labrador looking in top condition include:

- Short hair rake
- Bristle brush
- Slicker brush

The short hair grooming rake is almost a comb like apparatus, that is used to get all the way through both the rough outer coat as well as the thick and dense inner coat. This is very important, to remove all the dead hairs from the coat and prevent any possible irritation of the skin. Start using the rake from the top of the neck around to the shoulders, and across through to the chest. Never use the short hair grooming rake or any type of comb or brush against the direction of hair growth, as this can cause damage to the hair, leading to skin sensitivity.



grooming rake

Use the grooming rake gently around elbows and hips, and around the stomach area. Never use the rake around the sensitive areas of the dog such as the head, ears or around the reproductive organs. After brushing completely over the body with the grooming rake, it is time to brush the legs, tail and belly area. The slicker brush is the best tool for this, always grooming in the direction of hair growth. The slicker brush can also be used to groom the tail, moving from the thickest part of the tail at the base to the thinner tip.



slicker brush – © Kamil Karpel at istockphoto.com

A rubber grooming tool can also be used, it is often much easier on the dog's skin than the grooming rake. The rubber will catch and hold the dead hair and the wide rubber teeth will provide stimulation to the dog's skin that is pleasant for the animal as well as helping to improve the oil distribution through the coat.



rubber brush

The head and ears of the Lab can be gently wiped with a damp cloth to remove any debris or dirt. The eyes are not prone to gathering debris or tearing, but it is always important to check for any sign of irritation or redness and tearing of the eye.

To finalize the grooming, it is important to use a fine toothed comb to brush out the furnishings on the hind legs as well as the longer hair on the chest. A bristle brush will remove any remaining loose or dead hair, and help keep the coat shiny and health looking.

Labradors are never shaped or clipped. Owners sometimes believe that shaving or short clipping a Labrador will help in keeping the dog cool in the summer, but the reality is that the undercoat will help insulate the dog and keep him or her both warm in the winter and cool in the summer.

## **BATHING**

Labradors, as with all dogs that have been bred for use in the water, have a oily component to their coat that provides water resistance. Bathing a Lab will strip the hair of this natural oil and will result in dry, brittle and somewhat lifeless looking coats. A Lab should only be bathed when necessary and ideally not more than two to three times per year. If you do have to bathe the dog be sure to use only special shampoo and conditioners for dogs, never use human hair products as they can severely damage the coat and lead to skin irritations.

## **TEETH**

Keeping your Lab's teeth clean will decrease your need for costly de-scaling and dental cleanings at the vets. It is easy to train your Lab in the tooth brushing process by gradually getting them use to having your finger touching their teeth and gums. After they are comfortable with your finger along their gums, try using a finger sleeve or a special dog toothbrush. These items are available from your pet store. Use only dog toothpaste, never human toothpaste, as it is likely to be very distasteful for your dog.

## **NAILS**

Labs have black nails that make them hard to trim. If you are not sure exactly where the quick is in the nail it is possible to nick a blood vessel causing your dog lots of pain and also resulting in profuse bleeding. A groomer or vet can show you how to carefully clip the nails using a guillotine style nail clipper to prevent any injury to the dog.

Throughout the year most Labs will need only twice a week grooming but during the shed it is important to groom every day.

## **BATHING YOUR LABRADOR DOG**

No matter how clean and neat your pooch is, at some point in time they are going to need a bath. Starting your puppy off understanding what a bath is will help deal with the issue when the dog gets older. Labradors can be bathed indoors in a sink or bathtub, but larger breeds may need specialized equipment or an outdoor bath.

Some dogs will take to water and bathing more than others. Check with your breeder to find out if your Labrador is a water loving dog or not.

There are some commercially available “dry bath” powders that work well for quick deodorizing and freshening of the dog’s coat. Care needs to be taken when using these powders to avoid contact with the eyes, mouth and ears. Some dogs may be sensitive to the chemicals or perfumes in some soaps, shampoos or powders, so check a small area of your dog before treating the whole dog.

In order to bath your Labrador, follow these few simple steps.

- Clean all foreign matter out of the dog's coat as much as possible. With a longhaired breed this may take a bit of time. Small twigs or other objects in the coat can cause tangling in the bath, so removing them ahead of time will save effort in the long run.
- Fill a sink, bathtub or other water container with luke-warm water and place the dog in the water. The water should not be deeper than the top of the animal's legs or the bottom of its belly.
- Use your hands and arms to support the dog until it is comfortable and is not struggling. It is important to avoid any falls or slips at this time. Keep one hand gently placed on the back of the dog's neck, or under the stomach for small breeds such as the Labrador. Keep praising and talking to the dog in a reassuring manner. Praise the dog for standing still.
- If you have a shower nozzle and hose, this is an ideal way to wet the dog down and rinse off the shampoo. Make sure that the water is warm to the touch, but not hot or cold before applying the water to the dog. Use only the gentlest setting if there is more than one way to adjust the water output from the nozzle.
- Begin slowly pouring water from a plastic pitcher or other plastic container onto the back of the dog, starting at the tail and moving towards the neck. It is important to avoid using glass objects in case of breakage. If the dog becomes nervous and tries to move, stop and calm the animal before proceeding. Do not pour water over the dog's head, as this is very frightening to the animal.
- When the dog is wet from the tail to the neck, apply a good quality pet shampoo and lather. Again, keep one hand as a support for the dog and lather with the other. For larger breeds of dog it is usually easier to have two people to complete this task.
- After the dog is completely shampooed, rinse thoroughly with warm water. Work from the top of the dog to the bottom to make sure all shampoo is removed.

- You can complete the bath with a good skin conditioner/hair conditioner for dogs. Rinse thoroughly.

After the bath Labradors will want to shake, which, depending on the dog's enthusiasm, can be very messy. Immediately after the rinse remove the dog from the water and dry with fluffy towels. Keeping your hand firmly on the back of the neck will prevent them from shaking, or will minimize the amount of shaking until you can dry them with the towel.

A soft washcloth rinsed in warm water can be used to wipe the face and ears clean after the bath. Avoid using any shampoo or conditioner on the face, as the eyes, nose and ears may be particularly sensitive.

After the bath the dog will immediately run outside and roll, given the opportunity. This often undoes all your hard work. It is wise to keep the dog confined to the house until the coat is completely dried.

Dogs with outer and inner coats should be dried with a hair dryer to prevent skin irritations and disease. Avoid using a human hair dryer unless it has a wide variety of settings. Medium and high on regular hair dryers will be too hot for dogs and will cause skin damage and probably problems with behavior the next bath time. Pet stores sell special hair dryers for pets that have much lower temperature settings and different speeds.

After a few baths, your dog may look forward to the event. You can increase the likelihood of bath time being positive if you reward your dog for good behavior in the bath and do something special after.

## **EAR CARE FOR DOGS**

Most healthy Labradors will have few problems with their ears. There are, however, several conditions that can arise with regards to a dog's ears. The general symptoms of ear problems with dogs are:

- Frequent scratching of the ears
- Repeated and frequent shaking of the head
- Ears appear red and are sensitive to the touch
- Tumors or scaly appearing skin in the ears
- Discharge or foul smell from the ears

A veterinarian should immediately check any dog exhibiting these signs. Often the cause of the symptoms are ear mites, water in the ear, or other conditions that will need specific medical intervention. The conditions can become very severe and can result in loss of hearing or even death.

## **GENERAL EAR CARE**

Knowing your breed is the most important factor in determining how much attention you will need to spend on your dogs ear care. Usually dogs with ear flaps or ears that are covered by the long part of the ear will have more complications with ear problems than dogs with open ears have. This is largely due to the lack of air circulation and accumulations of wax. A dog with open ears has lots of air circulation, and wax is naturally expelled from the ears on a regular basis.

The first sign of a wax accumulation is usually a slight greasy discharge from the ear, along with a strong waxy smell. A dark colored discharge may be a sign of an ear canker and will need to be treated by a vet.

For a clear or light discharge the ear can be cleansed using a commercially prepared ear solution and a cotton ball. Soak the cotton ball or pad in the solution, squeeze out any excess moisture and gently apply to the inside of the ear. Do not push the cotton ball into the ear canal or allow any of the solution to enter the ear canal. Under no circumstances should you use a Q-tip or any other object. The danger with this is that a sudden movement of the dog's head could result in permanent hearing loss.

Occasionally, the wax build up will be farther down in the ear canal. The veterinarian can irrigate the ear canal and flush out the wax. This will usually need to be done several times if the build-up is severe. Again, this should only be done by a veterinarian, or other professional animal health specialist.

Long hairs in the ear may cause irritation and increase itching and redness of the ears. Trim or remove long hairs if this is a problem for your dog.

Avoid using water to clean the dog's ears. Not only is water in the ear canal often a cause of the discharge, but also it can lead to the growth of bacteria in the ear canal. Stop any cleaning activity that appears to be increasing the irritation and immediately see a vet.

Professional groomers can assist with regular ear cleaning when the dog is bathed. Most groomers include ear cleaning with the bath, and can let you know if they note any discharge or problems.

Ear mites are common in dogs, and require treatment for several weeks. If you have more than one dog and one has mites, you will have to carefully monitor your other dogs, as mites travel easily between animals. They are

hard to see in the dog's ears, but can sometimes be seen if the wax from the dogs ear is thinly spread on a piece of paper. White spots in the wax are the mites.

## **YEARLY CHECK-UPS**

Even if you do not take your Labrador to a groomer, you should check your dog's ears if you notice any changes in behavior such as scratching or head shaking. A vet should check any discharge or strong odor as soon as possible. If your dog has a tendency for wax build up, the ears should be cleaned frequently using a cotton ball and a commercially prepared solution.

In addition, the vet will check your dog's ears and hearing at their yearly visits. Older Labradors may have a decrease in hearing that is normal, but they may also need their ears to be cleaned more frequently. Following the advice of your vet will assist in this matter.

## **CLAW CLIPPING AND CARE FOR CANINES**

Dogs have claws or nails that are made of a similar material to human fingernails and toenails. The nails or claws of a Labrador are much harder and thicker than human nails, however, and do require some special care.

Dogs have two different colors of nails, black and white. The white nails are generally easier to clip at home as they are somewhat transparent and you can see where the "quick" ends and the nail begins. The quick is the tissue and blood supply part of the nail, and under white nails it will appear pinkish. The claws themselves are dead tissue, and have no nerves or blood supply, so will cause no discomfort to the dog when being trimmed.

Dogs with black toenails or claws are more of a challenge. The quick cannot be seen through the nail, and the chance of nicking the quick is much greater. This is a painful experience for the dog (think of cutting your own quick – ouch!), and the quick will often bleed profusely. If you are not completely sure that you know how to do this, get a vet or groomer to clip the nails for you.

Many Labradors will not need their nails trimmed if they walk regularly on cement or other rough surfaces such as paved sidewalks. These surfaces act like natural nail files to keep the claws short.

## **CLIPPING THE NAILS**

Purchase a good quality dog nail clipper. Do not use a human nail clipper as it will cause the nails to splinter, and will make the experience painful for the dog, as the nail may be twisted. Dog nail clippers will either be guillotine style (where the claw is placed in the clipper), or a scissor style (that has a notch in the blade to place the claw in). Do not use regular scissors as the risk of slippage is high.



guillotine nail clippers

Clip the nails short but be careful not to touch the quick or apply pressure to the area. Cut at a 90 degree angle to the pad, to provide a flat surface when the dog is standing. A nail file or electric file can be used to smooth the surface of the claw.

Many Labradors and other breeds of dog are afraid of the clippers and become frightened when they realize that they cannot pull their paw away from you. Starting this procedure with a puppy is the best way to train the dog to have his nails clipped.

Small dogs can be placed on their back in the owners lap and the clipping can be done in a very relaxed and playful fashion. Or often dogs can be trained to lie on their backs and have someone rub their tummies to take their mind off the clipping procedure. Occasionally the “clip” sound will irritate the dog or startle the puppy, so talking to the dog will help distract from this.

Most Labradors can be trained to allow you to hold their paw while clipping. They should be praised for not pulling away. Avoiding clipping into the quick and giving lots of praise and rewards will make the experience pleasant for you both.

## **DEWCLAWS**

Dewclaws are the little nail that grows on the inside of the dog's legs, a little way up from the actual pad of the foot. Dogs may have single or double sets of dewclaws.

A lot of Labrador owners remove the dewclaws, to prevent them from catching on anything while the dog is playing or running, and possibly causing infections or problems. It is largely a personal choice, as dewclaws that are compact and tight to the leg run little chance of being damaged.

Loose or floppy dewclaws may cause more problems. Dogs will have to be anesthetized, and the whole toe is removed, not just the claw. Most dogs have this done when they are being spayed or neutered, or the breeder may have it done when they are puppies.

If you are planning to show your dog, check your breed standards to see if they are required to have dewclaws for your competition.

## **VACCINATION REGIMES**

It is critical to the safety and well-being of your Labrador and other dogs to make sure that you follow an established vaccination regime. While there may be special situations in different areas that require additional vaccinations, the basic shots for dogs will be the same. Check with your local veterinarian, breeder or pet store for literature and information on vaccination protocols for your location.

The following vaccinations are required for puppies at 7, 10, 13 and 16 weeks of age:

- Parvovirus
- Parainfluenza
- Leptospirosis
- Hepatitis
- Distemper

Often these various vaccines are combined in one vaccination called DHLPP. Annual boosters will be required after this to keep the puppies and dogs healthy and free from these conditions.

Up to the age of about 8 weeks the antibodies received from the mother dog will protect the puppies. Puppies that are being kennelled or in contact with other dogs may also require an intranasal bordetella vaccination at 8 to 16

weeks. This prevents against kennel cough and is required before the puppy can be left at most reputable kennels. If the puppy or dog is in contact with other dogs frequently, this intranasal treatment should be repeated every six months.

Rabies shots will be given between 4 to 6 months. They will require rabies shots yearly, and in some areas an additional booster may be needed between the first shot and the second yearly vaccination.

Your veterinarian can advise you on any other vaccinations that may be required. Additional diseases that can be treated with vaccinations are:

- **Lyme Disease:** can cause some arthritis and lethargy in the short term. It is usually not fatal in dogs and can be treated with antibiotics. The dog can have relapses from the disease months after the infection if it has not been vaccinated.
- **Coronavirus:** will cause diarrhea in puppies that can be serious if another condition co-exists. The coronavirus will not be serious or fatal unless combined with parvo or other more serious disease.

It cannot be stressed enough how important it is to keep your dog's vaccinations up to date. Disease like parvovirus, rabies and parainfluenza, which can cause death in puppies and adult dogs, can only be controlled if all dog owners responsibly vaccinate their dogs every year.

A vaccination works by introducing a killed or altered form of a disease to the dog in a manner that is not harmful to the animal. The animal's immune system responds by making antibodies to fight the vaccination. When the animal is exposed to the disease in the future, the body already has the antibodies to fight the disease, and the animal does not become ill.

## **SIDE EFFECTS**

Occasionally some Labradors may have a side effect to vaccinations. They may appear tired, or refuse to eat for up to forty-eight hours after having the vaccination. They may scratch at the injection site, develop hives or a swelling of the face. They may also begin to vomit.

If this happens you should immediately contact the vet, who can then prescribe antihistamines to counteract the reaction. In the future, the vet will give the antihistamine with the vaccination to prevent the reaction from occurring.

## **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

It may not be advisable to vaccinate dogs that are already ill with an existing condition, even if it is not one that the vaccine is for. If your dog appears to be sick, has been vomiting or not eating, or generally listless and unhealthy, discuss this with your veterinarian before proceeding with the vaccinations.

Occasionally the veterinarian will recommend treatment of the existing condition prior to vaccination. Puppies should not be vaccinated prior to 6 weeks of age, as they do not have the ability to develop the antibodies. Female Labradors should not be vaccinated while pregnant or nursing, unless under the direction of a veterinarian.

# 8

## MEDICAL CARE OF YOUR DOG



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### **PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN A CURE**

As with most things in life, spending a bit of time attending to problems before they arise will save time, effort and money over the long run. The same is true with raising your Labrador. However, it is important to remember that a dog is not like a car or a machine, it is a living, breathing, loving member of your family.

When your pet becomes ill, it places a great deal of stress on the whole family. Spending some time on a simple plan to keep track of your Labrador's health and well-being will help you note if there are any changes in the dogs performance or behavior that may indicate health concerns, or may require a trip to the vet.

### **DAILY AND WEEKLY**

Spend a little time watching your Labrador every day.

- Note if they are interacting with other dogs or people in the family, or staying isolated. If your dog is normally aloof this is not a concern, but a normally social dog that does not want to interact could be ill or in pain.
- Watch how your dog moves, and note any stiffness or changes in gait. Keep track of this from day to day to monitor if it disappears, stays the same or gets worse. Dogs, just like people, can overexert themselves resulting in stiffness. The older the dog the more likely this is to occur. Try to limit the strenuous activity that older dogs are asked to do, as they often will do their best to keep up, even though it is painful for them.
- Watch your dog eat. Make sure that they are chewing their food and not gulping it down. Labradors may gulp their food if they are not being fed enough and are constantly hungry, or if they have dental problems and find chewing painful.
- Watch for any blood in the saliva around the mouth when eating.
- If the dog is overly hungry, increase the amount of food that is being fed, or feed several small meals a day rather than one or two larger meals.
- Monitor the amount of water the dog is consuming. Drinking too much water can be a sign of several health conditions. Drinking water and then vomiting should be noted, and immediate veterinary assistance sought. Many conditions of the kidneys, liver and digestive tract can be detected early by the amount of water that is consumed. A dog that is not drinking enough water may have kidney conditions, that can lead to toxicity if the dog stops urinating.
- Check to make sure that there is adequate fresh clean water for the dog, as often a dog will not drink unclean or fouled water.
- Watch for any irregular activity in either urination or bowel movements. Diarrhea is common when food is changed or excessive table scraps are being fed. It can also be a symptom of serious and life threatening diseases such as parvovirus.
- If the diarrhea does not clear up in two to three days, the dog should go to the vet. The vet may require that you bring in a stool sample to help with the diagnosis. In addition, some worms or internal parasites may be visible in the stool. Roundworms and hookworms can be fatal to puppies, and can also be transmitted to humans. Worms can also cause anemia and poor overall health and coat conditions

## **WEEKLY TO MONTHLY**

- It is a good idea to weigh your Labrador once a month. Overweight dogs, like overweight humans, have greater risks for many health conditions. Weighing your dog will help you monitor if it is eating properly and not overeating. If you notice that the dog is gaining weight, try decreasing the food a bit at a time, cutting out the table scraps or treats, and increasing exercise.
- Spend time exercising with your dog and note if there are any changes in the dogs stamina or general fitness level.
- Trim your dogs nails, clean their ears and eyes and check the condition of their skin at least once a month. Run your hands completely over the dog to check for any swellings, tumors or growths. Watch for dry or scaly patches on the skin or hair loss. These can be signs of fleas, mites or mange conditions.
- Schedule regular vet visits for your Labrador – adult or puppy. Follow all vaccination schedules and report any changes in your dogs behavior or condition to the vet if they do not clear up in 24-48 hours. The old saying “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” is really crucial when working with dogs. They don’t have the ability to talk for themselves; they have to rely on your attention to them to note if they are not well or need any changes in their environment. Acting sooner rather than later will catch any problems before they lead to larger complications.

## **DENTAL CARE**

While it may seem a bit strange, it is very important to care for your Labrador’s teeth throughout its life. Many people mistakenly assume that a dog will be able to care for its own teeth, much as nature intended. This may have been true if dogs only ate all natural ingredients and foods such as they would have eaten had they remained wild animals.

Domesticated animals, like dogs, eat a variety of foods and chemicals that are never found in nature. They are subsequently susceptible to dental health issues in the same way as humans are. In addition, dogs live much longer than they would in nature, and senior dogs benefit from good dental care throughout their lives.

## TEETH

Puppies start to get their puppy teeth at the age of 3 to 4 weeks. They will start with 28 puppy teeth. These teeth will be replaced with their 42 permanent adult teeth at about the age of four months. Dogs have four different types of teeth:

- Molars – used for chewing
- Premolars – hold and break up the food
- Canines – used to hold and tear the food into small pieces
- Incisors – cut and nibble

Many veterinarians estimate that approximately 80% of all dogs over the age of three have some form of gum disease. This causes problems for the dogs with chewing food, which can lead to digestive problems. Just like with humans, this also causes teeth to be easily damaged or start to fall out. This condition becomes progressively worse as the dog ages, and can even lead to fatal health conditions.

## PROPER CARE OF CANINE TEETH

While it is not necessary to brush your Labrador's teeth daily, it is a good idea to do this at least twice a week, or every two or three days. A finger-brush is a good option as it is like a little sleeve that fits over your finger. It is texturized to provide a scrubbing action, and is much less likely to accidentally and painfully bump the dog's gums during the cleaning.



finger brush

In addition to the finger-brush you should use specially formulated doggy toothpaste. Do not use human toothpaste as it is not correctly formulated for dogs, and the taste is unpleasant for your dog.

Starting this routine when the dog is very young will help them become used to the procedure. Show dogs will require more frequent brushing to keep their teeth bright and healthy.

## **BONES**

A good, raw, knuckle or beef marrow bone is a natural way for your dog to clean their teeth. Avoid using a cooked bone or a straight flat bone, as these can splinter and cause other health issues. When you notice the bone is beginning to shred or is getting small enough to be accidentally swallowed, remove it from the dog. The larger the dog, the larger the bone will need to be. Most butchers will save knuckle bones for you if you ask them.

There are also commercially available "tarter bones". These bones are good for all sizes of dogs as they come in several thicknesses. Care must be taken to remove these when they become small or the dog may ingest the whole bone.

## **CONCERNS**

When you are brushing your dog's teeth, watch for any signs of inflammation, redness or even bleeding along the gum line. This will be normal if the puppy is getting adult teeth, but is not normal in adult Labradors after about 6 months of age.

Look for any heavy deposits of tarter along the line of the gums or extending up the teeth. It will have a yellowish to brown color, and may not come off with simple brushing. If the tarter build up is severe, the dog will need to have it removed by a veterinarian. This process is known as scaling, and requires that the dog be anesthetized, so is a fairly costly procedure.

While dogs are not known for sweet smelling breath, it is important to get your dog to the vet if you notice a foul smelling breath over a period of time. This can be an indication of a dental or digestive problem, and it is always better to determine these issues as soon as possible.

## **MEDICAL CARE**

A Labrador Retriever is typically a very healthy and hardy breed of dog, that is relatively long lived. Typically, many of the problems that a Lab may experience (other than the genetic conditions discussed before) will be relatively easy to treat and manage.

## **COLD TAIL**

One of the more perplexing problems that can occasionally bother an adult Lab, especially a hunting dog, is called 'Cold Tail'. This is a condition where the Lab's tail actually seems to go numb, or may even be somewhat irritating to the dog. The tail will hang limply behind the dog, and often the dog will bite at it.

Usually this condition occurs after the dog has been very active in the water, or has gone into icy water. Usually this condition will revert back to normal within one or two days and does not require any particular treatment, but it can be very worrisome to an owner the first time it occurs.

## **EAR INFECTIONS**

Labrador Retrievers that are very active in swimming in the water can easily develop ear infections. This is largely because of the folded over natural position of the breed's ears, which can easily trap moisture and water in the ear itself. When the ear is not allowed to dry properly after swimming, the bacteria can easily build up along with the waxy deposits. When this happens, the environment in the ear is just right for rapid bacterial growth, resulting in chronic ear infections.

To prevent ear infections from becoming a problem, always check the ears at least once a week. Watch for signs of heavy wax build up, and a foul smell coming from the ear itself.

To clean the ear use a cotton ball or some soft gauze on your finger, but never a Q-tip as this can potentially damage the dog's ear. If the dog's ear is infected, take the dog to the vet immediately and get the infection treated. After the infection is cleared up, consider using a weekly ear cleaning solution that can be provided by your vet. Avoid using homemade remedies or over-the-counter medications unless specifically recommended by your vet.

## **EPILEPSY**

Epilepsy in dogs is a neurological disorder, just as it is in humans or other animals. It results in seizures of various degrees of intensity, some which are so mild that owners may not even realize that a seizure is occurring.

Epilepsy can occur either because of hereditary conditions, or because of certain types of injuries or parasitic infestations. Most types of epilepsy can be treated with regular medication and drug therapies. In dogs with severe epileptic seizures, the condition may become progressively worse as the dog ages, but this is relatively rare.

## **THYROID PROBLEMS**

Labradors are one of the many breeds that is occasionally diagnosed with hyperthyroidism. In this condition, the thyroid gland is attacked by the body's own immune system, resulting in poor coat condition, obesity as well as a decrease in the amount of thyroxine produced in the body.

Thyroid problems can usually be treated with synthetic hormone that is provided to the dog in the form of tablets. Dogs with thyroid conditions will respond very quickly to this treatment.

## **OBESITY**

Labradors are a very active breed, but they are also big eaters. As Labradors age, their metabolism naturally slows down, resulting in an more rapid weight gain - even with continued exercise. In order to keep Labs in good shape, it is important to provide lots of exercise as well as monitor their food intake, and decrease or eliminate the treats and any human food or table scraps they may be getting.

Regular vet checks and taking your Lab to the vet for regular yearly check ups and vaccinations is very important to their overall health and well being. At the first sign of any illness or health concerns it is important to immediately get your Lab into see the vet, so that treatment can be completed as quickly as possible.

## **ANAL GLANDS**

Impacted anal glands are problematic in every breed of dog. They occur in some dogs frequently, and in other dogs not at all. Sometimes the situation can be avoided by changing the Labrador food to a higher fiber diet and avoiding any food that is not premium dry kibble. Impacted glands are often noted when the dog skids its bottom on the carpet or on the grass outside before or after a bowel movement.

If the anal glands are impacted it is important to have them emptied. If you are squeamish you may wish to get a groomer or vet to do this simple procedure however it is easily done at home. To empty a Labrador's anal glands follow these simple steps:

- Apply a warm soft cloth to the anal area and gently apply slight pressure for several minutes, warming the cloth frequently.
- Using rubber gloves, position your thumb and index finger on the outer bottom edges of the anus.
- You should feel two hard sacs under the skin, these are the anal glands.
- Begin to apply very gentle pressure up and towards the middle.
- A thick substance should be secreted from the glandular openings.

If the dog appears to be in pain or if there is no emptying of the glands do not continue to apply pressure. Simply try warming the area again and repeat the process.

Professional groomers will complete this procedure with the regular grooming. If the glands are severely impacted and do not empty the Labrador will need to see a vet and may require some antibiotics if there is a viral or bacterial infection.

### **Allergies**

Every breed of dog has the potential to suffer from various forms of allergies. Dogs, just like people, can be allergic to perfumes, soaps, food, carpets, dust, bugs, fleas, mites, or just about anything else that they could touch, eat or smell.

A dog that has allergies or an allergic reaction can react by:

- Scratching excessively
- Biting or licking at its body or feet
- Chewing at its skin
- Tearing from the eyes
- Developing hot or dry patches on the skin
- Hair loss
- Changes in eating or drinking habits
- Excessive rolling
- Rubbing the face or ears on the ground
- Diarrhea or vomiting

These behaviors can also signal serious medical conditions so a vet should examine the dog as soon as possible. If it is determined that it is allergies the first thing is to remove anything new that has been introduced to the environment. This can be room fresheners, carpet or fabric sprays, carpet, food, perfumes or products used on the dog, or other new items in the house. The food should be kept basic, and there are some non-allergic foods available on the market. Watch for foods that have little or no wheat or gluten products or meals. Gradually add back items into the environment and watch for any signs of symptoms re-occurring.

Dogs can be treated with antihistamines to help with allergy control. These can be administered in the form of capsules or pills, liquids, or even once a month shots given by a vet. Talking with your vet and working together to eliminate the source of the allergy is important in conjunction with a treatment plan.

## **SPAYING AND NEUTERING YOUR DOG**

Part of being a responsible pet owner is make sure that your Labrador does not reproduce unless it is a planned event. There are so many unwanted puppies it is often hard to find homes, and often these animals have to be destroyed. In order to prevent this issue from continuing, it is important to have your dog spayed or neutered as soon as possible.

In addition to the puppy issue, there are several health and behavioral benefits to spaying or neutering your Labrador:

- Male dogs have a lower rate of testicular and prostate cancer
- Females have a lower rate of uterine and breast cancer when spaying occurs before the second estrus cycle
- Prevents females from getting pyometra, a fatal disease involving and infection of the uterus
- Decreases aggression towards other dogs
- Decreases aggression and dominance towards humans
- Decreases sexual behaviors such as mounting in males
- Eliminates discharge during the estrus cycle in females
- Decreases roaming in males and females
- Decrease the number of male dogs that will “camp out” when a female dog is in heat
- Prevents you from having to keep your female dog locked up when she is in heat

Spayed and neutered Labradors are generally less “hyper”, and are much less prone to engaging in sexualized behavior. This behavior can be aggressive in nature, and is of great concern if there are small children in the family or in contact with the dog.

### **WHEN TO SPAY OR NEUTER**

A Labrador puppy can be spayed or neutered any time after they are 8 weeks of age. This is not a common practice however, and most veterinarians prefer to wait until the puppy is four to six months old. It is important to speak to a vet

and not assume that your young female Labrador cannot get pregnant - do not allow her to run or be in contact with non-neutered male dogs.

Many times the first estrus cycle is very short without many physically observable signs and often owners do not know that the female is pregnant. This is not healthy for the young mother or the unborn puppies. If you notice male dogs paying any sexual attention to your female puppy, immediately isolate her from the males and schedule an appointment with your vet. By spaying and neutering early, you will prevent any unwanted litters and many health concerns.

By neutering a male Labrador puppy at close to the 4 to 6 month stage, you can eliminate a lot of the socialization and dominant behavioral problems that can occur with dogs of this age. While this is particularly true for large breeds, the small breed males can also become aggressive and highly sexualized at this time.

### **WHAT ANIMALS SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO BREED?**

Although it may be tempting to consider raising your Labrador puppy for breeding purposes, it is really a difficult and very serious decision. Not only does the average pet owner not understand the importance of knowing the breeding lineage, there are also special accommodations that need to be made to care for the mother while she is pregnant.

Remember that breeders spend a considerable amount of their time showing their dogs and keeping up with the latest medical information and breed information. They are serious about breeding only the best possible dogs to enhance the breed.

Most breeders require that you agree to spay or neuter the dog, unless you are actively showing the animal. They may also require that you consult with them before breeding the male or female dog.

Prior to making the decision to breed your Labrador, you should have a veterinarian complete a full physical on the animal. You should then research the lineage that is best suited to promoting genetically sound and healthy puppies. In addition, you should ensure that you have buyers for all puppies that may be born. It is important to know this information in advance so you are not left with unwanted puppies.

Overall, unless you are working closely with an established breeder, it is not advisable to attempt to breed your Labrador. Spaying and neutering your dog is recommended - to increase the lifespan of your pet and to eliminate many behavioral concerns that occur with non-spayed or neutered dogs.

## **PREGNANCY**

So you have decided to breed your dog: If you have a purebred female Labrador and have planned to have her bred to a good line, you will be eagerly awaiting confirmation that she has become pregnant.

The first step is to make sure that the female and male dogs have the opportunity to successfully mate. As this can be a difficult procedure, especially if this is the first time the female or male has bred it is important to have an experienced breeder there to facilitate the process. Once the female comes in heat there is a limited amount of time to have her breed with the male, so timing is critical.

Once the two have mated you may begin to note signs of change in the female's behavior.

### **PREGNANCY SIGNS**

- The female may appear to stay in heat longer than usual, and her vulva may stay swollen for longer than ordinary.
- She may become very affectionate towards humans and other dogs and will appear to be lazy and not as active as normal.
- At around 3 weeks she may experience signs of morning sickness and may vomit or dry heave frequently. You will notice that her teats become enlarged and may be warmer to the touch than the rest of her body.
- Between 28 and 32 days a vet or breeder can check for pregnancy by palpating the abdomen.
- At about day 35 it is important to gradually start to switch the female's food from dog food to puppy formula dog food. This process should be completed over about a week by gradually increasing the amount of puppy formula dog food mixed into the regular food. Pregnant females will eat about one and a half times more food than non-pregnant females.
- Smaller breeds may begin to appear to thicken throughout the ribcage by the end of the fourth week.
- Weeks 6-7 will show a noticeable pregnancy. The female may also have a clear discharge at this time. This is normal, and there is no

need for concern unless it is discolored or bad smelling. If there is any concern schedule a vet appointment.

- By the eighth week, you might hear the heartbeat of the puppies if you have a larger breed of dog. They will be most noticeable down the outer edges of the female's abdomen. You may also feel the puppies kicking and moving.
- In the ninth week the abdomen will drop and the female will prepare to birth the puppies. She will start to nest and become more secretive.
- The normal gestation or pregnancy period for dogs is 63 days.

## **BIRTH**

Once the female Labrador begins to make a bed, it is a good indication that she is close to giving birth. In order to prepare for this you should make available a quiet, warm and private area for the female. Line it with soft, washable material that is free from lint, strings or other potentially damaging materials. Avoid using perfumed or scented materials as this can irritate the female and the puppies.

A whelping box is a great idea, and can easily be constructed of wood or other solid material. It should be big enough to allow the mother to stretch out in when she is delivering her puppies.

The bottom of the whelping box can be lined with paper during the delivery to help with clean up. Soft clothes or towels can then be used to help the puppies move about. The sides of the whelping box should be short enough that the female can easily get in and out but the puppies cannot.

The box should be available to the female prior to the time of the birth, so she has ample time to get used to the box. If it appears stressful to her to stay in the box, let her find a suitable place that is comfortable to her, as an alternative.

The female Labrador will appear restless just before labor. You may notice her standing up and circling repeatedly. She may dig or otherwise try to make a bed for herself. Her temperature will drop slightly about 24 hours before delivery.

Be aware that some females become very secretive at this time and may not want to have people or other dogs around. Provide as much privacy for her as you can, while still being able to monitor for any complications.

**Know your vets emergency number** and have transportation available to get the mother to the vet if there are any complications. For larger breeds it is far easier to have the vet come to the dog. Check with your vet to see if house calls are an option.

## **FALSE PREGNANCY**

Many females will go through false pregnancy, know as pseudocyesis. They will exhibit all the physical and behavioral signs of pregnancy, but will not actually be carrying any pups. If you have any questions as to whether or not your female is actually pregnant. a vet can complete an x-ray or ultrasound to confirm the pregnancy.

Usually false pregnancy will resolve itself in a few weeks, but you should be aware that females that have had pseudocyesis once are at a high risk to exhibit the signs again. Therefore, they generally should be spayed to prevent the condition from continuing once they have had one or more instances.

## 9 MANAGEMENT OF COMMON DOG BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS



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### **CONTROLLING UNNECESSARY BARKING**

Barking is a natural process for a dog. It occurs as a response to a situation, event or stimuli that is exciting or fear-provoking for the dog. There are many instances that may cause a Labrador to bark:

- A ringing doorbell
- A stranger in the house, car or yard
- Another animal
- Unfamiliar sounds
- Times of excitement
- Boredom

- Need for attention or affection from humans or other dogs

Some types of barking are encouraged; such as barking at strangers or letting you know if there is someone driving up the lane. Other types of barking are less desirable, and in fact become a nuisance. Helping your dog understand good and bad barking is important, and needs to start as soon as possible in the training cycle.

Some breeds are more prone to nuisance barking. These tend to be the toy breeds, small breeds, and terriers! Larger breeds may also bark and generally are much louder than the smaller breeds. There are some interventions that prevent barking, but it is much easier to train dogs **when** to bark as opposed to teaching them when **not** to bark.

## **PUNISHMENT**

Punishment is not an effective way to stop a Labrador from barking. Usually a dog barks for the reasons listed above, and punishing does nothing to change the stimulus of the bark. Rather, it is more effective to distract the dog from the bark and then reward the dog for the following silence. Rewarding longer and longer times of silence will help the dog understand that you are OK with a short bark, but then you require the dog to cease.

## **TRAINING**

Start your puppy as soon as possible becoming used to new situations and people. Socialized dogs tend to bark much less than unsocialized puppies, as they are more comfortable and less stressed in different environments. In addition, leave your puppy alone for short periods of time, so he or she understands that you will often be gone and then come back. Leave toys and other favorite play items to keep the puppy busy and to help prevent barking from boredom.

If your Labrador is already a barker, try training them in familiar situations.

1. Have a known person knock at the door.
2. Let the dog bark once or twice, then give the "Quiet" command and have the person enter.
3. Immediately reward the dog for not barking at the familiar person.
4. Repeat this activity several times in a row so the dog understands that the knock at the door is not necessarily a stranger.

5. Reward every time the dog stops barking, immediately. The dog then realizes after the command he will be rewarded for not barking. The reward also acts as a distraction from the stimulus of the knocking.

The owner can also use a distraction method such as shaking an empty soda can with some pebbles or pennies in it immediately after the command to stop barking is given. Then immediately reward with a treat and lots of attention and verbal praise.

A water bottle that can squirt a small amount of water onto the dog's face can also be used. The dog may begin to associate the owner with a squirt of water, however, and this should only be used very carefully – a clever dog will simply work out they need to bark and then run!

There are some commercially available collars that squirt water or sound an alarm when the dog barks - these are also effective. These "bark-activated" collars are ideal for dogs that bark in multiple situations and in many locations. Avoid using any kind of electronic shock collars, however, as these are potentially dangerous to the dog. If you feel that there is no other option other than an electronic collar, speak to your veterinarian.

A professional trainer may be able to work with you and your dog to resolve the issue. Many trainers will come to the home to work in the environment that the problem behavior is occurring. Remember to positively reward the dog when any situations arise where the dog quits barking on command.

## **JUMPING**

Jumping is a problem in all breeds of dogs, and is particularly problematic in adolescent puppies. They become so excited that they attempt to jump up on humans and other animals, in their efforts to be noticed and to get attention or food. This behavior is a nuisance, and can even be dangerous if the dog is in contact with small children or elderly people. Even in its mildest form jumping up become irritating with the dog constantly dirtying your clothes and knocking things from your hands.

## **PUPPIES**

Start your puppy off right and do not reward or recognize the puppy when engaged in jumping behaviors. It is hard not to reach down and pet them, but avoid the temptation. When the puppy stops jumping, immediately praise and pet them, providing attention for **not** jumping and engaging it the right kind of behavior.

Puppies respond to all kinds of interactions, and if your puppy seems to be a “jumper” try to discourage activities such as wrestling or rough housing with the puppy. Direct your puppy’s playfulness towards a toy rather than you. When the puppy is playing with the toy and not jumping up, reward them with positive praise.

Talk with all the individuals that interact with your puppy, and have a commonly understood clear understanding of the behaviors that are acceptable and those that are not. Puppies have a hard time learning when they are receiving mixed messages about what is correct and what is not. Puppies will naturally want attention, praise and treats, so use this to your advantage.

## **ADOLESCENT DOGS**

Adolescent Labradors will jump mostly for attention. If not corrected while they were puppies they now become more of a nuisance than the cute little puppy jumping up. Even small breeds that jump can cause people to trip and fall, potentially hurting both the human and the dog.

One of the most effective ways to work with a dog between 6 months and one year is to use a leash training method. This requires two people, and a dog trained to sit on command. One person has the dog on a collar and short leash. The other person approaches the dog. As soon as the dog begins to jump up the handler tightens the leash and commands the dog to sit. The dog does not have the opportunity to jump. Both people then reward the dog for sitting and not jumping up.

This has a double benefit, in that it trains the dog to sit when greeting a person, a nice habit for a well-behaved dog to acquire. The key is to reward and praise for the desired behavior, and control the dog to prevent the undesirable behavior.

With a small dog such as a Labrador, the handler may have to kneel or sit on the floor to be able to control the jump before it starts. Care is taken to not jerk the dogs neck, rather it is a constant tension on the leash that prevents the jump.

It is important with any breed of dog to be consistent. It is difficult for the Labrador dog or puppy to understand how to behave if some people allow the jumping and reward it with attention, and other people punish. Try to be as consistent as possible, and ask others that interact with the dog to do the same.

In addition to working with people the dog knows, try including people the dog is not familiar with. Have them provide the treat for a dog that is sitting rather than jumping. Always pair the treat with lots of petting and praise.

## **BITING AND NIPPING**

Biting and nipping is usually associated with smaller breeds of dogs and is an extremely disturbing habit for your Labrador to develop. Not only does it make your pet unpleasant to be around but it can lead to having to have the dog put down, if it bites a child or other person.

Many breeds will bite or nip by nature. Herding breeds such as Shepherds, Heelers and Labradors use nipping as a way to control other animals such as sheep or cattle. While this behavior is valued and desired when herding is required it is not desired in house dogs or companion dogs.

### **REASONS DOGS BITE OR NIP**

Labradors that were removed from the mother and littermates too early may bite or nip because they were not properly socialized with their own species. They may bite or nip to gain attention, show displeasure or to try to show dominance or aggression.

In a litter puppies play with each other by mouthing and nipping at each other. They learn that if they bite another puppy or the mother too hard they will get bit in return.

Puppies that are removed too soon do not understand this process, and will simply bite. Often, as owners, we make the situation worse by allowing puppies to bite and nip at our hands and feet in play. Puppies should only be allowed to bite or mouth toys in play, never humans.

Biting and nipping can also indicate that the dog is in pain, or is suffering in some way. It is important to determine what the conditions were that led to the dog biting, and if it is an isolated incidence or a behavior pattern that has developed.

### **TRAINING A PUPPY**

The best way to train a Labrador puppy to be gentle and not bite or nip is to stop the undesired behavior from the very first time it happens.

1. Play with the puppy normally, but if a puppy does bite, say “No” or “No bite” loudly and do not interact with the puppy until it is calm.

2. Another good option is to simply yell "Ouch" and ignore the puppy. This very closely mimics what happens in a litter when one puppy bites too hard. Most puppies will respond quickly to this treatment.
3. When you start the play again, provide a toy for the puppy to hold in its mouth or chew on.
4. When you again offer your hand and the puppy does not bite it, praise the puppy for good behavior.

If the puppy does get your hand in its mouth, make your hand as large as possible, usually by forming a fist. This will cause the puppy to release your hand as it is uncomfortable in the mouth. Offer a toy to play with. Caution should be used with this method to prevent any injury to the mouth of a small dog.

To stop nipping at your heels, try carrying a spray bottle of water or a very diluted mixture of vinegar and water. The ratio should be 1 part vinegar to 8 parts water. When the puppy follows you and nips at your heels, loudly say "No" and spray him in the face with the water solution.

If the puppy is simply over excited, try returning him to his crate for 30 minutes to calm down. The crate should not be used as a punishment, just a place to relax and calm down. When the puppy is calm, bring him back out. Start by taking the puppy for a walk or outside to run for a while before petting or engaging the puppy. Offer him a toy before the opportunity to bite presents itself.

Avoid any games that involve biting or nipping - such as chase, tug of war, holding toys in the air for the puppy to jump to, or any other bite associated games until the puppy is more mature and can distinguish between your hand and the toy.

## **TRAINING OLDER DOGS**

Biting and nipping behavior is much more serious and much harder to stop in older dogs. If your Labrador has suddenly started nipping or biting, look for other health issues. Have a veterinarian check for any disorders, painful conditions or nervous disorders that may have caused this condition.

If there are new pets or new situations in the house, the dog may be stressed and just needs some time to adjust. Isolating the dog from the new pet and spending some extra time working with the dog may be all that is needed.

The biting or nipping behavior must be corrected immediately and not allowed to become a pattern. Speak sharply, and use the spray water method to correct the dog if nipping or biting is an issue. If the dog is biting, keep children or unfamiliar people away from the dog until you get the issue

completely corrected. Keep the dog on a leash at all times to prevent any injuries.

Seek professional advice for this serious problem. Vets, breeders and trainers will be able to provide direction and recommendations. Remember that some breeds are naturally more protective and may be more inclined to nip or bite.

Learning how to work with and control your dog is the key. Start this training when you first get the dog, don't wait until the dog actually bites someone. Many states and countries have firm laws on the putting down of dogs that have bitten someone.

## **SEPARATION ANXIETY**

A certain level of separation anxiety is normal in Labrador puppies. This anxiety results when the puppy first realizes that it is alone. If the puppy has just come from a kennel and has been with its littermates and its mother all its life, being alone is a very scary situation.

Most puppies will cry, bark and howl when first left alone. Gradually, within a week or so, they will realize that you will leave them alone but then will be back. The process can be sped up a little by placing a hot water bottle, stuffed toy, ticking clock, radio, or item of your clothing in the puppy's sleeping area. This allows the puppy to feel that he or she is not alone. In addition, providing toys for distraction and entertainment will help the puppy pass the time until you get home.

Occasionally puppies and full-grown Labrador dogs do not grow out of this stage. They continue to bark, howl, dig and chew in an attempt to get out and locate their owners. These dogs will usually eliminate in the house, even if they were fully housebroken. The dogs are so panicked that they are literally not in control of their own behavior.

The exact cause of separation anxiety in dogs is not completely understood. Often it occurs when a traumatic event such as a move, a death in the family, a long period of separation, a trip to a kennel, or a change in the daily routine happens. The dog may initially seem unable to adjust to these incidents. Dogs that are not socialized, or who have not been away from people often tend to have the most serious episodes of separation anxiety.

## **SEPARATION ANXIETY BEHAVIORS**

The following are behaviors associated with separation anxiety in adult Labradors:

- Excessive loud barking, howling or crying when you leave the room or the house.
- Scratching, biting and clawing at doors or windows when you are gone. Outside dogs may chew at their runs or try to dig under fences.
- The dog does not want to go outside by itself when you are home.
- Follows you around the house and will sit and cry or whine if shut out of a room that you are in.
- Extremely frantic greetings even if you have just been gone a few minutes.

### **WAYS TO HANDLE SEPARATION ANXIETY**

If your Labrador has mild to moderate separation anxiety, there are a few simple techniques that you can use:

- Just like with a puppy, provide an old, well-worn and unwashed t-shirt or other item of clothing for your dog and leave it with them when you leave.
- Avoid greeting the dog immediately upon returning; delay the greeting for a few minutes and keep it low key.
- Leave for very short periods of time, and try to avoid leaving the dog alone for extended periods until it becomes accustomed to your leaving and returning.
- Leave a favorite toy or a nice raw knuckle bone for the dog to chew on and entertain itself with. Bones can be messy, so this may only be a good idea if the dog is in a confined area of the house or outside.
- Try acting like you are leaving, and then sitting down again. The dog will then not begin to become anxious every time you pick up your keys or put on your coat.
- Once the dog no longer whines or cries when it thinks you are leaving, try stepping outside, closing the door and then returning immediately. Gradually extend the period of time that you are outside and the dog is inside.
- If the dog begins to become anxious slow down the process and keep your separation time shorter until the dog is calm again.

- Try giving your dog a signal to indicate you will return. This can be a phrase like “I’ll be right back” before you step out the door. Turning on the radio or the TV can signal the dog that you are leaving but will return. However, the radio itself is not a companion, nor will it alleviate anxiety for your dog.
- After you are able to reach the 30-minute absence mark, the dog should be able to stay calm if you are gone for longer periods.

Talk to your veterinarian, as this condition can be very stressful for both you and the dog. If the dog chews and destroys household items, there could be a danger that the dog could eat something harmful or injure itself. There are some anti-anxiety medications for dogs that can be prescribed by a veterinarian to help while you work on the behavior modification training.

A professional trainer may also be able to help you with some different techniques and approaches. Make sure that they have experience working with separation anxiety, as basic obedience training will not help this situation. Getting another dog will also not solve the problem, as the dog is not necessarily lonely, it is worried about being away from you.

## **DIGGING**

Digging, like many of the behaviors that our dogs do, is a natural behavior that has its roots in the early development of the species.

### **REASONS FOR DIGGING**

Dogs in their wild state, or in their domesticated state, dig for several reasons. Often dogs will dig to bury that wonderful bone that you just gave them. They will cover it with dirt and leave it there for a while to “age”. They will then dig it up and enjoy it at a later time.

They may also dig to find cooler bedding in the warm summer months. Dogs will also dig in snow to make a bed that will hold body heat. Pregnant females will dig to make a nest or bed to have their puppies in.

Many breeds are bred to be digging dogs. Terriers and other hunting dogs may have strong instincts to dig, and careful breeding has developed this. Although digging is not an essential characteristic for survival anymore, this instinct is still there.

Most dogs dig to escape, or because they are bored. If you feel your Labrador is digging to escape, you will have to determine if they are suffering from separation anxiety, or if they are trying to escape to someplace more entertaining. If it is not separation issue, consider how you can make your yard a more entertaining place for your dog when you are not home.

## **PREVENTION**

Dogs may dig to get to playmates on the other side of the fence. If your Labrador digs out of your yard to get to your neighbors' dog, maybe he or she just needs a companion. If you have the space and would like another dog, then providing a companion may be the answer. Alternatively, perhaps you can work with the neighbor to allow the dogs to be together in the day - provided they get along well and are both spayed or neutered.

Providing lots of toys, bones and other activities for the dog while you are gone will help them remain contented in the yard. Make sure there is shade and a cool area in the summer for the dog. A heated kennel or other bed area in colder climates may be necessary.

If your Labrador digs random holes in the yard, try fencing off or providing a "digging area" for the dog. Encourage the dog to dig in this spot, rewarding them for digging in the specified location. Provide lots of soft dirt for the dog to dig in. Fill existing holes with water, as most dogs do not like to dig in mud.

A few drops of pennyroyal essential oil, citronella or a sprinkle of red pepper or cayenne pepper around the hole will naturally repel the dog. Often the pepper is very effective, and can also be used to keep the dogs from digging in flowerbeds, and around trees and shrubs in a landscaped yard.

For more enthusiastic diggers, you can fill the hole and place a layer of chicken wire over the filled hole. Cover with a layer of soil. When the dog returns to dig it will stop, as the chicken wire will foil his efforts. Care needs to be taken that the wire does not damage the pads on the feet if the dog persists in digging.

Try exercising the dog for at least 30 minutes before leaving them alone in the yard. Provide distractions and other companions to help them spend the day without resorting to digging for entertainment.

## **CHEWING AND TEETHING**

Teething is a troublesome time for Labrador puppies, just as it is for children and infants. Puppies lack the ability to talk, so they use their mouth as a way to communicate, play and interact with their brothers and sisters. Puppies

learn through playing with their littermates that hard bites cause pain, and they quickly learn to control their biting. Puppies need to be aware that humans are not littermates, and that there is no level of biting or mouthing that is acceptable.

## PUPPIES AND CHEWING

During teething puppies will want to chew on objects, this is a natural developmental stage. Tough and durable plastic toys, or special teething bones made of synthetic materials can be purchased from your local pet store. Avoid human toys for puppies, as they can be easily destroyed and the small parts swallowed. This can lead to choking or damage of the digestive system that can result in long-term health problems for the puppy.

Most Labrador puppies get their first set of puppy teeth in the first four weeks of life. These teeth are very sharp, and puppies need to learn that they are not to bite or chew on objects other than toys.

By providing toys in the puppy's box or den area and eliminating other objects to chew on, the puppy will become accustomed to chewing on what you want them to chew on. Smaller dogs will need smaller toys, and larger dogs need bigger chew toys. Avoid leather or rawhide toys that can shred and choke a puppy. Toys that are too small for larger puppies may also present a choking concern.

Puppies then get their full set of adult teeth at approximately 4 months. At this time the mouth may be sensitive and the urge to chew will be evident again. Providing fresh raw bones, particularly knuckle and marrow bones when outside can help relieve some of the pressure of teething. Prepare the house for this time, removing all items that the puppy may be tempted to chew on. Since this is often difficult, confining the puppy to a room may be appropriate when you are not home to supervise.

Preventing any negative chewing during teething is much easier than trying to correct the problem once it gets started.

Avoid playing any games that involve the puppy biting, mouthing or wrestling with the humans in the family – this cannot be emphasized enough. They need to understand that you are not a littermate, and they need to be able to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behaviors.

This policy of **no biting** should be consistent between all family members. It is very confusing to a puppy if they are allowed to chew on one person's fingers but not on another's. Use a toy as the biting or chewing object in any games. Do not get into dominance issues using tug of war games with the puppy at this time.



## **CORRECTING A CHEWER**

If puppies do chew on furniture or other items, there are commercially available spray-on products to make the item distasteful and prevent the puppy from chewing. Always test these products beforehand, as they can discolor certain types of furniture and carpets.

Provide a variety of toys and synthetic bones for puppies to chew on. Praise the puppy when it is chewing on the correct items.

Never hit or harshly punish your puppy if it chews on an item. Physical punishment will lead to distrust, and will make training the puppy harder in all areas. A loud and firm “No chewing” when you catch the puppy in the act will usually stop the chewing. Provide an acceptable toy to the puppy, then praise him or her when she chews on the right object. Remove the previously chewed item from the dog’s reach until they have the concept of chewing only on toys.

For adult Labrador dogs, a quick squirt with a water bottle coupled with a stern “no” may work well, but only if you catch the dog in the act of chewing. Again, provide the appropriate replacement item and praise the dog for doing the right thing. Most adult dogs chew out of boredom, so try to add some new toys or distractions to their day. Long walks and more exercise may also help an adult dog from resorting to chewing behaviors.

If the chewing does not stop despite your best efforts, see a veterinarian. In rare cases the dogs may be chewing due to an imbalance in the diet or a medical condition. The vet may also be able to recommend a trainer that can help you learn to work with your dog to correct this issue.

## **EATING RELATED PROBLEMS**

Some eating related problems in Labradors may be caused by psychological issues, but for the most part dogs with eating disorders are either eating the wrong diet or not receiving enough exercise. Many owners feed their dogs excessive amounts of table scraps, human treats, and other items that are simply not healthy for dogs to consume. Some of these items, such as chocolate or onion, may in fact cause toxicity in dogs and can lead to death in some cases.

### **FOOD**

There are many different brands, types and styles of dog food available on the market. While price is a factor, the most expensive is not necessarily the best.

A good quality premium dog or puppy food will contain all the essential elements that a healthy dog will require. A dog that has other health issues may require a specialized food and this can be prescribed by your vet.

A good quality dog food should contain:

- 22-25% protein from a high quality protein source
- 21-24% fat

Watch the label for high levels of low-quality protein products such as meat by-products and bone meal, by-products and corn gluten meal. Look instead for whole meats as the key source of protein, rather than “meat derivatives”.

Specific diet recommendations can be obtained from the breed registry or a breeder.

## **DENTAL PROBLEMS**

Some eating disorders marked by rapid weight loss and a disinterest in food may be due to poor dental condition or painful teeth. If it hurts a dog to eat, it is less likely that they will consume as much food. Check the dog's teeth and gums for any signs of disease, bleeding or swelling. Try changing to a softer dog food until the vet has the dental issue under control.

## **LACK OF EXERCISE**

Dogs can become lazy and more sedate as they age. If your Labrador has slowed down due to aging, you may need to adjust their food intake accordingly to prevent obesity. Obesity in dogs is not a healthy condition, and can complicate respiratory, circulatory and other body systems.

Try encouraging your dog to exercise more, playing fetch or Frisbee, or just going for a long walk together. Remember if your dog is out of shape they will need to work up to long walks or runs, just like an out of shape person needs to do. Try to spend time with your dog and make the exercise pleasant for you both.

Dogs that experience a sudden weight gain with no major change in diet will need to be seen by a veterinarian as this can be a sign of serious conditions.

## **PICA**

Pica is the name of a medical condition where the dog attempts to eat inorganic or non-food items. This is more than just chewing, as the dog actually chews and swallows the item. It may be caused by a chemical imbalance, a nutrient, vitamin or mineral deficit in the body, or a nervous or

psychological condition. A veterinarian can complete blood tests to determine if there is a medical reason for the behavior. Adjusting the dog's environment and diet may be required to correct this issue.

Coprophagia, or the eating of feces, will be discussed later. This is a very embarrassing and potentially dangerous behavior for the dog to engage in.

## **REFUSING TO EAT VS. FINICKY EATERS**

Labradors that refuse to eat when there has not been a change of diet or other traumatic event should be immediately taken to a veterinarian. This is usually the sign of a significant medical concern if the dog does not eat at all in 24 hours and there have been no changes in diet, environment or living conditions.

Dogs may choose to not eat if they are finicky or picky eaters. This is easily determined to be the case if the dog will not eat the balanced dry dog food but will eat table scraps or wet food, or their favorite dry food or treat. You can avoid creating a finicky eater by:

- severely limiting the amount of table scraps or treats given during the day
- gradually switching to a new food so the dog acquires the taste for the new food
- scheduling feeding times, and only leaving the food out for the dog for twenty minutes twice a day
- mixing a very small amount of the desired food in with the balanced food and gradually eliminate the mix
- exercising the dog more so they are hungrier at meal times
- avoiding free choice food, as you will be unable to monitor how much is being consumed

Many people mistakenly feel that a dog will get tired of one kind of food over and over. This is not true, as dogs will actually benefit from a consistent, high quality food that meets all their nutritional requirements.

## **COPROPHAGIA**

As mentioned earlier coprophagia is the eating of fecal material. Dogs may eat their own, other dogs', or even other animals' droppings. This is an

embarrassing and frankly disgusting behavior, especially if your Labrador is an indoor animal that spends time with the family.

It is normal for puppies to go through a phase of coprophagia, and the female dog will often clean the whelping box or other area that the puppies are in by eating the waste material. Keeping the area as clean as possible will eliminate this issue, and puppies should never be kept in areas that are soiled.

## **ADULT DOGS**

Adult Labradors may eat feces out of habit, as an attention seeking behavior, or due to health concerns. If you have more than one dog and you notice that they are both eating one of the animals' waste it may be a sign that this particular animal is not properly digesting its food. In addition diabetes, thyroid disease, Cushing's disease or the use of certain steroids can trigger unusual eating habits in adult dogs.

The first step if you note an adult dog that suddenly starts this behavior is to talk to a vet and have your dog in for a check-up.

For the most part adult dogs eat their own stool or other animals' feces out of habit. This behavior can be started early in the puppy's life if the kennel or whelping box is not kept clean. If a puppy or dog is caught in the act of eating feces, undue attention (positive or negative) will reinforce the behavior. Try as much as possible to restrict your puppies' or dogs' ability to come in contact with fecal material.

## **CORRECTING THE PROBLEM**

As described above the first step is a trip to the vet. Once you are satisfied that it is a behavioral issue, not a medical condition, try the following:

- Keep your dog exercised and playing to avoid boredom
- Remove any and all fecal material immediately. This includes cat litter boxes, as they are often the target of a dog that has coprophagia.
- The vet can prescribe a compound that is added to the dogs food that has no taste initially, but after going through the dog's digestive tract will give a unpalatable taste and odor to the feces.
- Sprinkling cayenne pepper or red pepper powder on fecal material often works!

In addition, keeping the dog on a leash, and teaching it to come to you and sit down for a treat immediately after defecating can help teach a rewarding and

socially acceptable replacement behavior. Try praising your dog for not eating fecal material, and provide a toy or a reward immediately for the desired behavior.

## **CONCERNS**

The most obvious concern about socially unacceptable behavior has already been addressed. In addition, this can also be a cause for concern about parasite infestations.

Most worms and internal parasites lay eggs in the intestinal tract of infected animals. When your dog then eats the feces, he or she will become infected with the same worms and parasites. Chronic infestation leads to anemia, poor health and weakness of the immune system and even death.

As with many of the conditions discussed, prevention is the key. If your Labrador puppy is not exposed to fecal material, and your dog's pen, yard and other environments are kept as clean as possible, the opportunity to develop this habit is virtually eliminated.

Avoid punishing a dog that engages in coprophagia, as this may make the situation worse. Focus instead on positive behavior. Be prepared to change foods slowly to prevent any undigested portions being left in the stool due to stomach upset. Check with your animal health specialist if you notice any coprophagia, to make sure it is not a symptom of a serious medical problem.

# 10

## THE AGING DOG



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### **CARE OF THE AGING DOG**

A Labrador's needs, behaviors and temperament will change as they age. While this is an inevitable process, there are some things that can be done to make this positive for all involved, both humans and dog. The key to focus on is keeping the dog as active and involved in a routine as possible.

Aging Labradors will have the same issues as any human when they age. You will notice that your dog may have:

- Decrease in appetite
- Decrease in stamina and desire to exercise
- Loss of eyesight
- Loss of hearing
- Loss of memory
- Incontinence

- Possible temperamental changes

One of the key points to working with an aging Labrador is to know the expected life span. Some breeds live longer than others, and you should know the average to determine if some of the medical and behavioral issues with your dog are due to aging or a more serious medically treatable condition.

All dogs should have yearly vet checks, but older Labradors may require more frequent visits. Since older dogs don't have the stamina and energy that younger dogs have, they may be more affected (even by simple conditions) than they would have been if they were younger. Below are some of the more common medical conditions to watch for in an aging dog.

### **ARTHRITIS, PAIN AND STIFFNESS**

Senior Labradors are often stiff, particularly in the mornings or after long periods of inactivity. Since older dogs become more sedate naturally, it is important for the owner to watch for any signs of pain or discomfort when the dog is moving around. Any indications of pain or discomfort can be treated with arthritis medications, and even some natural remedies that work well with dogs. Talk to your veterinarian about options to treat and reduce the symptoms of arthritis.

### **INCREASED WATER CONSUMPTION**

Excessive water consumption can be associated with diabetes and kidney dysfunction. If the urine production increases, or the urine is very strong smelling or very pale, a veterinarian should be consulted as soon as possible. Urination can be a sign of loss of bladder control without any other complication, and there are diapers and other products available on the market to help owners and dogs cope with this issue.

### **BLINDNESS AND HEARING LOSS**

There are many conditions that can cause a Labrador to go blind or to become deaf. Most of these conditions can be treated or minimized with proper medical treatment. Some dogs will go blind or deaf as they age, and there is no specific treatment to prevent these conditions. Dogs can still lead a normal life even without sight or hearing.

Keep the environment the same, particularly with blindness. Keep the dog on a leash or in a fenced yard at all times, as they will be unaware of dangers such as cars or other aggressive dogs. Your dog will rely on his or her sense

of smell so make an effort to leave a worn item with the dog when you leave the house or the room.

Sudden blindness or hearing loss may be due to toxicity in the dogs system. Any sudden loss should be investigated by a veterinarian, through a check-up and blood tests if necessary.

## **CHANGES IN WEIGHT OR APPETITE**

Senior Labradors will often require a special diet. They may have digestive problems that cause mal-absorption of nutrients from certain kinds of food. Talk to your vet or breeder about the best type of food for senior dogs. Watch for any signs of bleeding of the gums or foul smelling breath, as this can signal dental or digestive issues. Dogs that have a history of digestive or dental problems in their early years often have the condition reoccur in their senior years.

## **MEMORY OR COGNITIVE LOSS**

You may notice that your senior Labrador does not seem to remember some commands that haven't been used for a while. This is normal, and spending some additional time to re-train using positive reinforcement can be rewarding for both you and your dog. The dog may also have difficulty hearing commands, so be aware of this issue.

Staying as positive with your dog as possible is critical. Avoid any kind of punishment as it really is not the dog's fault if they don't respond because they have cognitive loss. Keep commands to the basics; sit, come, and stay. Remember if the dog has arthritis it is painful to sit and stand repeatedly, so don't ask for a lot of this type of activity.

There are several ways to make your Labrador's senior years rewarding for you both. Avoid trying to keep your dog doing the same activities that he or she did as a puppy and an adult dog, rather try looking for appropriate activities for a senior dog.

## **EXERCISE**

Remember that a senior Labrador may not realize his or her limitations, and will often try to complete the same activities that it did as a much younger dog. Do not put your pet in this situation. If your dog is having difficulty with movement and exercise, keep the walks short and frequent, rather than long and infrequent.

Avoid overexerting the dog with games of fetch and Frisbee, rather try rolling the ball a short way for the dog to retrieve. Many dogs will stay playful long into their senior years, and others may not want to play. This is dependent on the personality of the dog, so respect their changes in temperament with regards to play.

Avoid jogging with a senior Labrador unless you gradually condition the dog to this activity. Even with conditioning, pay close attention to any changes in breathing or any changes in gait when the dog is exercising.

## **FOOD AND WATER AND BEDDING**

Keep high quality food and fresh clean water in easily accessible areas for your senior Labrador. They may have difficulty in getting around the house, so keep one room with all the basic necessities in it for the dog.

Many pet stores now sell extra thick dog beds for senior dogs, to provide extra warmth and padding. Be careful to make sure the bed and food area is at ground level, so the dog does not have to jump or step up if this is difficult.

## **JUMPING UP**

Many dog owners allow their pets to sleep and sit on the couch or bed. Be aware that as dogs get older, this becomes more and more difficult. There are commercially available ramps and steps that can be easily moved to the couch or bed for the dog to walk up, if you wish. This prevents the need for jumping up, which can be dangerous if the dog falls.

If you don't have the steps or ramp, try to anticipate when your dog would want to sit with you, and simply pick them up and place them with you. In addition, remember that senior dogs will need assistance with getting on and off the furniture.

## **MANAGING INCONTINENCE**

Incontinence in dogs will occur to some degree in every dog when they age. Females that have been spayed in earlier years are more prone to incontinence than are neutered male or intact male or female Labradors. This is not directly related to the surgical aspects of spaying, rather it is due to a decrease in the estrogen production.

This decrease leads to loss of muscle tone in the bladder, which causes leakage. Mostly the leakage will occur with the dog is complete relaxed and lying down or asleep. Estrogen supplements and other medications can be used to decrease this problem. Once the dog starts on an estrogen supplement, a decrease in the leakage will be noticed almost immediately.

Check with your vet to make sure that the condition is not due to a bladder infection, or other disease of the urinary tract.

Older Labradors require just as much attention as younger dogs. They can lead happy and healthy lives with just a bit more care and attention than they received in their earlier years.

If you have small children it is important to monitor their interactions with a senior dog, as an older dog is usually more lethargic and less tolerant of children. Make sure you praise and pet your senior dog, and keep him or her as active as possible. Find activities that are more suitable to an older dog and enjoy spending time together.

# CONCLUSIONS

The Labrador is a wonderful breed. Labrador owners are taken by the unique character of these loyal breed which seems to be a big dog in a little dog's body. Their keen intelligence makes them a great companion, and Labrador owners value the personality and nature of this breed highly, and recommend them as a hardy and faithful companion.

Here are some FAQ asked by people with, or contemplating a Labrador.

## **LABRADOR FAQ**

***1. I have heard that Labs can be very hyper, is this something that is seen in the breed?***

Like any breed, there are some dogs that will be more active or hyper than others, and generally knowing the temperament of the dam and sire will really help in getting a dog that has the energy level you are looking for. Well exercised Labs that have lot of time to run and play are not known for being hyper in the house.

***2. Do you have to teach a Labrador how to swim?***

No, Labs will naturally start to swim when they are ready. Typically, puppies at about 6 months old (if not slightly before) will start to be attracted to water and will want to go in and start to swim. Some puppies may want to start getting in the water before this age, but they should be very closely supervised.

***3. What is the best method to teach my Lab to be a retriever?***

If you want your Lab to retrieve waterfowl as a hunting dog, the best possible option for training is to work with a trainer than has experience. Labs that are to be used in events and competitions are usually trained by professional trainers with specialized experience in working with bird dogs.

**4. Are there any bad habits I should be aware of when I am training my Lab on the lead?**

Labs tend to be somewhat challenging to learn to walk in the heel position, they want to pull ahead and roam. Avoid using a retractable lead with the dog until he or she is fully trained to heel on the leash. Retractable leashes are great for exercise, but are not effective in helping the dog to understand that he or she is to stay right with you while you are walking.

**5. Can I use my Labrador as a guard dog or watchdog?**

These are two different roles, with the watchdog barking to notify the owner or strangers and the guard dog actually protecting or guarding the house or property. A Lab, with its deep booming bark, is a great watchdog - but is typically not a guard dog by nature. Labs can be trained to guard, but it is not a natural behavior or instinct in the breed.

**6. At what age is a Lab considered mature?**

Labs, like some of the other large hunting dogs, mature a little slower than other breeds. Labs are funny, happy dogs that love to run and play, so they may seem to hold on to their puppy behaviors well into their adult years. Most Labs will be fully grown physically at one year to 18 months, but may not fully mature emotionally and socially until they are over two years old. This is an important consideration for training and eventing with these dogs.

**7. Does a Labrador typically interact well with a small breed or are they better with larger breeds?**

A well-socialized and well trained Lab will get along equally well with a small or large dog, provided they are both not intact males. Neutered males will generally get along well with any type of dog, and even make excellent companions for non-canine pets such as cats. As with any dog, they will do better with pets and other dogs they have been raised with from puppies.

**8. I have recently heard of a silver Lab, is that a recognized color?**

There are only three acceptable colors of Labs - black, chocolate and yellow. Golden is a variation of yellow, as is the very pale almost cream colored labs. Silver Labs are likely crossed with a Weimaraner, or are a very poor or diluted color variation on a chocolate lab. These unusual colors are not recognized by the kennel clubs, and would be disqualified from competitions through the various kennel clubs.

**9. *My yellow Lab seems to have a different colored nose in the winter, is that normal?***

Many breeds of dogs have noses that seem to change color either slightly or fairly significantly through the year. It is not uncommon for yellow Labs to have a dark nose in the summer months, and then gradually fade to a lighter pinkish tinged nose in the winter. This is not a disease or genetic problem, it is just a natural pigment change. The exact reason for this change is unknown, but other dogs such as the northern sled dogs may also experience this nose pigment change.

**10. *What is an English Labrador?***

The English Labrador and the American Labrador are very similar in behavior and instinct, but the English Labrador is heavier and larger in frame than the American. The English Lab also tends to be somewhat more reserved, and calmer in temperament than the American Lab. Coloration is the same between the two types.

**11. *Can I use my Labrador in an obedience event?***

Labs are not typically seen a great deal in obedience but they can be excellent competition dogs with the right training and practice. They do excel in hunting and retrieving, in agility training and in field trials.

# SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR LABRADORS

## **UNITED STATES**

- [http://www.akc.org/breeds/labrador\\_retriever/index.cfm](http://www.akc.org/breeds/labrador_retriever/index.cfm)
- <http://www.labradorrescue.net/>
- <http://www.dogbreedinfo.com/labrador.htm>
- <http://www.ashlandkennel.com/>
- <http://www.hartzer.com/>
- <http://www.justlabradors.com/>

## **CANADA**

- <http://www.canadasguidetodogs.com/retrieverlab.htm>
- <http://www.copperstonelabs.com/>
- <http://www.wiscoy.com/grst.html>
- <http://www.nt.net/~samphire/>
- <http://www.labrador-canada.com/>

## **AUSTRALIA**

- <http://labradors.ontheinternet.com.au/>
- <http://www.labrador-retrievers.com.au/>
- <http://www.dogclub.co.uk/dogs/rowprofile-labr.php>
- <http://www.dogresources.com/labs/#Australia>
- <http://www.cranlamila-labradors.com.au/>

## **UNITED KINGDOM**

- [http://www.champdogs.co.uk/guided/all\\_labrador-retriever\\_breeders.html](http://www.champdogs.co.uk/guided/all_labrador-retriever_breeders.html)
- <http://www.helpalabrador.co.uk/>
- <http://www.dogclub.co.uk/dogs/profile-labr.php>
- <http://www.welrc.org.uk/>
- <http://www.labradorforums.co.uk/>

## **GENERAL DOG SITES**

- <http://www.dogchannel.com/>
- <http://lookd.com/dogs/>
- <http://www.thepetcenter.com/>
- <http://www.dogbreedz.com/>
- <http://www.doggy411.com/>
- <http://dogplay.com/youth.html>
- <http://www.petnet.com.au/dogs/dogbreedindex.html>
- <http://dogs.about.com/>
- <http://www.dogaware.com/>
- <http://www.my-dog.info/>
- <http://www.i-love-dogs.com/dog-breeds/>
- <http://www.guideofdogs.com/>
- <http://www.geocities.com/~olelo/shelties/emergencydoglinks.html>

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Sharda Baker

[www.labrador-secrets.com](http://www.labrador-secrets.com)

Contact us at;

<http://www.asksharda.com/support>

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