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Puppy Development From 8 to 12 Weeks

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Most [puppies](#) join their new homes from 8 to 12 weeks of age, leaving their mothers, littermates, and [infancy](#) behind. Many people get a puppy at this age—the imprinting stage. This is a time of rapid brain [development](#) when the dog is impressionable and ideal for training. The puppy is learning to be a dog. And, the dog is picking up its good and bad behavior tendencies from their experiences and environment during this critical learning period. Take a look at a pup's physical and behavioral milestones as well as health and nutrition needs during this vital puppy stage.

Physical Development

supervision and [crating](#) when alone.^[1]

Expect your young puppy to sleep a lot during this stage. Most puppies will sleep about 18 to 20 hours a day to support their fast-growing brains and bodies. Puppies from 8 to 12 weeks old may seem to go from zero to 60 out of nowhere, then suddenly pass out to nap within minutes of being in overdrive.

Before 12 weeks of age, most puppies will have trouble controlling their urination and defecation. They are prone to frequent accidents and cannot usually make it through the night without urinating. [House training](#) should begin as soon as you bring your new puppy home, but be prepared for the first few weeks to go slowly. Stick to a regular schedule, taking your puppy outside every time it eats, drinks, or wakes up from a nap. Take your puppy to a designated "potty spot." After a few weeks, it will learn to have better control over its bodily functions.

Your puppy won't begin to get adult teeth until about 16 weeks of age. Some of its baby teeth or "milk teeth" may start falling out between 8 to 12 weeks of age. Signs of teething typically won't start until 12 weeks old. You know your dog is teething when you begin to notice excessive drooling, excessive chewing, pawing at the mouth, and bloody residue left behind on chewed items.

Behavior Changes

The time from 3 weeks to 12 weeks is a critical [socialization](#) period.^[1] This time is often called a "fear stage" as puppies may seem to be afraid of everything.

Practice [handling your puppy](#) so it can get used to being held and touched in unfamiliar ways.

environments. Introduce your puppy to vet visits, nail trims, and baths and try keeping everything positive.

Reward your puppy for relaxing in new situations and exploring new things. However, don't push your puppy to accept a situation that scares it. It will eventually learn that there is nothing to worry about if you remain calm and upbeat. Act as if the situation is regular and routine.

Health and Care

Between 6 and 8 weeks of age, your puppy will need to visit the veterinarian for its first [puppy vaccines](#), deworming, and an examination.^[2] The breeder or adoption group might have administered its first vaccines and deworming and taken the puppy to the vet. Regardless, you should take your new puppy to your veterinarian within a few days of getting it to make sure it is in good health. Bring any records provided by the breeder or adoption group so your vet can adjust or prescribe a vaccination schedule.

By 18 weeks of age, the puppy should have all its vaccinations. But until then, you need to prevent exposure to diseases. Do not allow your puppy to walk in public areas or interact with unfamiliar animals. Your puppy can play with healthy puppies and adult dogs that have been vaccinated and dewormed. Make sure you know the owner of the other dog and can trust that the dog is healthy.

Food and Nutrition

Puppies begin weaning off their mother's milk around 3 to 6 weeks of age and are typically fully weaned between 6 to 8 weeks. By the time you get your new puppy, it should already be eating puppy food for at least a few weeks. The breeder or adopter should provide you with information about the type of food it is eating.

Start with the same diet, if possible. Allow your new puppy to adjust to its environment for a few days or weeks before you [choose a new food](#). If you decide to [change the food](#), be sure to transition to the new food gradually to avoid gastrointestinal upset.

[times a day](#), spaced out somewhat evenly. This regularity in mealtime helps prevent blood sugar drops, especially in very small breeds.

Start by feeding the amount recommended on the packaging for your dog's weight. Check your dog's weight every few days to see if the feeding amount needs to be adjusted. If your puppy seems voracious and does not seem to be gaining weight, adjust by adding more food. Reduce the offering if it leaves a lot behind. At your veterinarian visits, discuss the type of food you are feeding, the frequency of feeding, and the amount you feed per day vs. the amount consumed. Ask your veterinarian if you need to make any diet adjustments.

If you wish to feed [homemade puppy food](#), you can, but you will need to do so very cautiously. Consult with your veterinarian about the recipe you plan to use. You will need to make sure it is a balanced, nutritious recipe, using the right ingredients, and you are feeding an adequate amount of calories.

Your puppy can have a variety of [treats](#) as long as they are safe, [non-toxic](#), healthy, and make up no more than about 10 percent of your puppy's daily caloric intake.

Training

Even though your puppy is still a baby, it's essential to start [training](#) as soon as it comes home with you.^[1] Start simple. Teach your puppy its name. You should give the dog a couple of days to get used to the house rules like where it can go and forbidden zones in the house.

Let it get used to the feeling of a collar before adding a [leash](#). Then, you can start letting the dog drag the leash around, so it understands the feel of it. As soon as the dog seems comfortable with it, you can start training it to [walk on the leash](#).

Although this is a rapid learning period, your puppy may not be the fastest learner at first since there are many "firsts," new scents, places, and people all starting to come into focus. You can even begin to introduce some [basic commands](#) like sit, stay, and down. Go slow, be patient, keep it positive, and have fun.