



Puppy information and health plan

Bringing a new puppy home is an exciting time and the start of a new adventure for both you and your pup. Your life will change when the pitter - patter of tiny paws are heard and suddenly you will be responsible for all aspects of the care of a living, breathing animal. We've put together this pack to give you some guidance and help with questions you may have.

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Vaccinations

It is vital that your puppy is kept up to date with vaccinations to protect against the following infectious diseases:

Canine Distemper

Canine Parvovirus

Infectious Canine Hepatitis

Leptospirosis

At 8 weeks old your puppy can have his or her first vaccination and health check with the vet. Further vaccinations are given at 10 and 12 weeks. From the day that you bring your puppy home he or she can be taken out into your garden if it is enclosed and out-of-bounds to unvaccinated dogs. As long as your puppy is given the vaccinations as described above, he or she can start to go outside on a lead in public areas from 11 weeks of age. We recommend that off-lead exploring and access to ditches and water is avoided until your pup is at least 13 weeks of age.

Your dog should then receive booster injections on an annual basis.

Once your puppy has completed the primary course of vaccinations you will be given a certificate of vaccination. You may need to present this certificate to boarding kennels, dog walkers and puppy/dog training classes before they can accept your dog.

Kennel cough

It is also possible to vaccinate your dog against kennel cough. The vaccine is administered by squirting a few drops up the dog's nose. This can be done at the same time as the routine vaccine or booster.

Kennel cough is caused by the Parainfluenza virus and Bordetella bacterium. Kennel cough is only rarely life threatening but it is an uncomfortable and distressing illness for dogs to have as it causes a very severe cough. Traditionally, kennel cough vaccination was only recommended for dogs going into kennels but as the disease is passed between dogs in many situations such as at the groomers, training classes, doggy day care, dog walking groups and in the parks it has become very common in the local dog population. We now recommend that the vaccination is provided to all dogs that participate in the above activities and socialize with other dogs.

The kennel cough vaccine requires annual boosters to maintain immunity.

Other vaccinations

It is also possible to vaccinate your dog against rabies, if you are considering taking your dog abroad. Please ask the Acorn House team if you require further information about the PETS Travel Scheme.

Worming

Almost all puppies are infected with roundworms as these are passed on from mother to puppy. We recommend worming every month until 6 months of age.

Following this, you will need to decide upon a permanent worming strategy for your dog. Your veterinary surgeon will discuss your dog's health and lifestyle with you and help you decide on an appropriate longer term worming regime for your dog.

Roundworm eggs are very prevalent in soil and because they are microscopic and sticky they are easily carried into the house on your shoes or your pet's fur. When your dog licks himself he swallows these eggs and becomes infected with roundworms. One type of roundworm, *Toxocara*, can spread from animals to people and is very occasionally responsible for health problems in people, including blindness.

Dogs catch tapeworms either by eating fleas (fleas often contain tapeworm eggs) or by eating mice/ birds/ raw meat/ faeces.

The dog lungworm is transmitted via slugs and snails so the dogs at greatest risk are those that live outdoors or chew, play with and eat grass, outdoor toys and sticks as they may accidentally ingest a slug at the same time. Some owners report that their dog appears to enjoy deliberately seeking out and eating snails and slugs!

We are happy to discuss your dog's individual situation with you, explain the different products available, and help you decide on a worming regime.

Flea treatment

Fleas commonly cause itchiness and annoyance to dogs (and can also bite people!). Some dogs become allergic to flea bites and this can lead to very severe skin damage even if only one or two fleas are present. It is quite unusual to find live fleas on your pet as they will often be removed when the dog grooms himself. However, it is common to find flea dirt in the coat of a dog with fleas - these are tiny, dark, crumbly particles that may fall out of your dog's coat as you brush it. The adult fleas are just the tip of the iceberg and make up less than 5% of the flea population in your home. The eggs, larvae and pupae will be developing in the carpets, soft furnishings and between the floorboards! Fleas can hop a mile in an hour and you may bring them into the house on your shoes. A female flea can lay 40 eggs every day and once in your house, the larvae can live for up to 2 years.

Fleas are commonly caught from grass/vegetation, carpets/furniture and from other animals (cats, dogs, hedgehogs, rabbits).

We strongly believe that prevention is better than cure and recommend using flea control products every 1-2 months to prevent your dog ever picking up fleas and bringing them into the house. Again, a wide variety of products are available and we would be happy to help you select the most appropriate option for your dog.



Tick treatment

Ticks are usually found in grassland, scrubs, shrubs and low-hanging tree branches and will attach to your dog as they walk past.

You can check for ticks when grooming your dog, we can provide a tick removal device to remove them properly so the head is not left behind, we are happy to show you how to use this. We also recommend using a product which will kill ticks when they have attached, typically a tick needs to be attached for 24-48 hours to successfully transmit disease, we can provide protection for your dog which will kill the tick before it has a chance to transmit disease.

Ticks can transmit Lyme disease, in the last year Babesia has also been reported in the UK and this can be fatal.

Microchipping

From April 2016 legislation changes mean that all dogs living in the UK must be microchipped. A microchip is a tiny device (approximately the size of a grain of rice) that is injected under the skin at the back of your dog's neck.

If your dog goes missing and is taken to a veterinary surgery, police station, dog warden or rehoming kennels, staff will scan your dog and read the unique microchip code. This identifies your dog on a central database so that you can be contacted and your pet returned.

The microchip is also an essential part of the PETS Travel Scheme for dogs travelling abroad.

Teeth

Dog's teeth accumulate plaque and tartar and can become infected or loose just like people's teeth. To some extent it is possible to slow down the development of these problems by providing specially shaped chewy toys, crunchy biscuits or dental chews.

However, the best way to protect your dog's teeth is by brushing them every day. Not all dogs will tolerate this but if you start whilst they are young, many will accept and even look forward to it.

You can purchase special pet toothbrushes that fit over the end of your finger, or use a soft child's toothbrush. Human toothpastes are not suitable for dogs but you can buy non-foaming poultry or meat-flavoured toothpastes.

Any of the vets or nurses will be happy to demonstrate how to brush your dog's teeth. Please ask for further information, view our demonstration video on the website, or drop into the surgery to find the products and try yourself!



Insurance

Unfortunately dogs suffer from accidents and illness just like us and there is no NHS for animals, the cost of treatment has to be met by the animal's owner.

For example, if your dog was unlucky enough to have a collision with a car and need emergency treatment these costs can really add up and sometimes run into thousands of pounds. As your dog gets older, he or she may develop a chronic illness such as diabetes requiring medical care and treatment for the rest of his or her life.

We strongly recommend that pet owners take out insurance so that if your dog is unlucky enough to become unwell, we are able to offer the best possible care without you having to worry about how to pay for it!

There are lots of different companies offering pet insurance, so it is worth taking the time to research them.

Make sure that you read the small print carefully when deciding which policy to choose. Some insurance companies will cover any condition for the rest of the dog's life, whilst others will only pay out for the first twelve months of each condition.



Diet

Puppies are different from adult dogs, so their nutritional needs differ also. Any commercial puppy food labelled as “complete pet food for dogs” will be nutritionally balanced for your pup. It is extremely difficult to achieve the correct balance of calories, vitamins and minerals in a home cooked diet so we do not recommend that you attempt this. Raw meat can be a source of salmonella, e.coli and campylobacter infection and is not routinely recommended. If you do decide to feed a raw diet our vets and nurses will be happy to direct you towards the safest and most balanced options on the market.

Use the feeding guide on the label of your puppy food as a starting point and adjust the amount to maintain optimum body weight. Amounts may vary depending on age, size, activity level, environment and health. Puppies should be fed three or four times daily up until six months of age when two meals daily are appropriate.

Weigh your dog regularly and adjust the amount of food you are feeding as necessary. Our dog scales are available for you to use at any time that the surgery is open and no appointment is necessary to use them. Our reception staff will be happy to assist you and update your dog's weight record.

It is usually better not to feed your dog on titbits or table scraps but a controlled supply of safe treats will be very important for training and rewarding your puppy. If you do provide treats remember to reduce the amount of dog food given in the main meals to compensate!

Puppies can suffer from diarrhoea or colitis if they are suddenly changed from one diet to another. Find out from the breeder what your puppy was fed with and either continue with this diet or change it very gradually over a week or so.



Neutering - female dogs

A bitch will normally come into season every six months and each season will last approximately three weeks.

She will usually have her first season between the ages of six and twelve months, although there are some exceptions.

Most dogs will show 7-10 days of light bleeding or "spotting" at the start of the season and the vulva usually becomes red and swollen. During this time the bitch will be attractive to male dogs, but usually she will not show much interest in the male.

When the bleeding stops, the female is at her most fertile, and will accept a male. This period can last between five and nine days. It is important to keep the bitch under close control and supervision for the full three weeks duration of the season to avoid unwanted mating.

We advise that all bitches should be spayed if you do not wish to breed from them.

The advantages of spaying are:

- No unwanted pregnancies and none of the inconvenience of managing a dog in season twice a year
- Much reduced risk of mammary cancer developing in later life if a bitch is spayed as a young dog
- Many bitches develop a "false pregnancy" after each season if they are not mated, producing milk and nesting as if they are going to have pups. Spaying prevents this occurring.
- Entire (unspayed) bitches are at considerable risk of developing infection in the womb (pyometra). This is a life threatening condition requiring emergency surgery to save the bitch.

The disadvantages of spaying are:

- Possible weight gain - the changes in hormonal balance after spaying can make the bitch more likely to gain weight.
- A few older bitches may leak a little urine when lying down. This is due to a weakness in the muscles of the neck of the bladder and can usually be solved by regular administration of a tablet or drops in the food.

Taking all of these factors into account, on balance the health of your bitch will be better if she is spayed.

The spay operation involves removing the ovaries and womb under a general anaesthetic. The advice regarding timing of the spay varies with the breed of dog so we recommend that you call to discuss this with one of our vets and we can advise you according to your individual situation. If your dog has already had a season we advise that the operation is carried out approximately 4 months from the start of the season - this ensures that the operation is carried out at a time when the reproductive system is inactive, making the procedure more straightforward. Most bitches go home the same evening as the surgery, but the practice has staff and facilities for overnight monitoring if this is necessary. Acorn House is also able to offer laparoscopic (keyhole) spay surgery - please ask at Reception for further details.

Neutering – male dogs

Male dogs can enter puberty between 5 and 10 months of age, depending on breed. We do not recommend routine castration of all male dogs, preferring to make a decision regarding castration based on each individual dog's situation.

THE BENEFITS OF CASTRATION ARE:

- Dogs are much less interested in bitches in season. Therefore castration will reduce escaping and chasing after bitches in season.
- Castration reduces mating behaviour and desires so can be helpful for those dogs that demonstrate mating behaviour on their owner's legs or furniture!
- In some cases castration can make a dog less easily distracted and therefore easier to train. In some cases castration may help to reduce aggression towards other dogs. However, no behavioural changes can be guaranteed and castration will certainly not make a naughty dog into a well behaved dog - only careful training and management will achieve this!
- Castration is an essential part of the treatment plan for dogs that are urine marking inside the house

THE DISADVANTAGES OF CASTRATION ARE:

- Possible weight gain - this can be avoided by altering the food ration.
- The general anaesthetic - as with all operations this involves a small risk
- For dogs with fear-related behaviour problems, castration is liable to make the problem worse
- There has been an association between early castration (before puberty) and some musculoskeletal and internal problems in large breed dogs

Our general policy is to wait and see how a dog gets on after reaching sexual maturity. If you wish to have your dog castrated, we will be happy to perform the operation. Please ask one of the vets if you would like to discuss your dog's individual case and alternative options.

Training

Puppies are very accepting and adaptable!

The best period to introduce them to new situations, animals and people is between 7 and 13 weeks. Waiting for your puppy to be fully vaccinated will limit what you can do during this time, however providing that you carry your puppy when outside it will still be safe to get him or her used to traffic noise, car journeys, etc.

Invite visitors to the house to play with your puppy, particularly those with children if there are no children at home. Small or medium-sized friendly dogs can mix with your puppy as long as they are fully vaccinated themselves.

Once your puppy is fully vaccinated he or she can be enrolled at a local training class. These classes will help you to train your puppy and are also good for puppies to get used to mixing with other dogs in a controlled environment.

Pre-visit advice for pets visiting Acorn House Veterinary Hospital

Making an appointment

Appointments can be made using the online booking system or by telephoning Reception. Clients are free to select an appointment with any of the veterinary surgeons with consultations slots at the time that is convenient to the client. However, wherever possible it is recommended that clients make appointments with one particular vet to allow for case continuity and rapport building between the patient, client and vet.

In an emergency please do not use the online booking system but telephone the practice directly instead, so that an urgent appointment can be made.

Travelling to the hospital

Some dogs live close enough to walk to the veterinary practice. This should be avoided in uncomfortable weather conditions (particularly in very hot weather) and for pets that are unwell. If your pet is attending the practice for sedation or surgery, it is not appropriate for them to walk home afterwards unless you live extremely close to the practice (within 200 yards).

Cats and small pets should travel to the practice in a safe and secure carrier. This should be large enough for the pet to turn around inside. Pets should be transported in individual carriers rather than sharing (newborn litters of puppies and kittens are an exception to this). Carriers should be well-ventilated but primarily opaque so that the inhabitants are not "on display". A blanket can be draped over the carrier to assist with this.

Carriers may also be appropriate for small dogs. Carriers should be fixed in the car using a seatbelt and dogs that are not in carriers should be restrained using a seatbelt or harness. If dogs travel in the boot of the car be aware that a travel guard provides protection for the human occupants of the car from the dog in the event of an accident, but not for the dogs themselves.

Arriving early to allow for a short walk before the vet appointment may help dogs that become distressed or over-excited during a car journey. If possible, try to teach your dog to be comfortable with car travel well in advance of the vet visit by providing treats in the car, spending time in the car without driving anywhere, and using the car to visit different walking spots as well as for vet visits. Having a passenger available to sit with and attend to the dog so that the driver can concentrate on driving is also a good idea.

Arriving at the hospital

Clients should "check in" at the reception desk. The practice has separate waiting areas for dogs, cats and small mammals and these are clearly marked. Please be mindful that some dogs visiting the practice are unwell and may not feel like interacting with unfamiliar people and animals! Many dogs will find it over-exciting or stressful to try to wait patiently in the waiting room so please know that alternative options include waiting in the gazebo outside or in the car (the Reception team will take your mobile number so that the vet can call you when it is time for the appointment to start). The vet can also arrange for dogs to enter through the side door if necessary.

Information

At the start of the appointment the vet will talk to you about any problems you have noticed with your pet and their general health and routines. It will be very helpful if you are able to bring information regarding your pet's usual diet, any medicines they are taking, the symptoms that you have noticed, and any vaccination or other documents for pets that are new to the practice. This is particularly important if another person is bringing your pet to the appointment on your behalf.

Examination

The vet is likely to start the consultation with a discussion and then move onto examining your pet. Sometimes examination is "hands off" (watching the way a pet moves around the consulting room or in the car park, for example). Often it is necessary for the vet to handle the pet to examine problem areas or listen to the heart, for example. The practice provides a variety of food rewards to offer pets during the appointment, which it is hoped will build a positive association with the practice. If your pet has a favourite treat or a special diet, please feel free to bring this with you for the vet to use instead. Pets that are attending for surgery, sedation or digestive problems should not be offered food during the consultation.

Pets that are fearful of the veterinary practice

It is hoped that pets will learn to associate the veterinary practice with friendly staff, gentle handling and plenty of treats. However, we understand that the practice can be an overwhelming place for some patients. Please speak to your vet about your pet's particular circumstances.

Sometimes "hands off" observations and a detailed conversation about the problem can avoid a stressful examination for nervous pets. Other times, performing the consultation in the practice garden, or using anti-anxiety medicine before an appointment can help. In other situations sedation may be the most sensible option, rather than physically restraining a nervous dog or cat.

Any pet can react defensively if they are in pain or afraid. It is a great idea to purchase a well-fitting basket muzzle for your dog and gradually train them to wear it happily for short periods during home training sessions. A specific muzzle training information sheet is available on the practice website and muzzles are available for purchase in the waiting room. Teaching this skill should mean that your dog could be handled safely and without any additional stress if they were unlucky enough to suffer an accident or emergency in the future.

Dogs are more likely to feel comfortable at the veterinary practice if they are able to spend some time relaxing at the practice when they are fit and well, without any stressful examinations or procedures being carried out. We recommend that puppies attend the Canine Hub puppy classes, which are held in the practice waiting room at the end of the day, or that adult dogs attend "happy visits" to the practice at quiet times of day. Please ask at Reception for details.

Kennels

It may become necessary for your dog to stay at a boarding kennels at some point. Local kennels are listed online or we have a folder of places in our reception area. Kennels will require that your dog's booster vaccinations are kept up to date.

We recommend that you visit the kennels and speak to the owner/manager before booking your dog in.

Check list:

- The sizes of the kennels and runs
- Type of sleeping area
- The frequency and what type of exercise provided
- Feeding arrangements
- Check what the arrangements would be if your pet became ill whilst in the kennels
- Does the kennel have insurance to cover the vet bills or would you be liable?
- Would the kennel bring the animal to the veterinary surgery or would you have to pay for a veterinary visit out to the kennels?
- Is the kennel willing and able to administer any medication that your dog may require?
- Do the kennels require a separate kennel cough vaccine before they will accept your animal?



Emergencies

In the event of an emergency you will either be seen by a member of our team, or by a member from our partner practice at the Queen Mother Hospital for Animals. We are proud to offer this unique service to our registered clients which offers the following benefits for your pet in an emergency.

- During opening hours (**8am -8pm Mon-Fri and 8am-4:30pm Sat**): A member of our client care team will offer you an appropriate appointment at the usual Acorn House premises in Bedford.
- During closed hours before 11pm (**8pm to 11pm Mon-Fri; 4:30-11pm Sat and 8am-11pm Sun**): Emergency service at the usual Acorn House premises in Bedford (please telephone before setting off).
- During closed hours after 11pm (**11pm-8am Mon-Sun**): Emergency service at the Queen Mother Hospital for Animals, Royal Veterinary College, Hawkshead Lane, North Mymms, Hatfield AL9 7TA (please telephone before setting off).

In case of an emergency at any time of day please telephone 01234 261839 and your call will be diverted to the relevant team.

Patients staying in the hospital at Acorn House will receive 24-hour hospital care on site from our own team of vets and nurses.

Further information regarding the emergency service provided by the Royal Veterinary College at the Queen Mother Hospital is available at the following link:

[Out-of-hours veterinary emergencies \(rvc.ac.uk\)](http://rvc.ac.uk/out-of-hours-veterinary-emergencies)