

## HOUSE TRAINING AN ADULT DOG

By Barbara Bennett

The basics of house training are the same for an adult dog as they are for puppies. The good news is that an adult dog will catch on more quickly and will generally need to eliminate less frequently than a puppy.

If you have an adult dog who has been house trained in the past but seems to have “forgotten” and is soiling the house, the first thing to do is make an appointment with your veterinarian. There are many illnesses whose symptoms include inappropriate elimination such as spay incontinence, urinary tract infection, diabetes and Cushing’s disease.

When a new dog comes into your home the best plan is to assume that he is not house trained and create a routine to help him succeed. Even if you have been told that he is house trained, in the excitement of a new house and people he may make a mistake. So, when your new dog arrives limit his freedom in the house and stick to a plan to help him succeed.

### **Make a schedule.**

An adult dog needs to go out first thing in the morning and then begin to offer time outside every one or two hours. Nervous or excited dogs will pant more, drink more, and urinate more frequently. Use the same door to exit and go to the same area in the yard to jog his memory as to why you are there. I like to use a word “outside!” when taking a dog out.

It is helpful to write down a timeline of “potty activity” especially if there will be more than one helper taking the dog out.

Feed twice a day at the same time of day. Feed the second meal early in the evening because after your dog eats he will take a big drink of water. This will allow plenty of time to eliminate before you retire. Any food left after about 20 minutes should be picked up. Free feeding will only blur the schedule. Dogs normally have a more active metabolism in the morning and late afternoon. Those are the times to be especially vigilant for his signs that he needs to have a bowel movement. Also, give him time to eliminate after a ride in the car.

### **Confine him when you must leave.**

Confinement should be an area that is small enough that he will not want to mess there such as a crate or small laundry room. Put his bedding there and feed him there. To help him feel good about this area, spend some time there with him so that he does not associate it only with your leaving. Too much freedom too soon will set him up for failure. It is better to let him earn his freedom slowly because it is more difficult to take away freedom than to give it.

### **Supervise him while in the house.**

Use baby gates to keep him in the room with you or you may want to leash him to you. It is very important that he not be able to wander out of sight. Some houses have rooms that are seldom used. If the dog is allowed to wander there unsupervised he may feel that he is far enough away from the living areas to make a deposit. Close doors to rooms that are seldom used to set him up for success.

### **Go outside with him when he eliminates.**

You must go outside with him to praise and treat as soon as he finishes eliminating (not during) and I mean act like he just had the most brilliant and beautiful poop EVER seen by mankind. Giving a treat marks the occasion as very special and will encourage him to repeat the performance.

If you are certain that he needs to eliminate but he just stands there and looks at you, cross your arms and look away. Staring at him will make him less likely to stick to the business at hand and will encourage him to want to interact with you.

### **Give me a sign**

Some dogs are very overt in their request to go out while others are more subtle. With a new dog this is one of those things you have to learn about each other. If it is around the time he should need to eliminate and he even glances at THE door, take him out. Other signs are circling, sniffing the ground, stopping when he was doing, and looking distracted.

### **Never punish.**

Punishing him will only encourage him to hide from you to eliminate. If you find a mistake after the fact just clean it up and vow to be more watchful in the future. If you see him in the act, make a noise to interrupt him and immediately take him outside. Give him time to refocus on the job then praise when he eliminates.

If you find a mistake made hours ago (of course, that is impossible since he will never be out of your sight) RESIST the urge to grumble at him. That look on his face is not guilt, it is an appeasement gesture brought on by your negative body language. So remove the dog and clean up. Then roll up a newspaper and hit yourself over the head with it!

### **Clean up**

Use a cleaning product that does NOT have ammonia in it. Ammonia smells like urine and will draw the dog back to that spot. Once the stain is gone, use an odor eliminator on the area. This is a product that has enzymes that break up the odor molecules. Without the odor eliminator your dog will recognize this spot as an acceptable place to potty.

### **How long will this take?**

It depends. Some dogs will catch on faster than others. The dog's prior experience will play a large roll in the progress. If the dog was raised in filthy conditions and forced to eliminate in his crate he may have lost his need to stay clean. These dogs can be difficult to train and will need a lot of patience. Start them in a very small crate and give frequent outings and lots of praise. You may need to adjust the type of bedding until you discover what works.

The good news is most dogs do have a sense of clean and dirty. Your consistency and positive attitude are the key to success.

An excellent resource is "Way To Go! How to Housetrain a Dog of Any Age" by Karen London and Patricia McConnell. You may find it at [www.patriciamcconnell.com](http://www.patriciamcconnell.com)

### **A word about "marking"**

Marking is not a house training issue. It is the act of depositing urine or sometimes feces to mark territory. The offenders are usually males and it is usually a small amount of urine placed on a vertical surface.

When a dog is nervous, feeling threatened or insecure he may mark his territory. Intact males are also more apt to mark.

The solution is to figure out what is causing the dog to want to mark and eliminate that stress. Some of our foster homes have found that leashing to dog to keep him close to you is very helpful. Also, you can purchase a "belly wrap" or male diaper if needed.

There is a "look" to a dog right before he marks. He will line his body along the vertical surface, sniff, shift his rear legs then lift his leg. The best thing to do is to interrupt that sequence with a sharp sound like "ACH!" or "NO!", snap the leash and lead him outside. No other punishment is necessary. Remember he is marking because of some stress, punishment will only make it worse.

Clean up of the urine and the smell is very important. A dog will re mark an area that is not cleaned properly.

I once met a friend's new dog, a lovely playful young Labrador. As I was making a big deal out of this dog and playing with him, my older dog watched in obvious disgust. He then walked over and "marked" ME!

If you have any questions, please email MAESSR at [springerrescue@yahoo.com](mailto:springerrescue@yahoo.com).