

10 Ways You Can Help Your Dog Live Longer



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Science says owning a dog actually can [add years](#) to our lives. So that means we should return the favor to our dogs, right? Sadly our canine friends can't live forever, but we can work to make their lives as long and [healthy](#) as possible. Here are 10 ways to help your dog live longer.

1. Dog-proof your house

No matter whether you're bringing home a young puppy or a senior canine, you must dog-proof your house. "Examine every inch of the place you call home with one question in mind: How many ways can my puppy kill himself here?" the [American Kennel Club](#) says. "Anything that dangles, sparks, topples, or can be chewed poses a danger."

Carefully observe a new dog — especially as it becomes more comfortable in your home — to see what kind of trouble it might be prone to get into. (And don't assume a dog you've had for years

won't ever misbehave.) Make sure [poisonous plants](#) and [toxic foods](#) are out of reach. Secure doors, windows, fences, etc. for those doggie escape artists. And provide your dog with plenty of items to play with and safely chew, so it's less likely to touch something it's not supposed to.

2. Teach lifesaving commands



Maybe your dog never excelled in obedience school, but there are a few commands you should work on that could save its life. The AKC recommends making the extra effort to teach your dog “come, leave it, and an automatic sit or down.”

The “come” command could prevent your dog from running away if it ever gets loose. The “sit” or “lie down” might keep your dog safe if it's ever in a dangerous situation, such as too close to traffic, until you can get it under your control. And “leave it” could prevent your dog from eating something it's not supposed to. Plus, any dog who responds to commands is less likely to attack someone or become a community nuisance, which unfortunately is sometimes a life-threatening situation itself.

3. Take care of its teeth

It's not always easy to take care of a dog's teeth, but it's essential for your pet to live a long, healthy life. “A build-up of oral bacteria can ultimately lead to all sorts of health problems for your pet, including heart valve problems and infections within the kidneys,” according to [PetMD](#).

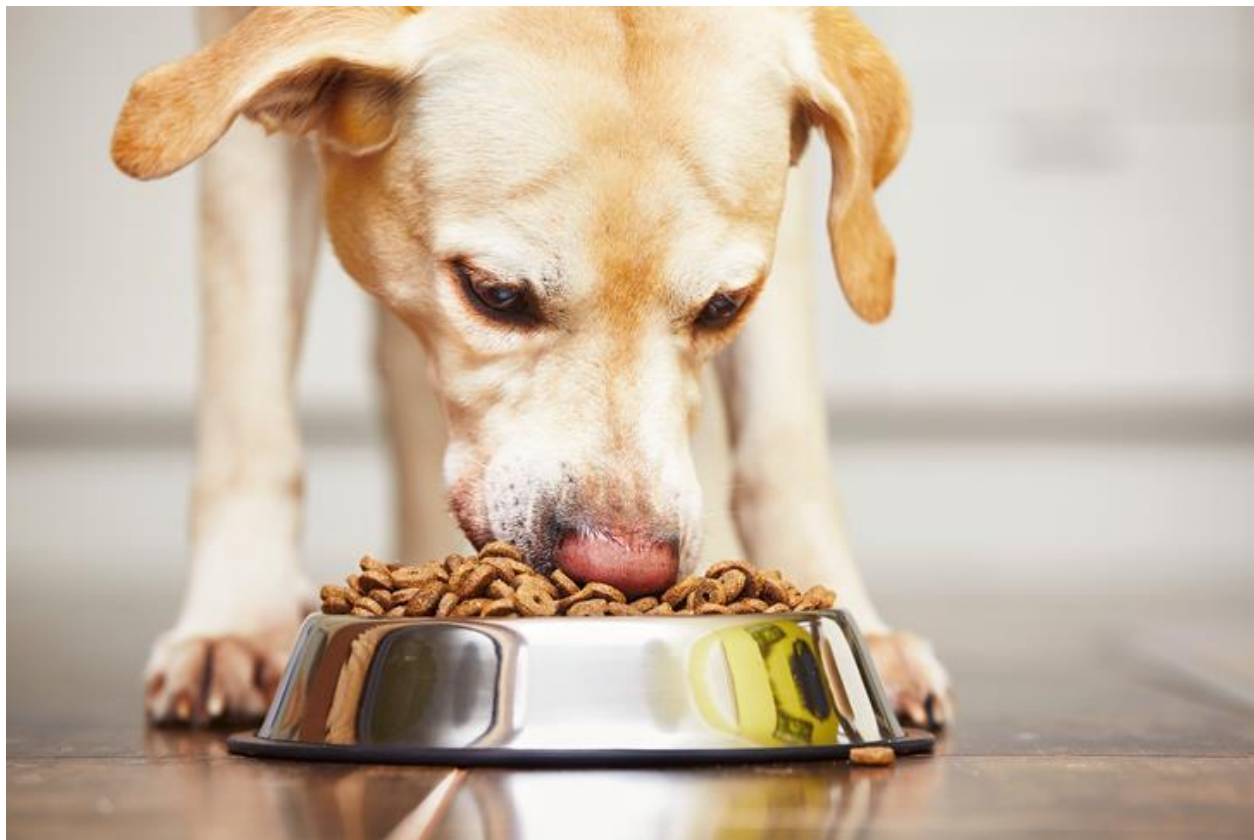
It's ideal to brush your dog's teeth as often as possible — even if you only can do a little bit at a time. Plus, talk to your veterinarian about chew toys and bones that help with oral hygiene, as well as whether you should schedule a professional cleaning. After all, nothing beats a happy and healthy smile from your pup.

4. Be your dog's voice

Your dog depends on you to be its voice out in the world (or the non-barking world at least). And there are several times where you'll have to intervene to do what's best for your pet. As the AKC puts it: "Be rude."

If a stranger wants to hug and kiss your dog, the answer likely should be no to protect your pet from undue [stress](#). Don't allow anyone to feed your dog something without your approval first. And refuse requests from strangers for their dog to "meet" yours — which so often happens on dog walks and at the vet. While it's highly important to socialize dogs, it should be in a controlled setting and not on someone else's whim.

5. Know canine nutrition



It probably goes without saying that you should keep your dog at a healthy weight. But you also must do your research to learn exactly what's in your dog's food — and whether its diet might be lacking in some way. "Don't just read labels and recipes, read your dog," the AKC recommends.

“Dull hair, unpleasant odors, and stomach problems may mean that the food doesn’t agree with him. If that’s the case, change the menu.”

Furthermore, ask your vet what your dog’s optimal weight should be. “Your veterinarian can also teach you to assess your pet’s body condition by observing your pet’s body shape and feeling certain parts of your pet’s body,” according to the [American Veterinary Medical Association](#). “A healthy weight isn’t simply a number on a scale; it’s about healthy body composition.” Commit to feeding your dog nutritious meals, and pay attention to any pet food recalls to make sure you’re not giving it anything dangerous.

6. Exercise daily

A healthy diet and exercise is the magic life-extending formula for both humans and dogs alike. Even if you have a yard your dog can play in, walking is a great way for both you and your pet to get in shape. “Not only is it physical activity, but it’s mental stimulation for your dog to smell, see and hear beyond the limits of your yard,” the [AVMA](#) says.

Just be sure you know your dog’s limits. “It’s best to make sure that your pet is healthy enough to begin an exercise program and that the program is tailored to fit your pet’s health needs,” according to the AVMA. Train your dog to safely walk on a leash. Avoid extreme weather. And watch your pet for signs of injuries or overexertion, especially in breeds that tend to have trouble breathing. As long as you’re smart about it, you’ll be enjoying those dog walks for years to come.

7. Learn animal first aid



If a medical emergency were to arise in your dog, would you know how to deal with it? “Accidents happen and knowing how to perform the Heimlich maneuver on a dog or how to tie a tourniquet can mean the difference between life and death,” the AKC says.

Have your vet recommend pet first-aid classes or other resources, and create a first-aid kit with dog-safe items. Plus, if your vet doesn’t offer emergency services, have them recommend a 24-hour clinic — and keep that number handy. Hopefully you’ll never need to act on your pet emergency plan, but it’s always better to have one in place.

8. Prepare for financial emergencies

Don’t let a medical emergency with your dog also become a financial emergency. Vet visits aren’t cheap, and you never want to be in a situation where you can’t provide the best care possible for your pet due to finances.

From the moment you become a dog owner, it’s ideal to create a financial plan to fund pet expenses. Consider purchasing pet insurance, which could end up paying for itself if medical issues arise. Or open a special savings account specifically for your pet that you contribute to each month. Whatever financial planning you choose, that extra cash could make all the difference in your dog’s life.

9. Watch out for toxins

There are lots of hazards out there that can shorten a dog’s life, and it’s up to you to shield your pet from them. Keep toxins — including certain cleaning products, foods, plants and even cigarette smoke — away from your dog. And pay attention to what your dog gets into [outside](#), as well. Lawn chemicals, certain outdoor plants and even mulch can be deadly for your pet. Educate yourself on these hazards because sometimes even a small bite of a toxin can have serious consequences.

10. Keep up with health care



Of course, a key factor in a long, healthy life is providing your dog with quality health care. The AVMA recommends taking your dog to the vet at least once per year for a checkup, as well as vaccinating your pet against potentially deadly diseases and using parasite preventatives. And don't wait to get to a vet if your dog is showing signs of injury or illness — or it's just acting a bit off.

One of the best ways to increase your dog's life and help the pet community as a whole is by spaying or neutering your animal. Besides avoiding unwanted litters that contribute to pet overpopulation, spaying and neutering can prevent some serious medical and behavioral issues. "Early spaying of female dogs and cats can help protect them from some serious health problems later in life such as uterine infections and breast cancer," according to the [AVMA](#). "Neutering your male pet can also lessen its risk of developing benign prostatic hyperplasia (enlarged prostate gland) and testicular cancer." Plus, quality health care should make your dog a calmer, happier companion — one who will stick with you for years to come.