

# Preparing Your Puppy for the First Walk

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One of life's greatest joys for people with pets is having a new puppy waddling around the house. Going for that first walk together should be a wondrous event for your new puppy and a very rewarding one for you. Of course, routine walks with your new fuzzy little pal and beginning the socialization process are key for your puppy's healthy development. To get started, here are a few puppy walking tips on how to walk a puppy for the first time.

Use this little list to help you make all the necessary preparations before going for that first walk and to make the most of the experience for your toddling new pet puppy:

## When to Start Walking a Puppy

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Puppies are especially adaptable at 1 to 3 months old. It's the ideal period for teaching them new skills and introducing them to new experiences. Expanding their exposure to the world during this growth phase helps your puppy build their self-confidence for successful walks with you.

Start helping your puppy become socialized well before taking your new little pal on walks out in public areas. Let your new little buddy begin experiencing social life through easy interactions. Maybe have a friend visit and engage with the puppy, then have a few friends over. You could even consider carrying your puppy in a doggie carrier for visits to family.

**Be very careful in encounters with other dogs during these socialization excursions. Make sure these are all friendly encounters. Do not make the mistake of allowing your dog to be exposed to older dogs that do not have a proven track record of being friendly with unfamiliar dogs. Also, avoid injured dogs, because they are less predictable. Be sure to ask people before allowing your puppy to approach their dog!**

## Get Puppy Vaccinations

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Have all necessary immunizations for your puppy, before you take the first walk together. Proper vaccinations help protect your puppy against highly contagious and harmful, even fatal canine diseases, some of which can present a serious risk to your own health and safety, too. Some of these conditions can be extremely difficult and costly to treat, and success is sometimes very uncertain. So, above all, be sure your puppy is protected before you take your dog on that first walk out into the world.

## Gather All Your Walking Supplies

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Prepare in advance for the big day of your first walk with your puppy. Make sure you are equipped with the essentials for a smooth experience for your puppy and you. These are the basics you should have in place when you head out on your first walk with your dog:

- Collar with current ID and vaccination tag
- Ultra-light-weight extendable puppy leash
- Bottle of water
- Expandable water bowl
- Doggie sweater or coat (if needed)
- Cell phone (for emergencies only)
- Puppy treats for rewards
- Pet waste bags

## Practice with the Collar and Leash

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The first time a puppy experiences wearing a collar, it can feel odd and can take a little while for the young dog to become comfortable with it. Being on a *leash* can be a *more* difficult adjustment for many dogs. A puppy, or especially an older dog, finding themselves on a leash for the first time will sometimes not want to walk. In some cases, dogs struggle frantically against the leash. Use this simple acclimation process:

1. First, let your puppy get comfortable wearing the new *collar* for a few days.
2. Then, be sure to introduce the leash gently and slowly, a few days prior to the first walk, by connecting it to the collar for a minute or two and walking around a quiet yard space.

If your puppy struggles against the leash, take it off immediately each time, then put it back on after a few minutes and try again for a minute or two. Talk gently and encouragingly and pet the puppy frequently throughout the process. Give a treat when the puppy calms down for a moment, and distract him/her with favorite toys and games.

1. Repeat this process until your dog becomes more comfortable moving around with the leash on.

## Encourage Your Puppy

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During each walk in new areas of the neighborhood, your puppy is processing all the new information he or she is discovering and trying to understand his/her environment. Make sure that your young dog's experience is a positive one. Provide plenty of moments to play along the way and abundant treats to add to the fun and encourage desired behavior!

When you do, inevitably, see undesired behavior or signs of stress in your puppy, rescue him/her from the circumstance. Don't scold. It's important not to make a very young puppy, or a dog of any age, feel overwhelmed with commands or disciplinary actions during walks. You don't want your pet to associate going for walks with a feeling of fear or anxiety.

## **Pay Attention to Your Puppy's Limitations**

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It's the big day! Time for the first walk! Your puppy is ecstatic! You are fully prepared. Keep in mind that a puppy needs a small start that builds into longer walks over time. Initially, a few months after the first vaccinations, your puppy walks should be limited to around 15 to 20 minutes or so, a couple of times per day. You can add a few minutes per month as your dog grows. Progressing the total walk time slowly helps prevent overheating or overexertion and protects your puppy's joints.

Be sure to avoid walking too fast with a puppy. It's most important to let your puppy go at his or her own pace. Pick a nice quiet area without other people and pets around. Start out by letting your puppy guide the way, stopping, exploring, sniffing harmless things at will. This is the way to train your puppy to love walking with you will look forward to walks with you and will enjoy bonding with you on your special walks!

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