Vet visits

Visiting the vet is a necessary part of a dog's life, and even the healthiest dog will benefit from general checks for parasitic prevention, vaccinations and to discuss neutering.

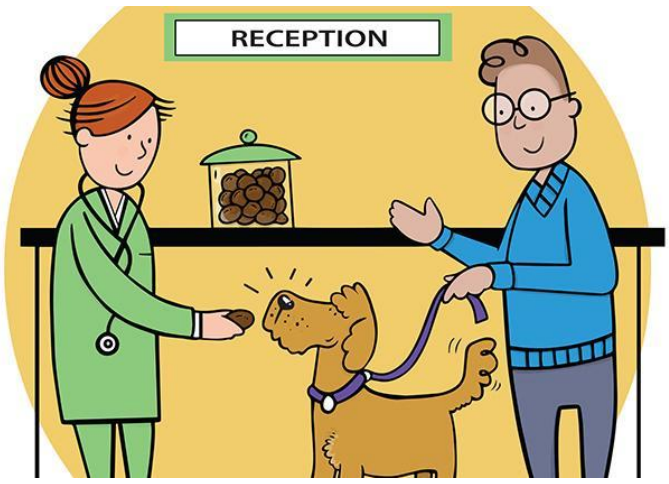
The experiences every dog has can influence their future behaviour, so if they find visiting the vet is nothing to worry about, they're likely to be more comfortable in future! Many dogs can find visiting the vet a challenge, but don't worry there's lots you can do to help your dog have happier visits.

Learning to love the clinic

If your dog associates being at the vet clinic with tasty treats and good things happening, then they're less likely to worry about it!

Speak to your vet team, as many clinics offer appointments specifically to provide dogs the opportunity to come along and explore. This might include sniffing around the clinic room, having some treats, getting on and off the scales, and meeting some of the staff - all in an enjoyable, relaxed way. This is great for puppies, ensuring their first few experiences of the clinic are carefully managed to be feelgood experiences.

You could also ask your clinic when it's likely to be quieter and pop along as part of your normal walkies, just for a sniff around and a treat from the clinic team. This will help your dog enjoy visiting and prepare them for the occasional time they need to be examined or receive treatment.



Teach your dog that being examined is okay

Begin by teaching this at home first, then practise in lots of different places to help your dog feel more comfortable about the vet examining them. Our **Handling** handout outlines a step-by-step approach to this.



Relaxing in the waiting room

The waiting room can be an exciting, scary and confusing place. It might be difficult for your dog to stay quiet and still, especially with the strange smells and other animals!

Help prepare your dog by teaching them to calmly settle down, no matter where they are. Our **Settle** handout explains how to do this.

Once your dog has the hang of it, practise in increasingly busier places to help them become 'waiting-room-ready'.

When it's time to visit the vet, help your dog feel more relaxed by bringing their favourite toy and the same blanket along to help them settle.

Try to book appointments at the practice's least busy time of day. If you can, try and leave some space between your dog and others. Encourage your dog to focus on you to avoid making eye contact with other dogs.

Examination time

Remember that you are your dog's best friend, and they are relying on you to speak up for them. By watching and understanding your dog's body language you can manage their experience to ensure it's as good as can be.

Make sure you can recognise signs of fear or anxiety in your dog. Our **Body Language** handout describes signs to look out for. Being able to recognise how your dog is feeling will help you to respond appropriately and take steps to make them feel safe again.

For example, you could ask your vet to examine your dog on the floor if they're worried about being picked up and put on a table. Or ask to wait outside the building before your appointment if your dog is worried or overexcited in the waiting room.

If your dog shows signs of feeling uncomfortable and needing space, feel free to politely but firmly ask your vet to stop what they're doing. Both your dog and your vet will thank you for speaking up.

If your dog growls, this is your dog's way of saying 'I am really uncomfortable!' so make sure you communicate with your vet. Never ignore your dog's growls and never tell them off for growling. Your dog is simply using their voice to tell you they're distressed.

Bites can occur during vet examinations because the owner and the vet ignored a growl, and the dog felt they had no other way to show how unhappy they felt in that situation. Being aware of the different ways your dog is communicating with you will help to make sure every visit to the vets is a happy one.

Keep calm

It can be a difficult experience taking your dog to the vet, especially if you're worried about them. But if your dog sees you becoming agitated and worried, they might follow suit! Staying calm and training yourself to consider what your dog needs at any point - on the journey to the vet, in the waiting room, during the consultation and afterwards – means you'll be showing them that you're relaxed. This should help them feel more comfortable about what's happening.

Our dogs mean so much to us, so to make the most out of the appointment prepare a list of questions for the vet in advance. Not needing to remember all your questions means you'll be better able to concentrate on making your dog feel as comfortable as possible during the visit.

Preparing for an overnight stay

Although we hope it never happens, if your dog ever needs to stay in the vets overnight there are some things you can do to help it be less scary for them:

- Send them with their own blanket or soft toy that smells familiar and of home.
- Make sure they have been to the toilet.
- Provide their own food so they can eat something familiar when they're allowed to.

Teaching your dog to feel relaxed and confident without you is a great start to helping them cope in hospital. Our **Coping Alone** handout provides advice for teaching your dog this valuable skill.



If your dog is struggling

If your dog finds vet visits difficult, behaves aggressively, or you find it difficult to manage your dog's behaviour at the vets, an accredited behaviourist will be able to help you.

You can find out how to source an accredited behaviourist here:
dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/behaviour/finding-behaviour-and-training-support

Contacts for further support

We provide lifelong telephone-based behavioural support for all our adopted dogs. If you need help for your **Dogs Trust dog** please email:
postadoptionsupport@dogstrust.org.uk

Everyone else can access support by emailing our training and behaviour helpline:
behavioursupportline@dogstrust.org.uk

Your nearest Dog School Team are also happy to help and can be contacted via:
dogstrustdogschool.org.uk

The advice contained in this handout is of a general nature and is no substitute for specific behavioural or veterinary advice. If you are worried about your dog, then do consult your vet.

A dog is for life ®
Dogs Trust is a charity registered in England and Wales (1167663), and in Scotland (SC053144), and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (09365971).

© Dogstrust 2024
dogstrust.org.uk