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The 10 Fundamentals of Dog Care

The best advice for when you welcome a furry family member home

by [The Farmers Dog](#) (Paid Content)

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One of the many remarkable things about dogs is their simple approach to life. They chase a squirrel, scratch a itch, find a good meal, and a fun game of fetch – without fretting about what all means or what’s next. But when it comes to caring for dogs and seeing them as for a healthy, happy life, things aren’t always so simple.

“Give them lots of love” is a given. Beyond that, there’s a lot more to know. Start with these 10 simple but essential principles, and you’ll be on the way to giving your dog the best life possible.

1. Your life is going to change

While dogs are more wondrous than – typical great and often funny, to name just a few – they aren’t exactly convenient. This new family member depends on you, so you’ll have to be there – to walk them, play with them, and just spend time with them. In exchange for the added responsibility, your dog will transform your life in amazing ways.

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2. Your dog should have choices

You’ll decide what your dog can, when they go out and play, the boundaries obtained in your house, and more. But your job is a thing being with feelings and preferences. So, if your dog isn’t in the mood to play or walk, give them space. Don’t force them to socialize with other dogs they don’t like. If they want some time alone, give it to them.

3. Training is ongoing

Giving your dog choices doesn’t mean letting them do whatever, whenever. Training is key to having a well-adjusted pet, and it’s not something you only do for a few weeks when you first bring your dog home. Your dog continues absorbing their environment and gathering new information long after puppyhood. Continue to reinforce the most useful skills, like recall, and be consistent about encouraging only behaviors that you find desirable. Rewarding good manners is fun for both of you!

4. A crate is a good idea

Crate can be a huge help with potty training, creating a sanctuary when your dog can spend quiet time alone, and an essential tool when you need to transport your pet safely. The secret to making the crate safe, comfortable, and fun is to make it a destination. Stock it with a comfy bed, favorite toy, a treat, or tasty chew, and use a cover to make it an inviting den.

5. Socialization is key – and not just with other dogs

The more novel stimuli your dog experiences in puppyhood, the more likely they are to interact with them as an adult calmly. Exposure to other dogs, different people and settings, appliances, forms of transportation, weather conditions, noises, and other everyday phenomena will help them grow into well-balanced adults.

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6. Your dog needs lots of exercise

Many dog owners underestimate how much activity their dog needs, both physically and mentally. Long walks, training, organized activities like agility, and mental challenges like food puzzles can help keep your dog healthy, happy, and engaged. Let your dog’s age and body condition inform the intensity of their exercise sessions.

7. Be proactive about veterinary care

As it is for humans, preventative care is a vital part of keeping dogs healthy. Schedule regular vet visits, keep up with vaccinations, and communicate with your veterinarian so everything in the office isn’t a crisis. Know your dog’s breed predispositions and watch for related medical conditions.

8. You have to brush your dog’s teeth

Every dog, ideally. Brush with a toothpaste made for dogs, watch for warning signs like tartar and bad breath, and make sure the vet does regular dental checkups. Over 80% of dogs suffer from dental disease by the time they hit three years old.

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9. Keep your dog at a lean, healthy weight

Maintaining a healthy weight and lean body condition are the most accessible and effective ways you can look out for your dog’s long-term well-being. Obese dogs face an increased risk of cancer, arthritis, kidney disease, thyroid issues, diabetes, and more. While exercise is an important part of keeping your dog at a good weight, exercise isn’t the only key.

10. Your dog needs good, real food

Sounding of food, it’s one of the most essential yet easiest-to-overlook factors of dog care. Many dog food bags feature wholesome ingredients or jargon like “superfoods,” but what’s inside most of those packages is a heavily processed, dead product that’s anything but healthy. Providing balanced nutrition in the form of fresh, lightly cooked meat and vegetables can have a big impact on every area of your dog’s health and it’s one of the most impactful steps toward keeping your dog healthy and happy.

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