

Your complete guide to natural dog care and training

# Whole Dog Journal™



Credit: Nancy Kemm



**On page 3. Check in the freezer!** — Though the frozen raw diet niche has been around longer, the fresh cooked/frozen segment of the market is getting bigger. However, you should expect to pay a premium for the convenience of feeding these high-quality dog foods.

Credit: iStock, Getty Images



**On page 3. Tricks for treats** — Tips for managing rewards for better behavior.

Credit: Nancy Kemm



**On page 14. Pick a poison** — Human medications, both prescription and over the counter, are one of the biggest threats to our dogs' health and safety.

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# A Paperless Magazine

*We'll see you online!*

I feel a deep sense of accomplishment for having been here for the first printed issue of WDJ in 1998 right through to this, our last printed issue. My family was excited to hear that I've spent my last night foregoing the evening movie-watching with them in favor of working into the wee hours in an attempt to get the files to the printer on time—at least until I told them that the digital deadlines would be weekly now. Whoops!



There has always been a certain satisfaction to seeing the print edition, even to me, the person who sent the digital version of the pages to the printer each month. But I will say that the paper versions of WDJ have been a burden to mail and even store. I have two long shelves in my office devoted to 28 binders full of paper, whereas all of the information in those 28 years' worth of printed magazines fits in a tiny thumb drive on my desk, too. One of these days soon, I'm going to chuck those binders in favor of giving the shelf space to some of the many dog products that I have here heaped in boxes, waiting to be reviewed.

I said this last month, but it bears repeating that *Whole Dog Journal* is switching to an all-digital publication that will give you *more* dog-related information, not less. This will allow us to upload articles more frequently, with new content posted weekly, rather than monthly. So, please, if you have not already done so, go to [www.whole-dog-journal.com/online-account-activation](http://www.whole-dog-journal.com/online-account-activation) and activate your digital subscription (or you can just scan the QR code here to start the process). If you've already done this, you're all set. You'll start receiving emails with links to all the new content online.



Scan this with your smartphone to access the account activation page.

Computers have streamlined the work process for journalists in countless ways; for example, I haven't had to buy a book or visit a veterinary school library in order to research and fact-check an article in years! Photos and video are easier to shoot, edit, send, and receive. These things have also improved our readers' experience, too. Today, we can get time-sensitive information to you faster than ever, and we don't have to limit the number or depth of articles for space! And, on a completely selfish note, now that our articles don't have to be prepared for the printing process, I'll have more time to enjoy outdoors with my dogs! See you online soon.

NK





# Fresh Frozen and Refrigerated Dog Food

*Most (but not all!) of the companies who compete in this niche make very high-quality (and expensive) canine diets.*

It's easy to get confused in the rapidly expanding freezer section of your local pet supply store, so make sure you're looking at the correct frosted-glass case: This month, we're looking at fresh-frozen or refrigerated *cooked* diets for dogs.

In terms of ingredients and appearance, the cooked-frozen or -refrigerated products may be nearly identical to frozen *raw* diets for dogs—and for good reason: Both types of diets have sprung from the desire to responsibly nourish dogs with fresh, whole, *real* foods (and with a minimum of effort). However, the cooked subset of the refrigerated or frozen canine diet industry may soon outstrip the older, more established raw-frozen segment of this niche market; it's growing that fast. It turns out that there are lots of dog owners—and, notably, their veterinarians—who want to feed a fresh, complete, and balanced diet of whole foods, but who aren't willing to risk exposing their dogs to the pathogenic bacteria that may be present in raw diets.

## “LIGHTLY COOKED”

All “ready to eat” (cooked) diets must be subjected to a “kill step” that will neutralize any pathogenic bacteria that may be present in the food. The companies working in this niche have come up with a phrase that nearly all of them use to describe their products: They call them “lightly cooked,” to distinguish them from canned and kibble diets, which are subjected to much higher temperatures.

Some of these products are cooked with steam. And at least one company bakes and grinds its meats and then combines them with raw, ground vegetables. But most of the products in this category are cooked with a method called *sous vide*, a French term that translates to “under a vacuum.” The method is also known in the human food world as “LTLT cooking,” which stands for low-temperature, long-time cooking.

Cooked foods must be subjected to complementary factors of time and temperature in order to serve as a bacterial kill step. Kib-

*Look at the labels carefully, or ask a store employee for help, when looking for a cooked frozen diet for your dog. Often, as in this freezer case, the cooked and raw diets are displayed by manufacturer, not by their cooked or raw status.*



ble is cooked (extruded) in a high temperature, short time (HTST), though high-pressure is another bacterial-killing factor in the extrusion process. Canned food is also rendered safe by canning pressure, heat, and time. The *sous vide* process involves much longer cooking times at a lower temperature.

*Sous vide*-cooking also involves sealing the food in an oxygen-free package (achieved with a vacuum sealer) and immersing the package in a water bath. The process transforms the collagen in meat's connective tissue into gelatin, without denaturing the proteins. And it preserves the texture of vegetables and other plant matter, as the temperature never gets high enough to boil, which burst the food's cell walls.

These factors preserve not only the taste, texture, and appearance of food, but also the food's nutrients; there is less vitamin loss and no development of acrylamide (a neurotoxic chemical that naturally forms in starchy food under higher temperature-cooking).

Another aspect of *sous vide* cooking is a huge benefit to the pet food company that makes it: The product is packed and cooked, and then frozen, shipped, and stored in the same package.

## HUMAN GRADE

Most of the diets sold in this category are labeled as “human grade,” which means they are made with 100% human-edible ingredients in a facility that is licensed to make human food. There are a couple exceptions.

It should come as no surprise that the two largest companies that compete in this niche do not claim to make human-grade products. Freshpet makes no human-grade claims about its refrigerated foods, though it variously describes its ingredients as *fresh, whole, real, highest-quality*, and my personal favorite, *farm-raised*.

Nom Nom, which was an early participant in this niche, sold to the giant pet food conglomerate Mars Petcare in 2022 in a billion-dollar deal (a development that hints at the potential size of this market). Nom Nom does not use the human-grade claim, either.

In contrast, there is relatively tiny Smallbatch Pets, which formulates its foods with ground meats that contain bone—an ingredient that is not approved for use in human food. Like the makers of many raw diets, Smallbatch defends this decision out of its dedication to the idea that fresh, raw, ground bone is the *ideal* source of calcium and phosphorus for dogs. That formulation choice

costs them the legal “human-grade” designation, and though we believe their hints that everything else about their products would meet all the requirements of human-grade manufacturing, we can't say their products are human-grade, either.

There is one more fairly well-known, fresh-cooked, frozen dog diet that is not human grade—but is not on our “approved food” list: Bil-Jac Frozen. Though its first ingredient is chicken, its second ingredient is wheat flour, the fourth is chicken meal, and the eighth is molasses; this is a formula that more closely resembles a kibble than the rest of the products in this category.

## WHY FEED YOUR DOG A FRESH COOKED DIET

As stated earlier, most of these products are made with high-quality, fresh, whole ingredients. Almost every company has an origin story that credits the company's founder's sick dog as the inspiration for the formation of the company; in each story, the company owner/founder started making their chronically ill dog's food at home, causing an almost immediate improvement in the dog's symptoms and prognosis.

And, you know, as much as these stories seem like clichés, they are clichés that make sense. There are plenty of dogs who don't thrive on highly processed foods—and not all of these dogs will eat a raw diet, and some of them can't digest raw diets very well. Dogs with sensitive stomachs tend to do best when fed a high-quality cooked diet.

It's an added bonus that you don't have to worry about pathogenic bacteria in a cooked frozen diet posing a risk to your dog or someone else in your family, or your veterinarian yelling at you about the risks (real or imagined) of raw diets. Also, these are complete and balanced diets; you don't have to worry whether the recipe you follow for a home-prepared diet is imbalanced or failing to meet all of your dog's micronutrient needs (something *else* your vet is likely to lecture you about).

## Safe Handling for Frozen Cooked Diets

In general, handle frozen cooked dog food just like you would handle some frozen, cooked chicken nuggets for your kids!

- **Thaw frozen foods in a leak-proof container in the refrigerator.** This takes longer than leaving a frozen food on your kitchen counter; it might even take more than one day! But the food should be kept below 41°F at all times. Most manufacturers recommend feeding the thawed, refrigerated food within five to seven days from thawing, and within three days of opening a package.
- **If your dog does not finish his meal within a few minutes, put the remainder in a leak-proof container in the refrigerator.** You can offer it again at his next meal-time, but if he fails to eat it in this second presentation, dispose of that meal.
- **If an order of frozen food is delivered to your home and arrives thawed and not cold, contact the company immediately—and don't feed it to your dog.** Warm temperatures can cause the proliferation of what are called “spoilage bacteria”—species of bacteria that can be beneficial in small numbers, but whose uncontrolled growth can cause spoilage through the production of acetic acid.

# WDJ'S TOP 3 FRESH COOKED DIETS FOR DOGS (FROZEN OR REFRIGERATED)

All of our top picks are made in human-food manufacturing facilities with human-grade ingredients

## JustFoodforDogs

- ✓ The company's products have passed AAFCO feeding trials, which were carried out on privately owned dogs (not captive dogs in laboratories).
- ✓ JustFoodForDogs is also the only fresh whole-food company to have commissioned digestibility studies at a major university.
- ✓ These foods were among the lowest-priced foods we examined. The company states that it purposely keeps its prices lower than its competitors so the product is available to more dogs.



## My Perfect Pet

- ✓ Its products (most of which are named after a dog or cat) do not contain excessive amounts of fat; some contain *half* the fat found in competitors' products
- ✓ Complete nutrient analyses for each diet can be downloaded from the company website
- ✓ Grain-inclusive and grain-free products available; both single-species (limited-ingredient) and multiple-species formulas available. Adult maintenance *and* puppy formulations are also available.

## Open Farm Pet Food

- ✓ Products contain certified organic ingredients and animal protein sources that are certified humane by Global Animal Partnership or certified grass-fed and grass-finished.
- ✓ Complete nutrient analyses for each diet can be downloaded from its website
- ✓ Grain-inclusive and grain-free products available



## EXPENSIVE

However, it needs to be said plainly: Feeding this sort of diet is very expensive; you pay a premium for the quality as well as the convenience. It can take a little work to compare the cost of one diet to another, especially as you often have to figure in first-order discounts and weigh whether you have enough freezer room to take advantage of bulk-buying discounts.

We did the math on a number of diets and found that most are sold for somewhere between \$8 and \$10 a pound—out of reach to feed as an everyday diet for those of us with a big dog or more than one dog.

## HOW WE CHOOSE

Here's what we recommend looking for when choosing a fresh cooked frozen diet for your dog:

■ **A nutritional adequacy claim.** Look for confirmation that the product is a complete and balanced diet for dogs of your dog's life stage

(adult maintenance or growth). For example, "This product was formulated to meet the nutritional levels established by the AAFCO Dog Food Nutrient Profiles for all life stages including growth of large size dogs (70 lbs. or more as an adult)." We do not recommend diets that are intended only for "intermittent or supplemental use," unless the product is being used as a meal "topper."

■ **A complete nutrient analysis for each product.** Only a few companies in this category list the typical nutrient analyses for their products on their websites. It's a sign of professionalism, expertise, and commitment to have these available for consumers to examine—and a red flag if a company can't get the analysis for any of their foods to you upon request.

Some of the companies on our list will custom-formulate diets for dogs with specific needs—but

the formulation software that the company uses should be able to generate a complete nutrient analysis for custom diets, too.

■ **Fat levels that are not excessive.** We recommend products with protein levels that are about twice the levels of fat for most dogs. Foods that contain more fat than protein should be avoided—especially for individual dogs and breeds that are subject to pancreatitis (for more about this risk, see "Pancreatitis in Dogs," on the WDJ website).

■ **Ingredients that are *certified* humane, free-range, wild-caught, and/or organic.** Many dog food manufacturers make claims about the provenance of their ingredients without offering any sort of third-party verification of those claims. We're sorry to say we don't believe any of the claims without certification. 🐾

*Nancy Kerns is the editor of WDJ.*



# WDJ'S APPROVED COOKED FRESH/FROZEN DOG FOODS

The following companies all manufacture high-quality complete and balanced diets for dogs that are made with meat and (mostly) other whole food ingredients, “gently cooked” in a variety of fashions, and then sold in either a refrigerated or frozen state. Because these are cooked foods, none of them were subjected to a separate “kill step” that would neutralize otherwise pathogenic bacteria; cooking is the kill step.

Some of these diets contain grain or other carbohydrate sources. Carbohydrate-free diets are more common in the raw frozen diets we reviewed in May 2025.

Notes about the data in each column:

**COMPANY:** Products are listed alphabetically by company. The exceptions are products made by Freshpet, who makes several lines of fresh-cooked foods; these will be listed by their better-known names.

**PRODUCT FORM/FROZEN:** If the company used a term to describe the shape of the product or its package, we’ve used their term. Otherwise, we’ve tried our best to describe how the food is formed or packaged. Most of these products are sold in a frozen form, but again, Freshpet is the outlier; its products (which are sold under several different names) are the only ones that are sold in a refrigerated (not frozen) state.

**HOW/WHERE SOLD:** Smaller companies tend to take orders and ship product directly to their consumers; larger

companies may sell their products this way but may also be available in pet supply stores or via third-party online retailers such as Chewy. One advantage of purchasing these products in stores is the ability to bring them home and put them in your freezer without having to also dispose of lots of insulative packaging and melted ice packs.

**HUMAN-GRADE:** One hundred percent of the ingredients in products with this designation must be human-edible, and these products must be made in a human-food manufacturing facility that is subject to the same inspections and licenses as any human-food facility.

**NUTRIENT ANALYSES ON THE COMPANY WEBSITE:** The companies that make foods in this category are far behind the conventional dog-food industry in terms of providing complete nutrient analyses for their products on their company websites; we found only three companies that provide typical analyses for their products online. One or two companies had statements on their websites suggesting that consumers could request the complete analyses; why bother posting such a statement? Just publish the results!

**FIRST 10 INGREDIENTS OF COMPANY’S CHICKEN VARIETY:** Since nearly all companies that manufacture this type of food make a chicken variety, we’ve chosen that product from each company to compare. If the company makes more than one chicken variety, we’ve named the product we used for comparison.

COMPANY WEBSITE, PHONE	FORM/ FROZEN	HOW/WHERE SOLD	HUMAN- GRADE	NUT. ANALYSES ON WEBSITE	FIRST 10 INGREDIENTS OF COMPANY’S CHICKEN VARIETY
<b>A PUP ABOVE</b> apupabove.com (512) 846-9372	Bags; frozen	Stores, subscription/ direct	Yes	No	Chicken, chicken liver, sweet potatoes, chicken bone broth, rice, apples, spinach, kale, tumeric, thyme
<b>EVERMORE PET FOOD</b> evermorepetfood.com (718) 596-6788	Pouches; frozen	Stores, subscription/ direct	Yes	No	Chicken, chicken hearts, eggs, organic sweet potatoes, organic carrots, chicken livers, organic kale, organic apples, organic dandelion greens, organic blueberries
<b>FARMER'S DOG</b> thefarmersdog.com (646) 780-7957	Pouches; frozen	Subscription/ direct	Yes	No	Chicken, chicken liver, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, chia seeds, (vitamin/ mineral blend), salmon oil
<b>FRESHPET</b> freshpet.com (866) 789-3737	Bags and rolls; refrigerated	Stores	No	No	Roll variety: Chicken, chicken broth, brown rice, rice bran, carrots, ground oats, carrageenan, natural flavors, peas, spinach
<b>FULL MOON</b> fullmoonpet.com (888) 970-3855	Bags; frozen	Stores, subscription/ direct	Yes	No	Chicken, chicken liver, chicken bone broth, spinach, cassava, carrageenan, vinegar, calcium carbonate, salt, rosemary extract
<b>HOMESTYLE CREATIONS</b> Freshpet.com (866) 789-3737	Bags; refrigerated	Stores	No	No	Grilled Chicken Bites variety: Chicken, chicken broth, tapioca starch, natural flavors, dried citrus pulp, pea protein, calcium carbonate, dicalcium phosphate, zinc proteinate, iron proteinate

COMPANY WEBSITE, PHONE	FORM/ FROZEN	HOW/WHERE SOLD	HUMAN- GRADE	NUT. ANALYSES ON WEBSITE	FIRST 10 INGREDIENTS OF COMPANY'S CHICKEN VARIETY
<b>JUST FOOD FOR DOGS</b> justfoodfordogs.com (866) 726-9509	Pouches; frozen	Stores, subscription/ direct	Yes	No	Chicken & Rice variety: Chicken, white rice, brown rice, chicken liver, kale, carrots, apples, sunflower oil, flaxseed oil, omega marine microalgae oil
<b>MY PERFECT PET</b> myperfectpetfood.com (858) 486-6500	Bars; frozen	Stores, subscription/ direct	Yes	Yes	Grain-Free Chicken variety: Chicken thigh, chicken breast, green beans, zucchini, broccoli, sweet potato, chicken liver, spinach, celery, cranberries
<b>NATURE'S FRESH</b> Freshpet.com (866) 789-3737	Bags and rolls; refrigerated	Stores	No	No	Grain-Free Small-Breed Chicken variety: Chicken, chicken liver, pea protein, eggs, natural flavors, carrots, pea fiber, vinegar, salt, spinach
<b>NOM NOM NOW</b> nomnomnow.com (415) 991-0669	Pouches; frozen	Stores, subscription/ direct	No	No	Chicken, sweet potatoes, squash, water, spinach, sunflower oil, canola oil, natural flavor, vinegar, dicalcium phosphate
<b>OLLIE</b> myollie.com (844) 886-5543	Pouches; frozen	Subscription/ direct	Yes	No	Chicken, rice, carrots, chicken livers, peas, potatoes, spinach, cranberries, tricalcium phosphate, salmon oil
<b>OPEN FARM</b> openfarmpet.com (833) 399-3403	Pouches; frozen	Stores, subscription/ direct	Yes	Yes	Harvest Chicken variety: Chicken, carrots, kale, butternut squash, apples, coconut oil, pumpkin, water, salmon oil, flaxseed
<b>PETPLATE</b> petplate.com (855) 981-6109	Cup/bowl; frozen	Stores, subscription/ direct	Yes	No	Chicken, sweet potatoes, chicken liver, apples, green beans, red lentils, ground flaxseed, vinegar, potato starch, safflower oil
<b>SMALL BATCH PETS</b> smallbatchpets.com (888) 507-2712	"Sliders" and patties; frozen	Stores	No	No	Chicken (with ground bone), chicken, chicken gizzards, chicken hearts, chicken livers, organic carrots, organic sweet potatoes, organic broccoli, organic zucchini, pollock oil
<b>STELLA &amp; CHEWY'S FRESHMADE</b> stellaandchewys.com/ collections/more-pet-food (855) 617-2959	Pouches; frozen	Stores	Yes	No	FreshMade Chicken variety: Chicken, organic carrots, butternut squash, kale, chicken bone broth, chicken liver, apples, ground flaxseed, calcium carbonate, sunflower oil
<b>THE PETS TABLE</b> thepetstable.com (929) 429-4025	Pouches; frozen	Subscription/ direct	Yes	No	Chicken, chickpeas, chicken liver, carrots, green beans, sweet potatoes, apples, spinach, salmon oil, sunflower oil
<b>VITAL</b> Freshpet.com (866) 789-3737	Bags and rolls; refrigerated	Stores	No	No	Grain-Free Small-Breed Chicken variety: Chicken, chicken liver, carrots, sweet potatoes, pea protein, eggs, cranberries, natural flavors, pea fiber, vinegar
<b>WAG TANTRUM</b> wagtantrum.com (713) 205-5989	Pouches; frozen	Subscription/ direct	Yes	No	Organic chicken, organic broccoli, organic squash, organic carrots, organic brown rice, tricalcium phosphate, potassium citrate, powdered cellulose, choline bitartrate, magnesium sulfate



# Training With Treats

*To train a dog with positive reinforcement, it helps to understand the difference between a reward and a bribe.*

**T**raining with treats is an incredibly effective positive reinforcement dog training technique. It's dog-friendly and fun, and the basics are easy for trainers of all ages and skill levels.

At its core, the concept is simple: Feed behaviors you want to see happen more often.

But simple doesn't always mean easy. Understanding how, when, and how often to use treats in training can help you achieve better results. Here are six tips to keep in mind:

**1 Use treats as a lure or reward—not a bribe!** Those who oppose using food in training often cite not wanting to “bribe” their dog as the reason why.

News flash: Positive-reinforcement dog trainers don't want you to bribe your dog either!

What's the difference? Here's an easy way to think about it: When you use food to guide your dog into position (think treat on his

nose), that's a lure. When you ask your dog to do something, he performs correctly, and you deliver a treat, that's a reward. When you ask your dog to do something, he doesn't do it, so you produce a treat and then he responds, that's a bribe!

For best results, use treats as lures and rewards and try to avoid bribing your dog.

**2 Remember to “fade” the treat lure.** When you train behaviors with a food lure, a great goal is to fade the lure as quickly as possible—meaning, make sure your dog can perform correctly without the treat on his nose as a lure/guide.

When your dog can confidently follow a food lure into position, do a couple of repetitions with the lure and then quickly ask for a third using the same hand motion, but without food in that hand. Reward with a surprise treat from the *opposite* hand after your dog performs correctly.

*Treats are an important part of positive reinforcement dog training, but remember that they're not the only way to reward a job well done! Toys, praise, cuddles, and getting to do something fun can also be used to reinforce desired behaviors.*



Credit: Nazar Rysak, Getty Images



*Don't forget to celebrate success!  
Pairing praise with treats not only  
adds to the fun, it also increases the  
value of praise as reinforcement.*

This helps your dog learn to respond correctly in order to earn treats versus responding correctly because he sees treats.

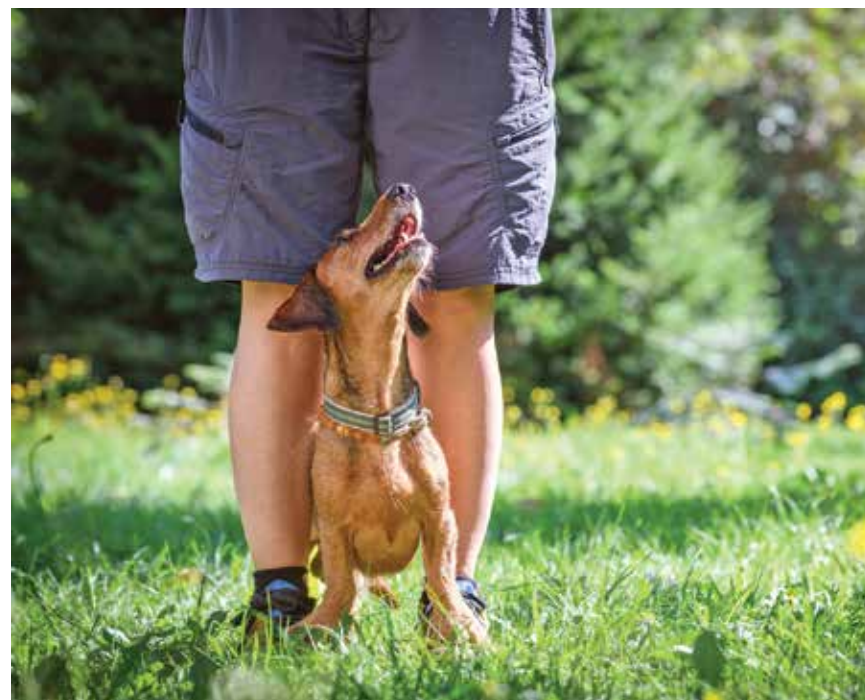
**3 Timing is everything; watch what you're rewarding.** Aim to deliver the treat within two seconds of your dog performing correctly. This helps your dog connect the treat to the behavior.

Similarly, pay attention to what your dog is doing as you deliver the treat. If you're working on "sit," it's best to reward your dog while his hind end is on the floor. If you take too long to deliver the treat, he may sit, then stand. At that point, a treat is likely to reinforce a sit-stand combination.

**4 Invest in the reinforcement.** Frequently include praise and petting as you deliver treats; don't just dole them out like an emotionless Pez dispenser. You and your dog are a team, so why not celebrate the occasion of your dog earning the treat?

By pairing treats with petting and praise, you're scientifically raising the value of your petting and praise through classical conditioning, making it worth more to your dog in the future and when it's delivered in the absence of treats.

Also, don't be afraid to be generous with your treats—especially when your dog has a breakthrough moment in training or otherwise performs exceptionally well—like readily leaving a difficult distraction to come when called. Occasionally make a point to deliver multiple treats one at a time as you praise and pet your dog in ways she enjoys. Try to stretch the reinforcement over 10 to 15 seconds. Pay attention to her body language; if she's leaning or ducking away from you as she eats, she's likely saying, "Thanks for the



Credit: ihusca, Getty Images

food, but you're coming on a little strong," and you should consider changing your body language. (Are you leaning over your dog? A lot of dogs don't enjoy this.)

These generous jackpots can be meaningful and help motivate your dog to perform correctly—with speed and enthusiasm—in the future. However, be careful not to overuse jackpot rewards. If jackpots are available all the time, they can lose value.

**5 Reward every correct response but use treats intermittently.** Once your dog reliably performs the desired behavior without the lure, keep treats on the menu, but learn what else your dog enjoys and mix in offering those things as rewards, too. Once my dogs understand simple behaviors like "sit" and "down," I make a point to use life rewards to reinforce those behaviors throughout the day.

For example, when I know my dog wants me to open the door so he can go outside, I can ask for a "sit" and the treat becomes me opening the door. When we see a friend on a walk, I can ask him to "lie down," and the treat becomes me releasing him to visit our friend. Anything

your dog wants—that you can safely allow him to have or experience—can be used in place of a treat to reward his behavior. It's also a great way to establish a strong sense of teamwork between you and your dog.

**6 It's OK to keep treats on the menu forever.** (Yes, really!) Every positive-reinforcement trainer I know continues to use food throughout their dogs' lives—at least in some circumstances. In my own home, I keep treats in a dish on my desk to reinforce my dog for not barking at the mail-delivery person. When I have an opportunity to let my dog explore an area off-leash, I use treats to reinforce coming when called, because I greatly appreciate my dog's decision to hit the pause button on his exploration simply because I asked him to.

Continuing to use treats (as rewards, not bribes) doesn't mean that your dog is not trained; it's a sign of an enlightened trainer who understands the importance of offering a meaningful reward in exchange for a job well done. 🐾

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*A long-time contributor to WDJ, Stephanie Colman is a writer and dog trainer in Southern California.*



# In the Aftermath of a Dog Attack

*Why you should consult a veterinary behaviorist after a serious dog bite or mauling—even if the dog is ultimately euthanized.*

*Sean Lowe and his wife Catherine, in a screenshot taken from Lowe's Instagram post about being attacked by the family dog, Moose.*

On March 17, Sean Lowe, an American TV reality show personality best known for his role on the 17th season of ABC's "The Bachelor," posted a long video on Instagram about how their family dog attacked him. In the video, Lowe sat with his wife by his side and described two incidents involving their dog Moose, a 7-year-old Boxer the family adopted three months prior. Lowe was badly bitten by Moose in attacks that occurred just a few hours apart; the dog

has been removed from the home to an as-yet undisclosed disposition.

How can a dog who was a much-loved and -trusted companion to a family with three small children suddenly turn on and maul a member of that family—not once but twice?

Though every dog owner and trainer alive will express their own opinions, the only people who are professionally qualified to find the answers are veterinary behaviorists, who have advanced education and training in medical and behavioral diagnosis and treatment.

In an effort to help people understand what factors can contribute to seemingly uncharacteristic aggressive behavior in dogs, and offer information about how to appropriately and safely deal with a dog who has aggressively mauled a human or another animal, we asked a veterinary behaviorist for his professional insights.

Chris Pachel is a doctor of veterinary medicine (DVM), a board-certified Veterinary Behaviorist of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists (DACVB), and a Certified Animal Behavior Consultant of the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants (CABC). He is also the owner of the Animal Behavior Clinic in Portland, Oregon, where he and several other veterinary clinicians help people with their animals' behavior problems.

## COLLECTING A THOROUGH HISTORY IS NEEDED

One of the first things Dr. Pachel wanted us to understand is that an aggressive animal incident cannot possibly be explained from the victim's or onlookers' accounts alone. If he or another veterinary behaviorist was engaged by a dog's owner in the aftermath of a traumatic incident, they'd start with the story of the incident, but then do a deep dive into the dog's medical, training, and life history. Since Dr. Pachel did not have an opportunity



Credit: Sean Lowe/Instagram

to interview Lowe or examine the dog or the dog's records, his comments here are speculation meant to demonstrate how complex it is to draw accurate conclusions about what really happened to precipitate the incident.

"It's never as simple as the story that the witnesses tell," Dr. Pachel says. "If I were seeing this dog clinically or working with a client on the heels of this event, there is much more information I'd need to make an informed diagnosis and recommendations for the treatment or outcome of the dog."

## TRIGGER STACKING

In almost every news story in both print and on TV, the phrase "vicious dog attack" was used in relation to Lowe's incident. However, Lowe himself described Moose as a loving dog, ordinarily devoted to following Lowe around the house, accompanying him on walks and errands, and just wanting to be petted. Nevertheless, shortly after a smoke alarm started blaring in Lowe's home, Moose attacked his owner, causing serious injuries that required a trip to a hospital emergency room. The next day, after being locked out of the house overnight, the dog pushed through several doors and attacked his owner again, causing additional injuries.

In most cases where a dog's behavior became quickly and drastically aggressive, there are precipitating events that exponentially increased the likelihood of such a behavior change—but the events are often evident only to canine behavior experts, or revealed in retrospect under questioning. In the case of Moose and Lowe, there was one obvious trigger—an "insanely loud" smoke alarm siren going off in the house, caused by smoke from an outdoor barbecue wafting into the house from open patio doors.

However, it's highly likely that there were several and perhaps *many* factors that had pushed Moose into a stressed, hyper-aroused state well before the alarm went off.

"Trigger stacking" is the phrase

that behaviorists and trainers often use to describe the phenomenon that occurs when dogs are exposed to a number of stressful stimuli in a relatively short period of time (from hours to days), leading to heightened anxiety, fear, and aggression. While in Moose's case, the smoke alarm may have been the factor that tipped his behavior into aggression, the stack of factors contributing to Moose's fall into aggression probably started hours earlier.

Contributing factors could have included anything from the doorbell going off earlier as the barbecue guests arrived, the mere presence of Lowe's friends in the house, loud and/or boisterous voices, the proximity of high-value food (meats on the grill!), and/or the presence of alcohol and/or smoke from cigars or cigarettes. "All of those are potentially cumulative and sequential arousal triggers," says Dr. Pachel.

## THE LAST STRAW

In Lowe's account, it was the blaring of the smoke detector that "flipped a switch" in Moose. But Dr. Pachel noted that in Lowe's account of the incident, there was, in fact, a progressive escalation in Moose's behavior.

Lowe said when the smoke siren began blaring, he grabbed a dish towel and was waving it at a smoke detector in an attempt to clear the air when Moose grabbed at his hand, prompting Lowe to tell the dog, "No!" Then, he described, Moose started biting at Lowe's feet—a behavior that he stated Moose had done before, but not this intensely. This prompted Lowe to use a more stern "NO!"—and, Dr. Pachel observed, "That was when the conversation changed." At that point, Moose aggressively grabbed Lowe's arm, biting deeply, and causing Lowe to feel that he was fighting his dog for his life.

Lowe was eventually able to wrestle Moose into the backyard and close the door; he was then transported to a hospital for treatment. It's not explicitly described, but it sounds like Moose was left outdoors overnight. The next morning, Lowe

described that his parents came to take Lowe's three children to their home while the next steps for Moose were being decided.

In Lowe's account, as the children were getting into the grandparents' car, Moose somehow pushed open the back door to the house, and ran through the house and out the front door, making a beeline for Lowe and attacking him again. This time, Lowe and his parents were able to restrain the dog until police and animal control officers were able forcibly take the dog into custody. (Moose's current status has not been disclosed.)

## AROUSAL CAN TAKE SOME TIME TO RESOLVE

When a dog is involved in a violent interaction, his body is often flooded with cortisol, adrenaline, and norepinephrine. These "fight or flight" chemicals make the dog's heart beat faster, increasing his blood pressure and blood sugar, and giving him more strength and energy. This physiological reaction occurs in response to a perceived threat to survival—and takes some time to dissipate.

After a trauma, the dog's cortisol and adrenaline levels may remain high for many hours, keeping the dog in an abnormally reactive state for some time. After a violent incident, it's critical to truly secure the dog and seek help from professionals (see sidebar, "What to Do Immediately After a Dog Attack.")

## WHAT A VETERINARY BEHAVIORIST WOULD INVESTIGATE

Though commenters on Lowe's social media feed and news articles about the attack all seem to have strong opinions about what caused Moose to behave aggressively, a veterinary behaviorist will first collect a lot more information about the dog and his history before making any recommendations.

"If this family came to me with this incident, before I'd make any speculation about the cause of the event or recommendations for the dog, I'd want any pre-adoption records that may be available, any



medical history, any training history,” Dr. Pachel says. Of course, in the case of a 7- or 8-year-old dog who was adopted from a shelter just three months prior, “We’ve got seven to eight years of learning history that are a black box; we have no way of knowing if the dog has history of any significantly traumatic events or forceful, scary, or painful training.” That said, in his experience, he has often observed that dogs who have had a learning history or experiential history that included painful or aversive outcomes from confrontational interactions from humans will frequently respond with defensive aggression to a stern verbal directive.

“I don’t know how much time elapsed between the alarm starting and Moose’s aggressive response, but it doesn’t sound like it was ‘immediate,’” says Dr. Pachel. “I have a strong suspicion that there was actually more of a back-and-forth conversation. The noise of the smoke alarm may have been the source of arousal, but I suspect that the reprimand-based interaction in the face of all of the arousal and chaos that I’m presuming was happening may have been at least a contributing factor.”

Even lacking any pre-adoption history, a veterinary behaviorist would collect information from the dog’s owner about the time that they have spent together—and this often

includes information that the owners are unaware could be relevant to the dog’s abnormal or aggressive behavior.

“I’d want to know everything about the three months the family spent with the dog,” Dr. Pachel says. “The playful foot-biting that Lowe mentioned; what did that look like? Were there any situations that the dog seemed uncomfortable with? All of that information has the potential to dramatically change the story from the armchair speculation that runs rampant in situations like this.”

Sometimes, there are clues in small things that the dog’s owner never realized were a sign of the dog’s stress or discomfort.

For example, Dr. Pachel says, “Many dogs have a negatively conditioned association to smoke alarms or other alarm-type sounds; was this dog sensitive to the microwave, electronic beeps, cell phone sounds, or any other low-battery alarms? Did he have a pre-existing history of arousal with food, visitors, doorbells, having mom and the kids away? Some dogs are sensitive to the presence of alcohol! I’ve had patients in my practice who are accepting of all sorts of human behavior unless alcohol is involved—and then everything is escalated in terms of the dog’s perception of threat. Just the presence of alcohol is significantly relevant from the dog’s learning history stand-

point.” (Note: In Lowe’s account, he did not mention whether alcohol was present at the barbecue.)

Being veterinarians, veterinary behaviorists also collect as much information as possible about the dog’s physical history.

“We know from recent research on the comorbidity between chronic pain—even at a low level—and older-onset noise-sensitivity or noise-aversion patterns that pain can induce an anxiety component. Did the dog have any medical conditions that could have been contributing to chronic pain or stress? Even perfectly healthy dogs can have behavior issues, but dogs who are not metabolically and neurologically healthy and normal are even more likely to exhibit abnormal or aggressive behavior,” Dr. Pachel says.

## WHAT A BEHAVIORIST CAN OFFER AFTERWARD

Moose’s owners have not yet disclosed what Moose’s outcome was or will be, though some reports have him currently staying at a secure boarding facility. There is a wealth of advice from commenters recommending either that Moose should be euthanized or given a chance to live out his days elsewhere. Once again, we’d recommend that owners of a dog who did something similarly violent consult only with a veterinary behaviorist, whether to help make a decision regarding the dog’s future—or to deal with a decision that’s already been made.

After a thorough history and examination of the dog has been completed, a veterinary behaviorist’s report will include the professional’s opinion about the dog’s behavior and discuss risk factors that affect the likelihood of achieving a safe and successful outcome for the dog and his owners.

If the owner decides to keep the

*Dogs often have a completely different experience at events that their owners regard as happy and fun. The presence of strangers, noise, high-value resources (such as grilled meats), alcohol, smoke, and other factors can produce fear and aggression in some dogs.*



Credit: syneriser | Getty Images

dog, the clinician will develop a treatment plan, typically addressing the dog's physical management, behavioral interventions, diet, exercise, and medication. Little is left to chance—but the owner will be primarily responsible for seeing such a plan through and keeping the veterinary behaviorist apprised of the dog's progress or lack thereof. The clinician can also give the owner information about alternatives to

treatment, such as rehoming or euthanasia.

"I got into veterinary medicine because of animals, but I got into behavior because of the people," says Dr. Pachel. "After an incident like this, it can really help a family to help them understand what happened. This can both alleviate their anxiety about all the 'What ifs?'—such as, what if the kids had been home and he attacked one of them?—

and potentially inform their future interactions with dogs. Sometimes in the aftermath of a traumatic event it's highly therapeutic to bring the entire family into the dialogue to help them understand what happened, allow them to express some of their concerns and anxieties, and bring some closure to the event." 🐾

*Nancy Kerns is the Editor-in-Chief of WDJ.*

## WHAT TO DO IMMEDIATELY AFTER A DOG ATTACK

If you've ever witnessed a bloody dog fight or dog attack, you probably remember the scene as chaotic and disordered. People often respond with screams or yelling and try to counter the dog's violence with violence of their own—and in the aftermath of such an event, the focus is often on any injured humans or victim animals.

The very first priority, however, is securely containing the dog who attacked to prevent more damage. Putting the dog outside is woefully insufficient; putting the dog in a room or garage is a little better, but be advised that dogs who have been through a traumatic event and are physiologically aroused—full of adrenaline—are extraordinarily strong and may react quite abnormally for hours or days. Dogs in this state may jump or climb fences they were previously safely contained in, or chew and claw through hollow-core doors they never before challenged. Getting them into a strong crate, a room with a solid door (and inaccessible windows), or a car should be the first goal.

While the wounded are being transported for medical evaluation and help, summon professional help to deal with the dog. If the attack happened during regular business hours, contact your local animal control office; after hours, one generally has to call the local police or sheriff's department, who will decide whether they will summon the animal control officers on call or try to deal with the dog themselves. If at all possible, insist on help from animal control officers, who will be equipped with the experience and special tools that they can use to capture and extract a dog who is still hyper-aroused and aggressive. (Law-enforcement officers who lack experience with dogs are all too likely to shoot dogs—sometimes even the wrong dog.)

If professional help is not immediately available, be extremely cautious about approaching the dog over the



Credit: Anita Kot | Getty Images

*Dogs who experienced a traumatic event and displayed serious aggression may remain physiologically aroused for hours or even days. Until they have completely recovered (from a hormonal standpoint), they should be held in a secure facility, to prevent escaping and causing more harm.*

next hours or even the next day. After a traumatic event, the dog may suffer from sky-high cortisol levels for days. Do not permit children or elderly or infirm people near the dog, and maintain the dog's secure containment until he is either taken into custody by an animal control officer for a quarantine or until it's clear that the dog is entirely himself again and can be safely quarantined at home (if appropriate). Note: It is not safe nor appropriate to quarantine a dog in a home with small children in it.

Once the wounded have been treated and the dog is secure, the next step is to confirm the dog's rabies vaccination history, because the dog's vaccination status will effect the treatment of anyone who got bitten. If you don't have the dog's complete medical history, get as much of the history as you can as quickly as you can.



# Common Dog Poisons

*Over-the-counter and prescription medications, human food, chocolate, and poisonous plants are among the top reasons dog owners called ASPCA poison control in 2024.*

Credit: Denise Panyik-Dale | Getty Images



*Dogs eating chocolate was the fourth most common reason people called ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center in 2024.*

Jennifer Owen never expected to spend part of Valentine's Day on the phone with the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center (APCC).

"I went to the gym and forgot that I put a new candy bowl out with chocolate heart candies wrapped in aluminum foil," Owen says. "When I got home, the now-empty bowl was on the floor."

Even worse, Owen didn't know which one of her dogs was the culprit. "I had three Labradors and no idea what combination of them ate the chocolate," she said.

It turns out that Owen may not have been the only worried dog mom on the phone with pet poison control that day. Dogs who gulp down chocolate are among the most common calls to the APCC hotline.

"What we call the chocolate holidays tend to be busier: Valentine's Day, Halloween,

Thanksgiving, and Christmas," says veterinarian Tina Wismer, senior director of toxicology at the APCC. "Anytime there's chocolate left out, dogs will find it."

In Jennifer's case, she quickly got on the phone with the APCC and brought peace of mind. Fortunately, she still had the candy bag and could tell her case worker precisely what was eaten. The toxicology team calculated her dogs' weights and the amount of missing chocolate and let her know she didn't need to load her four-legged crew in the car and race them to the ER.

"Thankfully, the bag was small, and even if one of them ate the entire bag, they were still in the 'safe' with a likely tummy ache zone," Owen said. "I found the culprit through some shimmery, decorative, foil-filled

poop."

## THE ASPCA ANIMAL POISON CONTROL CENTER

Dogs have a keen knack for finding, opening, and devouring many things they aren't supposed to.

The APCC received more than 451,000 calls from pet parents last year who needed immediate answers: Could what their dog gobbled down cause a life-threatening problem? The organization crunched its data and, in March, released its annual list of the top 10 toxins that pets managed to ingest the most.

More than 50 veterinarians and 120 support staff, all trained in toxicology, work at the APCC around the clock, day and night.

For a \$95 consultation fee, an APCC case worker takes detailed information from pet



parents, including a dog's weight, what they ate, and the quantity.

Even if a dog wolfed down multiple types of products (as this author's dog did once: a box of chocolate chip cookies and a box of fiber bars), the APCC likely has each item's ingredients in their database, which was started in the 1970s. It includes thousands of household products, foods, plants, toxins, and medications that dogs decided were edible.

The staff calculates the risk and gives pet caregivers advice—which generally ranges from “Your dog will likely be fine” to “Head to the animal ER right now!” The APCC assigns each case an ID number, which is crucial to give the medical team if treatment is needed. Many veterinarians rely on the APCC's expertise.

“Sometimes people come to the emergency room after their dog eats something that we're not 100% familiar with,” says emergency room veterinarian Carly Fox with the Schwarzman Animal Medical Center in New York City. “We have the owners call pet poison control in the waiting room so we can contact their

experts afterward. It is absolutely worth the call; it's truly unbelievable how much the APCC knows.”

The APCC also knows what lifestyle trends are going on in peoples' homes across the country by crunching the top calls they receive.

“What is happening in veterinary medicine reflects what's happening on the human side of things,” Dr. Wismer says. “During COVID, we had a ton of animals being exposed to cleaning products. Since COVID has ended, cleaning product calls dropped.”

## THE ASPCA ANIMAL POISON CONTROL CENTER'S TOP CALLS

So, what are the top calls pet parents and caregivers made to the ASPCA's Animal Poison Control Center? What is toxic to dogs? What is poisonous to dogs? Here's what topped the charts in 2024.

**1 OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICATIONS.** Calls about pets chomping down over-the-counter medications, like dietary supplements, vitamins, and

nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) pain medications like ibuprofen and naproxen, have remained steady over the last few years as the No. 1 call the APCC receives.

The ingredients in some dietary supplements may be helpful for humans, but they can be dangerous to dogs, and certain over-the-counter pain medications can be so hazardous that some dog ingestion cases Dr. Fox gets make her cringe.

“NSAID toxicity can be really bad,” Dr. Fox says. “It depends on how much the dog ingests and their weight, but it can cause GI upset, that can progress to GI ulceration, bleeding, acute kidney failure, and in really severe cases, it can cause seizures, comas, and death.”

**2 HUMAN FOOD AND DRINKS.** Pets that gobble down food and drinks made for people held their spot at No. 2 on the list from years past.

What are the most toxic foods for dogs? Gum, candy, products containing the artificial sweetener xylitol, grapes, raisins, garlic, and onions.

And it's not only onions that can cause problems. “Leeks, shallots, chives, and other foods that are part of the allium family all have a compound called N-propyl disulfide that can damage red blood cells and make your animal fairly sick if ingested at high enough doses,” Dr. Fox says.

## 3 HUMAN PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS.

Calls from people saying, “My dog ate my medication,” remained in the third spot this year. Pets who ingested

*Humans are often over-casual about how they store (or just put down) bottles of over-the-counter and prescription medications. All medications should be put in secure, dog-proof locations.*



Credit: Nancy Kerns

heart, antidepressant, and ADHD medications were the most common cases.

The APCC says they're seeing a trend with some callers saying, "Oh my gosh! My dog got into my grandma's purse and ate her pills!" These stories are a good reminder that not all guests may realize some dogs are curious, always-hungry, nosy foragers who will investigate anything new in their homes.

"Visitors, like grandma or your child's friends, may not know that their purse or backpack on the floor can be very dangerous," Dr. Wismer says. "Not only do you have to train the people in your household not to leave anything your dog can get into around, but you also need to train your guests."

**4 CHOCOLATE.** As Owen learned, chocolate is a dog fan favorite.

Dark and baking chocolate are typically the most dangerous to dogs due to the higher amounts of caffeine and theobromine, a compound in cocoa plants. These ingredients can cause dehydration, an increased heart rate, blood pressure spikes, and even seizures.

When it comes to chocolate (and human food), don't underestimate a dog's creativity and drive to get what they want.

"The other day we had a call from someone who described how their dog slid a chair across the floor so he could hop onto the chair, then onto the table to eat brownies," Dr. Wismer says. "Sometimes they're smarter than we are, so you need to

protect yourself and protect them as best you can."

**5 VETERINARY PRODUCTS.** This is a good news, bad news situation: More and more pet medications smell yummy and enticing so dogs eat them, but that can become a problem.

"Many people have a difficult time giving their dog pills," Dr. Wismer says. "So, they make some very tasty and flavorful so the dog will take them easily. But we're seeing an increase in animals ingesting higher doses because we're making more chewable formulations. That means, if you don't put that bottle away, they could eat the entire bottle of pills."

### OTHER TOP PET POISONING CONCERNS

Other top-ranking pet poisoning calls to the APCC included insecticides, rodenticides (rat and mouse poison), household products, cleaners, batteries, recreational drugs, fungi, and plants.

Hydrangeas, tulips, daffodils, and sago palms are some of the top poisonous plants for dogs.

### SWIFT ACTION IS THE BEST ANTIDOTE

Of course, prevention, supervision, and management are the best ways to avoid having a dog poison control emergency, but it can take a split second for a pooch to eat something that mistakenly falls on the floor, a toddler gives him, or he finds on the street during a walk. Weird, unexpected, and bizarre things happen to even the best pet parents.

If a dog does manage to consume something suspicious or worrisome, immediately call the APCC, a veterinarian, or an animal hospital. The sooner a dog gets help, the better the outcome will be.

"We may be able to induce vomiting or give a dose of activated charcoal to stop the absorption of whatever they ate," Dr. Wismer says. "But once they're already having problems, once they're symptomatic, that limits what we can do."

Up to 10% of the cases Dr. Fox handles in the emergency room daily involve dogs that have swallowed something toxic or poisonous.

She says some of her most heartbreaking cases are when pet parents avoid bringing their dogs to the ER because they fear the cost. If a dog is in danger, waiting will only risk their lives, which could result in an even more significant medical bill.

"It kills me when people don't bring their dog in right away because our biggest ability to save your dog's life is within the first couple of hours of ingestion," Dr. Fox says. "There are so many things we can do to try to prevent that toxicity from progressing. Some people come in and say, 'My dog ate all this ibuprofen yesterday.' Well, it's now too late. So, we cross our fingers and do what we can." 🐾

*Mary Schwager, "Watchdog Mary," is a television, print, and digital journalist who has won 17 Emmy awards for investigative and consumer reporting and several honors from The Dog Writers Association of America. Find her at [www.watchdogmary.com](http://www.watchdogmary.com).*

## HOW TO CONTACT ANIMAL POISON CONTROL

The ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. For an animal poison-related emergency, AAPCC can be reached via phone at (888) 426-4435.

For non-emergency information or to learn more about the Center, visit its website at [aspc.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control](http://aspc.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control).





# Old Dog, New Puppy?

*It can be challenging to support a senior dog and raise a puppy at the same time. Consider these issues before you take the leap.*

**A**s you see your beloved old dog's muzzle beginning to gray, it's natural to consider adding a puppy to the household. You'd love for the next generation to learn from the best, and honestly you're thinking it would soften the eventual loss to have another dog already in the family.

But balancing the needs of dogs at opposite ends of the age spectrum can be tricky. Sure, sometimes it's immediate bliss, with the senior feeling revitalized and stepping up to mentor the puppy! But just as often, the elderly dog is miserable with all of the new bouncy energy in the house, and the humans end up feeling divided and unable to give either dog what they need.

It's hard to know beforehand where your individual household will fall on that spectrum, but it's wise to be prepared—so you're ready to jump in to make it a success after all. Here are some questions to consider as you ponder whether it's the best time for you to add that puppy to the family. (For much more detail, check out our new book: *Old Dog, New Dog: Supporting Your Aging Friend and Welcoming A New One.*)

## PROTECT YOUR SENIOR FROM PUPPY ENERGY

People reasonably assume that if their older dog has always played well with his buddies, he will love having a puppy to play with at home. But—unlike those solid adult dog friends—puppies have not yet developed their social skills. They constantly jump in faces, bite too hard, grab tender body parts, and pounce unexpectedly. They haven't yet learned that other dogs don't enjoy all of that.

Perhaps you're thinking that your senior dog is just the one to teach the puppy canine manners and communication skills. Well, that can be true, to a point. But the best lessons are taught by a willing professor, not one acting under duress. Expecting your senior to babysit the rude toddler 24/7 is



Credit: Nancy Kerns

unfair. (After all, the dogs didn't choose this living situation—the humans did.) If you want your senior to guide well, interacting with the puppy must be optional, or you'll find your puppy gets the wrong lessons.

And here's a key point that's easy to miss: A typical senior has begun to decline physically. Mind you, even if you are a very caring owner, there may be diminishment that you are not aware of. They have anything from minor aches to obvious tender spots that they protect. They may have begun to lose some eyesight or some hearing. That means the incoming puppy missile is not just irritating but is, in fact, a little scary for them. That can result in unwelcoming behavior you never would have anticipated: "Oh my gosh, I've never seen her snarl like that!"

So, if you bring a puppy into the household, your first priority is to protect your senior's peace—physically and psychologically. If your older dog would normally relax into long naps but is perpetually on guard because an enthusiastic, full-of-energy pup might barrel in at any moment, we've let her down.

*During the first few weeks, a simple height advantage can be all a nice old senior dog needs to find a temporary escape from puppy enthusiasm. Soon enough, the pup will be able to get up there, but by then their friendship will have advanced.*



Just because she's being "nice" about it—i.e., hasn't growled, snapped, or bitten—doesn't mean it's OK! We often hear folks raving about how tolerant an old dog has been with a puppy, and we keep thinking, "Please don't put that sweet old soul in a position where she constantly has to tolerate things." She's earned her peaceful, undisturbed days.

Here are things you can do in the first weeks and months to set up both dogs for success:

- ✓ Always provide an escape option for your senior.
- ✓ Closely supervise the times the dogs have free access to each other, observing body language closely and cheerily redirecting when either of them is overwhelmed.
- ✓ Never punish your old dog for growling; growling is good communication. If the puppy does not immediately adjust the behavior that elicited the growl, it's time for you to step in to give your oldie a break by engaging the pup elsewhere.
- ✓ When you can't actively supervise, separate the dogs. Use pens, gates, crates, leashes, and a division of labor between the humans.

✓ Build the dogs' relationship by leading fun, joint, controlled activities—like a simple three-minute treat-filled training session or a 10-minute sniffari on leash. Dogs feel safer when a situation is predictable, so these moments create a positive association and a feeling of trust.

### ENRICH (AND TIRE OUT!) YOUR PUP

The happiest senior-puppy matches are the ones where the puppy has plenty of outlets—other than the senior—for all that puppy energy and curiosity. There are so many options, and the best approach is to combine them all:

■ **Playdates with well-matched puppies or puppy-friendly dogs are absolute game-changers.**

■ **Brain games.** A three-minute training session—sit, touch, spin, through, down, come—does wonders for a bored pup looking for engagement. Throw half a dozen of those into your day and your pup will be less desperate to obsess over your senior in the constant search for fun.

■ **Outdoor time.** Half an hour spent outside fulfilling natural canine

needs (such as sniffing and digging) does wonders.

■ **Foraging.** Give your puppy a way to forage "naturally" for food; ditch the bowl and offer meals in the form of food scatters, stuffed Toppls, puzzle toys, and homemade challenges, like kibble hidden in crumpled paper stuffed inside the cardboard box that came today.

■ **Goofy human play.** Structured games like fetch can be great, but don't forget to relax and have fun bonding with your puppy by offering play bows, rolling around, etc.

When all of that happens regularly, puppies come back to their senior nicely spent. They say hi to their sweet old dog sibling with a nice sniff and flop down to relax. Now that's a puppy an old dog can start to like! You might even finally see the senior actually approach the puppy: "Hey, um, I haven't seen you much today . . ."

### MAKE TIME FOR PUPPY SOCIALIZATION

Brand new puppies who have a senior to toddle after usually take to the idea of a leash walk weeks before singletons do. That's great!

However, the key role of the first few months of walks is to socialize the pup. This is how we carefully introduce him to the world, helping him feel comfortable with all of the new things he'll encounter. To do that well, it's critical to note the puppy's reaction in the moment and dial the intensity of each experience up or down to meet him where he is.

For example, let's say you want to get your pup to feel comfortable around kids, so

*Watch out if you find yourself saying, "Our sweet old dog is being so tolerant! She lets the puppy climb all over her." Ack! She shouldn't have to put up with constant puppy shenanigans. Make sure she always has a true choice and an escape route.*



• Credit: Kathy Callahan

## HOW TO INTRODUCE A PUPPY TO YOUR SENIOR DOG

Want your senior and your puppy to start off on the right paw? Don't just wing it! Instead, the day before the puppy comes home, create a clear plan for the introduction.

Plenty of people will give you a detailed map of the one way that works. Hogwash. There are countless approaches that can succeed, as long as you commit fully to this principle:

**AGENCY:** Both dogs need to feel that they have the ability to give themselves the distance and time they need to assess the situation.

When you're holding a puppy tight in your arms, or restraining your adult with a leash, it interferes with their sense of agency. That's why the best introductions often happen through a see-through barrier (pen, fence, gate) when both dogs have four paws on the floor. That way they each have the option of moving closer to sniff or farther away to observe.

The other general key to success: Be patient. If there's good body language on both sides—obvious interest, no retreats, loose bodies, play bows—fantastic! Now, though I know you want the answer to be “remove the barrier,” continue to wait. Sometimes, to go fast you have to go slow. The more time you give these two to get to feel comfortable with each other while that barrier is still up, the faster you'll get to the time when it's safe to remove that barrier.

(For much more detail, check out our book *Old Dog, New Dog: Supporting Your Aging Friend and Welcoming a New One.*)

you've approached a fenced playground where kids are having loud, fast fun. If the puppy is interested and moving toward the sounds, wonderful! If he's hanging back or turning away, though, you'll want to stop at a comfortable distance and allow him to observe.

What does that mean for your senior? If your senior is an absolute angel out in the world and can constantly model a calm, confident reaction to loud trucks, fast scooters, barking dogs, and unpredictable kids, and will have the patience to stop, wait, and turn around a dozen times each walk, then your senior is a wonderful addition to your socialization adventures. But for most of us it's too hard to socialize a puppy well with any other dog also in tow.

So, think about how you might find time to socialize your puppy

well—without depriving your senior. Maybe every day as you head out with your puppy, the pattern is that the senior always gets a frozen stuffed food toy or special cuddle time with another member of the household.

### WHAT ABOUT WHEN YOUR SENIOR DECLINES?

It's natural to wish for new beginnings and some fresh joy when you begin to feel sad that losing your senior is around the corner. A puppy can be just the thing, truly! Though the demands of puppyhood are high, there is much sweetness, laughter, and new life folded into that package.

However, let's picture that you're just able to make it work and you're keeping all of the balls in the air. But then . . . your senior's health begins to decline. How will you feel as you're

Credit: Kathy Callahan



*Twelve-year-old Nala and puppy Georgie were first introduced through a gate. This photo was taken after the calm, interested body language from both dogs signaled that they were ready for the gate to be removed. This stage, with free access to each other, requires close supervision.*

navigating meds and diagnoses and how to best support your old friend—when at the same time you're trying to find the time and energy to potty-train and socialize a puppy? Maybe it'll feel like too much. Or maybe switching gears between those two dear dogs at that time is just what the doctor ordered for you. It's different for everyone. We just want you to take a moment and think it through before diving in.

Of course, we hope your senior has years and years of good time left. You may get all the way through puppyhood with a very healthy senior, and then when she nears the end you've got a lovely young adult dog at your side who has been fully shaped by your dear old friend. That's the dream. 🐾

*Kathy Callahan is the author of Welcoming Your Puppy from Planet Dog, and her business focuses on helping clients through puppyhood. Helen St. Pierre is the founder of the senior animal rescue and sanctuary Old Dogs Go to Helen and the owner of No Monkey Business Dog Training. They combined their expertise to write Old Dog, New Dog: Supporting Your Aging Best Friend and Welcoming a New One.*



HEALTH

# Dog Dental Insurance

*For a healthy young dog, the cost of dental insurance will likely be more expensive than regular veterinary care, but that can change quickly in the event of illness or injury.*



Credit: R.A. Kearton | Getty Images

*Most dogs will experience some form of dental disease during their lives. The right canine dental insurance can help mitigate the costs of preventing, diagnosing, and treating tooth problems in dogs.*

By the time they're 3 years old, most American dogs have active dental disease, and its treatment can be expensive. Dog dental insurance might save thousands of dollars in dental care, but if your dog never needs a dentist, you could pay hundreds of dollars every year for insurance you never use. Or your insurance plan might not cover your dog's treatment. Is canine dental insurance worth the cost?

## HOW DENTAL INSURANCE FOR DOGS WORKS

Dental insurance for dogs is not sold alone. It's sold as part of a comprehensive illness-and-accident pet insurance policy.

In most cases, you pay for veterinary services when they are performed, then submit a claim with itemized receipts to your insurance company for reimbursement. Dental coverage is subject to waiting periods specified in the pet insurance policy, usually between two and 30 days before a treated condition is eligible for reimbursement.

Pet health policies do not cover pre-existing conditions, so it makes sense to enroll at-risk dogs before they develop gingivitis or periodontal disease.

Most canine dental insurance plans cover:

- Treatment for periodontal disease, gingivitis, oral tumors, and stomatitis (inflammation of the mouth).
- Emergency procedures such as treatment for illnesses and accidents including tooth extractions, root canals, X-rays, and prescription medications.
- Treatment of fractures and other trauma injuries to the teeth and jaws.

Basic illness-and-accident policies do *not* cover the following, but they may be provided for in an add-on wellness policy:

- Annual dental exams
- Routine tooth cleaning
- Dietary supplements and dental chews

Dental coverage in an illness-and-accident policy requires:

- Annual dental examinations
- Following your veterinarian's specific recommendations for routine care

Illness-and-accident policies that include dental coverage do not usually pay for annual exams or tooth cleaning unless they are part of the treatment plan for a dog who developed dental disease after being enrolled. Dental exams and tooth cleanings are preventive measures, and in most cases those expenses are covered or partially covered by optional add-on wellness policies.

## INSURANCE POLICY TERMS

Every policy that pays for illnesses, accidents, and dental procedures for dogs will define the policy's:



- ✓ Annual limits (maximum payouts per year)
- ✓ Reimbursement rates (such as 70% or 90% of eligible veterinary expenses, up to the policy's limit)
- ✓ Co-insurance (the difference between the reimbursement rate and 100%, which is your responsibility)
- ✓ Annual deductible rates (the amount you pay for covered conditions before being reimbursed)

If your insured dog is in an accident or becomes ill, you are responsible for paying the policy's deductible, plus your co-insurance percentage of remaining eligible expenses, plus any veterinary treatment fees exceeding the policy's annual limit, if your policy has one.

## FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE COST

Monthly premiums for dog dental insurance depend on:

- The type of coverage and its limits
- The dog's breed and age
- The dog's health condition
- Location (city and state)
- The insurance provider and its underwriting criteria
- Deductibles and reimbursement rates
- Optional add-ons, such as wellness care plans
- Discounts for insuring multiple pets and in some cases registered service or therapy dogs or the owner's military service

Some breed-specific factors can affect dental coverage. Breeds with potentially higher dental insurance costs include:

- Small and toy breeds such as Chihuahuas, Yorkshire Terriers, Pomeranians, Maltese, Toy Poodles, and Shih Tzus, which often have crowded teeth in their small mouths, leading to plaque buildup and gum disease

- Brachycephalic (flat-faced) breeds such as French and English Bulldogs, Pugs, Boxers, and Boston Terriers, whose compact skulls can overcrowd teeth
- Breeds prone to periodontal pockets, tartar buildup, and gum disease such as Dachshunds, Shetland Sheepdogs, Greyhounds, and Cavalier King Charles Spaniels

## IS DOG DENTAL INSURANCE WORTH IT?

Consider how an unexpected bill for your dog's dental problems, illness, or an accident could affect your family's finances. For example, treating periodontal disease or gingivitis can cost between \$300 and \$1,000. Simple extractions average \$35 to \$75 per tooth and most root canals cost between \$1,000 and \$3,000. Advanced oral surgery can be even more expensive.

According to organizations that track pet health expenses, the average vet visit for dogs in the United States is under \$200. If your dog remains healthy and accident-free, the monthly premiums for pet insurance will quickly exceed the cost of routine checkups.

However, if your dog is injured or becomes seriously ill, his treatment can cost more than many pet owners can afford. Finding a balance between the risks your dog faces, insurance that covers those risks, and what you can afford requires research, but it doesn't have to be daunting. The most common conditions treated by veterinarians involve dental illness, so if your dog is likely to develop tooth or gum problems, focus on the details of insurance policies that include dental care.

## COMPARING DENTAL INSURANCE PLANS

Thanks to their interactive websites, it's easy to compare the policies and rates of leading pet insurance companies. Do this by visiting insurance websites and entering your

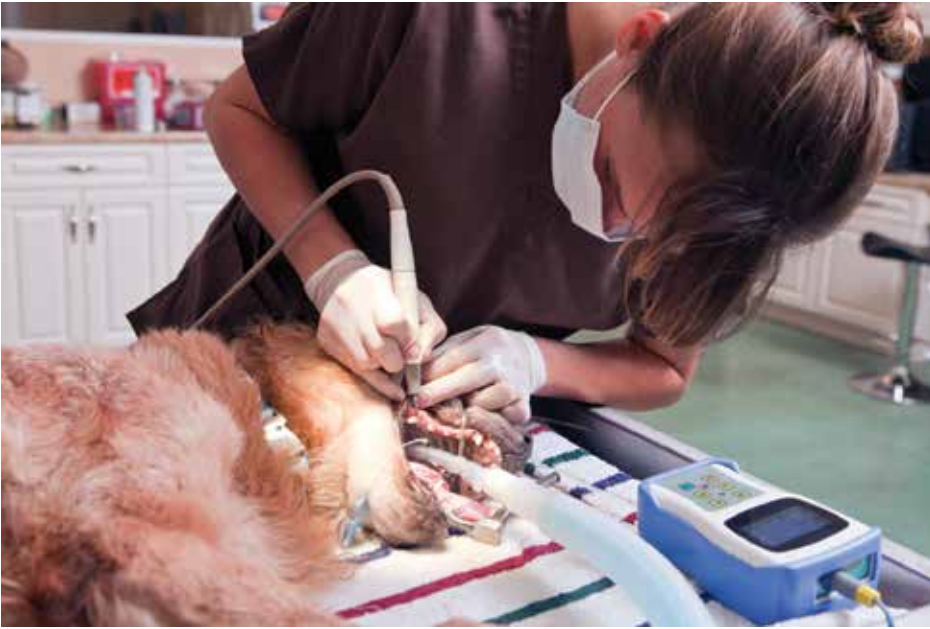
dog's breed, age, location, and other requested information. Study everything the policy does and does not cover.

■ **ASPCA Pet Health Insurance** covers tooth extractions for dental accidents, treatment for conditions like gingivitis and periodontal disease, and tooth cleanings prescribed for dental diseases in its basic policy. It does not cover cosmetic procedures. The website offers different combinations of annual limits, reimbursement rates, and deductibles, such as limits of \$2,500, \$5,000, \$7,000, or \$10,000; 70%, 80%, or 90% reimbursements; and \$500, \$250, or \$100 deductibles. A Basic Preventive Care add-on policy covers preventive tooth cleaning.

■ **Embrace Pet Insurance** covers periodontal disease, abscessed teeth, misaligned teeth, gingivitis, tooth loss, jaw fractures, oral trauma, and tooth fractures in its illness-and-accident policy. Options include policies with annual limits of \$5,000, \$8,000, \$10,000, \$15,000, or unlimited; deductibles of \$100, \$250, \$500, \$750, or \$1,000; and reimbursement rates of 70%, 80%, or 90%. A Wellness Rewards add-on program covers preventive dental cleaning.

■ **Fetch Pet Insurance** covers dental treatments for dogs regardless of age. Its dental coverage includes treatments for periodontal disease, oral tumors, fractured teeth, root canals, crowns, gum disease, tooth resorption, tooth extractions, and gingivitis. Pre-existing conditions, cosmetic and orthodontic procedures, including implants, fillings, and caps, are not included. Routine dental cleanings, which are not in the standard plan, are covered in a Fetch Wellness add-on. The standard policy has an annual limit of \$5,000, annual deductible of \$500, and 70% reimbursement rate.

■ **Figo Pet Insurance** provides



*Depending on where you live and your dog's age, breed, and size, veterinary dental cleanings may cost from \$300 to well over \$1,000, so an insurance plan that pays for annual cleanings may be very helpful.*

an active dental disease, caps, crowns, root canals, fillings, implants, or planing, even when related to periodontal disease.

The most popular plan among its several options has an annual limit of \$10,000 with a \$500 deductible and 90% reimbursement rate. A Preventive Essentials add-on wellness plan covers dental cleaning.

dental coverage in its basic illness-and-accident policy, which covers expenses for the treatment of dental illness or accidents. Its most popular policy has a limit of \$10,000, \$750 deductible, and 70% reimbursement rate. An optional Basic Wellness plan covers annual tooth cleanings.

■ **Lemonade Pet Insurance** is available in only 38 states. Its basic illness-and-accident policy, which pays a maximum of \$5,000 per year after a \$250 deductible for 80% of covered claims, does not cover dental procedures. A Preventive+ add-on wellness policy includes routine dental cleaning and dental illness diagnosis and treatment, such as tooth extractions, root canals, gingivitis, and periodontal disease.

■ **Odie Pet Insurance** includes dental care in its basic illness-and-accidents policy, which does not cover pre-existing conditions except for those that were cured at least 18 months before applying.

Beginning at age 3 for periodontal disease coverage, teeth must be annually cleaned and examined under general anesthesia and any periodontal disease found during the exam must be treated before periodontal disease coverage becomes available. The basic policy pays up to \$10,000

(annual limit) reimbursing 90% of veterinary fees with a deductible of \$500. A Wellness Plus add-on plan covers annual tooth cleaning.

■ **Pets Best Pet Insurance** from Progressive covers dental emergencies, periodontal disease, extractions, and endodontic treatment for canine and carnassial teeth with its basic illness-and-accidents policy. There is no annual limit (maximum payment) to coverage. The basic policy has a \$500 deductible and 80% reimbursement rate. An add-on policy covers dental cleanings.

■ **Prudent Pet Insurance** includes dental procedures in its basic illness-and-accidents policy, which has several options. The most popular has a \$10,000 annual limit, \$500 deductible, and 80% reimbursement rate. Annual cleanings are covered under a wellness add-on policy.

■ **Pumpkin Care Health Insurance** offers an illness-and accidents policy that covers dental illnesses such as periodontal disease and gingivitis and other dental procedures. It does not cover pre-existing conditions or dental cleaning except for dogs with active dental disease.

Not covered are routine dental cleanings for dogs who do not have

■ **Spot Pet Insurance** covers dental expenses in its basic illness-and-accidents policy. The annual limit for illness-and-accident claims is \$2,500, and the policy covers 70% or 90% of eligible expenses with deductibles of \$250 or \$500. An add-on wellness plan covers annual dental cleanings.

■ **Trupanion Pet Insurance** from State Farm offers basic policies for dogs up to 14 years old that cover treatment for new dental illnesses and injuries, such as tooth extractions, caps, crowns, root canals, jaw fractures, tooth repairs, root abscesses, and tooth resorption.

The policy does not cover pre-existing conditions, routine dental cleanings, or preventive care. The insurance reimburses 90% of eligible expenses after a lifetime (one-time) deductible has been paid for the condition. Trupanion pays veterinary fees directly to clinics at checkout (no reimbursement application needed), and there is no reimbursement maximum (no per-incident, annual, or lifetime limits). 🐾

*A long-time contributor to WDJ, CJ Puotinen is the author of The Encyclopedia of Natural Pet Care and Natural Remedies for Dogs and Cats. Her books can be purchased through Whole-Dog-Journal.com.*



# Can Dogs Get Bird Flu?

*While the most recent strain of bird flu is often fatal to cats, no cases have been reported in dogs to date.*

Bird flu is making the news a lot lately, and you may wonder if dogs can catch it. Also called avian influenza or referred to as H5N1, this virus has the potential to expand its horizons beyond birds to humans and other mammals. As of this writing, no dogs have become clinically ill or died from this recent strain of H5N1 bird flu.

However, dogs can become infected with “H3N8 or H3N2 influenza viruses, but those are different forms than the current outbreak of H5N1,” according to Cornell University’s College of Veterinary Medicine.

A report from Ontario, Canada, in April 2023 confirmed the case and death of a dog with avian flu. In this case, the dog scavenged a dead goose who was infected.

Bird flu has been found in:

- ✓ **Dairy Cattle.** Cows usually have mild symptoms, but the virus can contaminate their milk.
- ✓ **Humans.** Dairy workers have gotten mild cases of this virus, primarily as eye infections, from exposure to infected cows.
- ✓ **Cats.** Bird flu is commonly fatal in cats. Neurologic signs are generally the first clue that this is more than a standard respiratory infection and sudden death may be the first indication of a truly serious problem. Farm cats have been infected via raw milk, feral and outdoor cats have gotten infected from catching sick birds, and indoor-only cats who have eaten raw foods made from infected poultry have died.
- ✓ **Foxes and Mink.** In Finland, large numbers of foxes and mink on fur farms have died due to avian influenza.

## MANAGING EXPOSURE

The number of bird flu cases increases and decreases seasonally, which makes sense: It’s spread by migrating birds. You can’t put your

dog in a bubble to prevent all exposure to birds. But you can exercise sensible management:

### ■ **Don’t feed raw milk or dairy products made from raw milk.**

While the processing to make cheese or yogurt might kill the H5N1 virus, no one knows for sure at this time.

### ■ **Avoid feeding raw diets that contain poultry.**

While your dog might not die, he can get sick if the meat is contaminated and his feline buddy could very well die. Practice good food handling techniques if you feed any raw diet. Freezing and freeze drying do not kill the virus.

### ■ **Keep your dog away from dead or ill birds.**

Don’t frequent parks, ponds, or any areas where large flocks of birds congregate, especially in spring and fall when there are large migrations of songbirds and waterfowl.

### ■ **Remove bird feeders.**

This is especially important if there are reports of avian flu in your area. In that case, take feeders down to discourage birds from lingering in your yard.

## NO BIRD FLU CANINE VACCINE

There is no vaccine for avian flu, and your dog’s canine flu vaccination will not provide cross protection. So far, there are no cases where a sick human gave a dog bird flu or vice versa, but the potential is there. The more cases of bird flu occur, the greater the likelihood of mutations that would allow the spread to more species.

Work in the United States on bird flu has been greatly curtailed, but the virus possesses the potential for causing a pandemic if mutations allow for more spread. 🐾

*Deb M. Eldredge, DVM, is an award-winning writer and the technical editor of Cornell’s DogWatch.*



*Although no dog cases of bird flu have been reported in the current outbreak, it makes sense to keep your dog away from birds.*



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