



## Handling Exercises for Puppies

It is important to practise handling exercises with your puppy from day one. Teaching your puppy to remain calm and confident whilst being handled, will ensure that as an adult dog he can cope with every day scenarios from being groomed to being examined by the vet.

### **Grooming:**

The type of tools needed for grooming will depend on every individual pet, and the type of fur he has. When teaching a puppy to accept being groomed, it is sensible to start with a soft brush, that won't pull or tug his coat, to get him used to the sensation (a Zoom Groom is ideal). Start by holding a treat in one hand under your puppy's nose, whilst slowly and gently running the brush over him with the other hand. It is important to verbally praise your puppy for remaining calm throughout the process.

To begin with, your puppy will need fairly frequent rewards to encourage him to remain patient and to learn to enjoy being groomed. When your puppy is used to the process and is able to remain relaxed throughout, you can start to reduce the amount of food rewards he receives. In time, you will be able to groom your puppy without food under his nose; although it is important to still reward him intermittently to reinforce appropriate behaviour. Should your puppy begin to get wound up by the process, and start play biting for example, it may be necessary to go back a step, and increase the food rewards he receives for remaining calm. This will help to keep him relaxed and without the opportunity to become frustrated and fidget. Some puppies accept and enjoy being groomed very quickly, whilst others may take slightly longer, and may need higher value treats for this exercise.

Never tell your puppy off for becoming fidgety, but instead praise him when he is calm and relaxed. Grooming can be quite stressful for some dogs, so it is important to teach him to enjoy the process. Always keep each grooming session short and end on a positive note (i.e. with him relaxed).

### **Handling:**

Throughout your puppy's life, there will be many instances when he will need to be physically handled; for example, during trips to the vet, treating a cut paw, removing ticks, etc. In order to ensure that such occasions are as least stressful and easy as possible for your dog to endure, it is important to teach him to accept being handled from as early as possible.

Start by holding a treat under your puppy's nose to keep him occupied, whilst you run your other hand over his body. Pick each foot up in turn, rewarding him after holding each paw for a second or two to start with. Once you are able to pick each foot up without your puppy fidgeting, you can progress to examining your puppy's paws and toes more thoroughly before each treat. Whilst doing so, make sure you are verbally praising your puppy for remaining calm. In the same way, you can practise examining his tail. To examine his eyes, start by gently holding his head still for a second, before giving him a treat.

Once he has learnt to accept that, progress to gently examining his eyes, rewarding intermittently. Similarly, you can inspect his ears and teeth in the same way. Gently lift your puppy's lips, praising him calmly as you do so, and give him a treat after a second or two. In time you can increase the duration of the examination before rewarding him. This is something your puppy will need to learn to accept and experience during his trips to the vet, so it is important to practise such exercises to build his confidence, before expecting him to accept a stranger to do the same.

### **Teeth Cleaning:**

Toothbrushes for dogs come in many different forms. Some are similar to a human toothbrush, others are designed to sit over your finger like a glove, so using your finger to brush your dog's teeth. As always, it is important to teach your puppy to accept having his teeth brushed, rather than forcing him to endure it.

If you have practised handling your puppy as above, he should be confident having his teeth looked at before you start the cleaning process. Start by allowing him to lick the toothpaste off the brush, so he learns that the toothbrush coming towards him is not a scary object. Next, gently lift his lips, and brush the teeth at the front of his mouth for a second or two before stopping and giving him a treat. Many puppies aren't comfortable with the sensation of tooth brushing, so it's important to keep the sessions short before rewarding. This will teach him that if he remains calm and accepts his teeth being brushed, a positive reward will follow. In time, you can increase the duration of the brushing before each reward, as well as progressing to brushing the molars at the back of his mouth too. If your puppy becomes anxious or fidgety, go back a step; make the sessions shorter and more rewarding for him, before expecting him to cope with all his teeth being brushed in one go.

### **Ear inspection and cleaning:**

Whilst some breeds of dog are more predisposed to ear infection and dirty ears than others, it is important for all dogs to learn to accept having their ears examined and potentially cleaned. Start by holding a treat under your puppy's nose with one hand, whilst using your other hand to lift, stroke and touch your puppy's ears. If he accepts this without fuss, progress to examining his ears with both hands, whilst calmly praising him, and rewarding him with a treat at the end. Once your puppy is able to remain relaxed throughout this process, you can begin to gently clean inside his ears with some wet cotton wool, getting him used to the sensation, before rewarding him. As always, ensure your puppy is calm and relaxed before expecting too much from him. If he struggles, go back a step, and make the process more rewarding for him.

### **Progression:**

Once your dog is happy to be handled by yourself, consider asking other members of the family and friends to do the same exercises. This should be closely supervised, but it should be done to ensure your dog is used to be handled by various people of different ages, genders, sizes, etc.

### **Please consider:**

Some dogs are more accepting of handling if they are occupied with something. A stuffed Kong or Snuffle Treat Mat work well to take your dog's mind off of the process and give them a positive association to it. Some dogs are more tolerant of grooming if they have a toy in their mouth rather than using a food reward.