**Take Home Information for Our New Puppy Owners**

Have patience, as it may take him several days to adjust to his new surroundings.

Your puppy is eating three meals a day.  At each of his meals he is eating 1-1.5 cups of ProPlan Puppy Formula.  You will receive a bag once you pick up your puppy.  If you choose to feed another brand, we would recommend Diamond Lamb & Rice (it's what we feed our adult dogs), Nutro Natural Choice, Nature's Choice, Nature’s Recipe, or any of the high-quality foods that DO NOT CONTAIN SOY!

Soy is common in dog food because it is a cheap source of protein compared to meat and maximizes profit to the company.  But bear in mind that the canine in the wild is a carnivore, and is not given to eating beans as their primary source of protein.  We have found that it contributes to poor coat quality in many Labrador bloodlines -- sometimes amounting to an almost allergic reaction -- and also has been questioned as having a possible link to "bloat", which is a potential life-threatening condition affecting the gastro-intestinal tract.  We do, however, encourage a little supplemental feeding of vegetables like carrots, green beans, etc., as a source of fiber.

You can also add a tablespoon of cottage cheese or a quality "moist" canned chicken formula to his food and cover with just enough hot water to moisten the food and slightly soften each kernel.  Go easy on this, though -- canned moist dog food is a major contributor to the accumulation of tartar on the teeth, with the same unfortunate result over the years as in humans. The water can be reduced over the next month as his teeth become strong enough to crunch the dry nuggets. Supplementing a high-quality dog food with vitamins is unnecessary. Everything he needs is in the food.

We keep our puppies on three meals a day until they are six months old, and then reduce to twice a day.  We also recommend that you discontinue the puppy formula of whatever food you are feeding about 5-6 months of age (or after the second 40-pound bag) and switch to the adult formula of the same brand.  The number of feedings can be twice a day if your schedule does not permit mid-day feeding, but if your puppy seems hungry do not fall into the temptation of feeding him before bedtime unless you don't mind getting up in the middle of the night to clean up!!  Just adjust the amount fed at the two meals; for example, if he would be eating 1 cup three times a day adjust to 1.5 cups twice daily to equal the same daily amount.   This is not a hard and fast rule, and should be varied to fit needs and size of the individual dog.  The total amount of the food fed at each meal should be increased as the pup grows.  It is difficult for us to tell you how much, or when to increase, as each dog should be fed according to his needs.  This varies greatly with each dog and depends on several other factors such as exercise, size, time of year and type of food.  Please do be aware that it is better to have your pup a little on the thin side than to allow him to become grossly overweight.  Overfeeding your pup is doing him a great disservice. But it is a thin line -- if you undernourished the puppy (especially in the first 6 months) it can affect his long-term adult stature. Some people may disagree, but we believe there is no such thing as a "fat" puppy up until about 3 months of age. After that, what we look for is the visibility of the last rib as he trots across your field of vision. If you can see two ribs, he's too thin. If you can't see the hint of the last rib, he's probably just a tad too heavy.

As a guideline, we feed our adult bitches (weighing 65 pounds) one and a half cups twice a day, and our adult dogs (weighing 80-90 pounds) two cups twice a day.  (NOTE: all this feeding information is based on feeding a high quality premium food containing the following approximate amounts of protein:  Adult food, 24-25%; Puppy food, 26-28%; Performance food (actively campaigned show dogs and dogs undergoing intensive gun dog training), 30% approximately.  The feeding of foods containing higher percentages of protein is not recommended, as it encourages rapid growth that can in turn contribute to joint problems like hip dysplasia, etc.).

The Labrador needs a little oil added to his daily diet to maintain a shiny, healthy coat.  At 2 months of age we begin the introduction of safflower oil to his food.  Introduce this slowly--a quarter teaspoon each feeding, working up to a teaspoon per day over the next week or two--to avoid loose stools and increase it to 2 teaspoons at six months continued for the life of the dog.

You may wonder about adding other things to the pup's diet.  Many leftovers from the table are harmless and can be added after 3 months of age, but go easy.  You don't want him to become a picky eater and only eat if his regular food is buried in mounds of steak, eggs, chops, and gravy.  Use table scraps as occasional treats in his food rather than routine.  Suggested scraps are meat, beef and chicken fat, bacon grease (only a smidge), cereal, cooked vegetables, and cooked eggs. DO NOT FEED:  Pork, ham, ham fat, raw eggs, corn, raw vegetables or fruit or any type of meat bones.  If you feel your pup needs something to chew on we suggest compressed rawhide chews from a quality pet store.  Avoid rawhide from the Far East or Mexico as it is often cured with arsenic.  AND PLEASE BE AWARE THAT CHOCOLATE IS HIGHLY TOXIC TO DOGS.

Until your puppy becomes adjusted to his new surroundings he should be fed in a quiet and rather secluded place where he can be alone.  After he has become adjusted to his new home and is eating all his meals well, he can be fed in the kitchen or outside.  Give the puppy 20 minutes to eat his food and then pick up the dish.  Food should not be offered again until his next feeding time.  Do not leave uneaten food in the dish after the 20 minutes are up.  Fresh, clean water should, of course, be available always.

Labradors, as a breed, have hip problems as they are fast maturing, heavy bodied dogs.  These hip problems can be environmentally influenced a great deal. Earlier we cautioned against overfeeding your puppy.  The more weight they are forced to carry at a young age, the more stress is placed over the hind quarters and thus the hip sockets are strained.  Also, try not to let your pup run around on linoleum or slippery floors. If you watch your pup on a slippery floor, you will see that his hind legs will slide out from under him and he ends up with all four legs going in different direction.  This again puts too much stress on those joints.  Likewise, too much exercise for a pup is bad.  He can play in the back yard with you and the kids all he wants, but running after a bicycle or following a jogger for miles, especially on pavement, should really be saved until he is close to 2 years old and fully mature.  A person matures at such a rate that all his bones and muscles take up to 20 years to form.  A dog has all his bones and muscles formed by the end of his first 14 months or so...he must take it sort of slow.  Many a pup has been structurally damaged by owners who insist on jogging with their dog or working strenuously in the field before the puppy is mature enough to handle this kind of orthopedic stress.

We do not bathe our Labs regularly.  Bathe only when necessary and brushing is necessary only to remove burrs and to hasten shedding (once or twice a year).  A good Labrador coat will stay healthy and shiny with a balanced diet including additional fat.  The dog's nails should be kept trimmed.  Purchase a pair of nail trimmers from the pet supply store and cut the tips off each week.  Your pup's ears should be checked for cleanliness about once a week or so, more often if he has been in water.  If cleaning is necessary use a Q-tip dipped in baby oil to clean the ears.   A small amount of ear powder puffed into each ear is a good preventative measure for ear problems.  If he has been swimming or playing in water, check to be sure the ears are dry...if needed, dab out extra moisture with a cotton ball.   Never let water remain in the ear canal as it will invariably set up ear infections just like in human babies. The presence of a sweet/pungent odor accompanied by copious amounts of wax indicate a yeast infection and must be attended to by your vet. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon in dogs with drooping ear flaps who also love the water!

DO NOT PLAY ROUGH WITH YOUR PUPPY.   Don't let the puppy develop bad habits such as jumping on you or the children, biting clothing, etc.  If you allow any dog--including ours--to "rule the roost" you are asking for problems. You must ALWAYS remain the "pack leader". Remember that your little puppy will weigh 65-90 pounds when grown.  Some of the bad habits that developed as a small pup will not be as cute or desirable when he is fully grown.  Fortunately, once corrected properly at an early age, Labradors generally learn their place in society easily, because they really do want to please their owner. DON'T LET HIM DO ANYTHING AS A PUPPY THAT YOU WON'T WANT HIM TO DO AS AN ADULT, WHEN HE IS LARGER....

As for discipline, we recommend the use of the word "NO" in a loud and stern voice.   A good verbal reprimand will usually be enough.  If not a shake by the scruff of the neck should be used.  You must remember, however, that just as soon as your pup has stopped doing what he wasn't supposed to do, he should be petted and praised.  Tell him what a good dog he is.  NEVER call your dog to you and then reprimand him, as he will associate coming when called with a punishment.  Go to him when he is doing something wrong, and don't forget the praise when he does something right.

Most people want to know about housebreaking.  A whole book could be written on the subject, but a few suggestions that we might make are: Take the pup out first thing in the morning, after each meal, after each nap, after each play session when he stops and starts to sniff around, and the last thing each night.   Pick him up and CARRY him to the door and put him on the spot where you would like him to go.  This will eliminate the possibility of an accident on the way.  Praise him highly when he goes outside and scold him when he has an accident in the house, putting him outside immediately.  After he has gone outside let him have some freedom of the areas of the house he will be allowed in.

We STRONGLY recommend a size 400 dog crate for confinement at night or when you are away.  It will also be very handy when you are too busy to watch him.  The pup will usually be clean and will avoid soiling his "den" at all costs.  Bear in mind that it is the rare puppy that can hold it more than about 4-6 hours until he is about 3 months old.   Be patient--it will come. If you can concentrate on housebreaking for the first two weeks or so you will not encounter any problems thereafter.  Your puppy has been trained to grass, pavement, and other outdoor surfaces so getting him to go outside should not be a problem.
NEVER, EVER -- UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES-- PUT A PUPPY OR AN ADULT DOG IN HIS CRATE WITH A COLLAR ON! We cannot emphasize this enough!!!!

Contact your veterinarian for vaccinations that your pup will need.  To be fully protected your pup needs another set of shots and worming’s at about 9 and 12 weeks (we have already given the first set at six weeks) as well as a booster about once a year.   A rabies shot should be given at 4 months of age, following your vet's advice thereafter. Vaccination protocols differ from one part of the country to another, so be sure to follow the advice given by your vet.
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Please feel free to call on us if we can be helpful in any way.  We hope that you and your new puppy will have many happy and healthy years together.