

THE CARE OF YOUR GREAT DANE PUPPY

Congratulations! You've just purchased a Great Dane puppy. However, you're very confused. The person you purchased the puppy from didn't give you any real care information. Wanting to do the best for your puppy, you've talked to other Dane owners, your vet, and a couple of established breeders. You've received conflicting information and don't know what to do.

Dane Outreach has prepared this brochure as basic information on the care of your new Dane puppy in hopes it will help clarify some of the commonly-asked questions new Dane owners have about the care of their new puppy.

FEEDING AND DIET

What to feed your new puppy can be the most confusing question of all. If you ask a vet or a pet food salesperson unfamiliar with Danes, you may be told your puppy has to be fed a puppy food to meet his growth requirements. You may even be told to add vitamin and calcium supplements. Wrong! A Dane puppy should never be fed a puppy food! Experienced vets and long-term breeders will tell you the best diet for a Dane puppy is a quality dog food in the moderate protein range of around 21% to 23%. Why is that? Danes are an extremely fast-growing breed. At one point in your puppy's life he will gain up to five or more pounds a week. If you feed a puppy food, it forces too much growth too fast, and can lead to a number of growth and bone problems. The feeding of a moderate protein quality dog food will allow the puppy to grow at a slower rate. He will still meet his genetic potential on a moderate protein food.

Equally dangerous is giving your puppy a calcium supplement. Quality dog foods already have calcium in them. The ratio of calcium to phosphorus is very important in proper bone development, and the addition of a supplement can change that ration. An improper ratio can lead to bone problems. Some breeders add vitamin C to the diet, although many now consider this to be "old school".

Generally, dogs under 6 months of age should be fed three times a day and dogs over 6 months should be fed twice a day for life. A quiet time of one hour before and two hours after mealtime is recommended.

Puppies should be on the lean side, but not skinny. A Dane puppy in proper weight will have hips and spine covered, and you will just be able to see the outline of the last rib. Dane puppies should never be allowed to become fat as it is too hard on growing bones.

EAR CROPPING INFORMATION

A frequent question new Dane owners have is whether to crop their puppy or leave the ears natural. While that is an entirely personal issue with many pros and cons, the new Dane owner contemplating cropping should be aware of a few things before they have their new puppy cropped.

First, the age a puppy is cropped is of utmost importance. Most long-term breeders feel the best age for cropping is between seven and ten weeks of age. Anything done after that timeframe is much more difficult on the puppy. And while you may find a vet who will crop a six month old puppy, it's highly recommended you don't do it. It is very hard on the dog and the ears most likely will not stand properly.

Next, the vet you choose to do the cropping is very important. Cropping is an art. Just because a vet says he does cropping doesn't mean he does a good job at it! When you go to choose a vet for cropping, be sure you do your research. Ask long-term Dane breeders who they use. Ask to see pictures of Danes the vet has cropped so you have an idea what the ears will look like.

You also need to be aware that cropping alone will not result in standing ears. Proper and diligent ear taping is required for the ears to stand properly. The taping causes the cartilage to form "memory". Incorrect, sloppy or inconsistent taping will result in ears that don't stand, flop over the side of the head, or lean over the top of the head. If you cannot put the effort into proper after-care, do not crop the puppy.

It should be noted that uncropped Danes can sometimes have “flying” ears that don’t position themselves correctly on the side of the head. Instead, they may flop over the eyes. Some Dane owners consider this cute and don’t mind. However, if this is bothersome to the owner, ears will need to be glued or taped to achieve the proper set.

VET CARE

Choosing a vet qualified to care for your Dane puppy is very important. Danes are a unique breed, and you want to choose a vet who is familiar with them. Your best bet is to talk to other Dane owners and long-term breeders to find a referral. While any vet can handle routine procedures like vaccines and stitching up a cut, many do not recognize common Dane problems. HOD, a bone disease that can affect Danes, is not commonly seen in many other breeds and is often misdiagnosed. Danes can have tonsillitis, another problem not common in other breeds. Growing problems, coat problems due to thyroid imbalances, emergency treatment for bloat, and other Dane maladies need to be treated by a vet familiar with the breed.

The new Dane owner would be advised to do research on common Dane problems so they can be recognized if they occur. All Dane owners should be aware of what bloat is, its signs, and emergency treatment. Any Dane puppy with re-occurring lameness, or lameness lasting for more than two days should be radiographically evaluated by a competent vet. A minor problem can become quite serious if not dealt with quickly.

PUPPY CAUTIONS

For all their great size, Great Dane puppies are really quite fragile. Their large size and fast growth can result in clumsiness, which can in turn lead into injury. With a growing puppy, it is imperative to avoid hard bangs and falls—an injury to a growth plate during the growth stages can cause a serious, debilitating and expensive injury.

As a precaution, Dane puppies should not be allowed rough and tumble play with older dogs. Puppies playing together should be supervised carefully, as two puppies running full tilt towards each other can meet with a lot of force and resulting injury. Dane puppies should also be supervised going up and down stairs.

Slick surfaces in the house, such as hardwood floors, can pose a danger. It's easy for the puppy to run around a corner, slip and fall. Prevent these problems by having non-skid rugs down on slick surfaces.

Care should be used when children are playing with the puppy. Small kids should never be allowed to attempt to pick up or carry the puppy. They should understand that rough and tumble play is not allowed.

Caution should also be used when the puppy jumps out of cars or trucks. Many vets and breeders feel the jarring impact of the front feet striking the pavement can cause shoulder injury in young dogs.

Danes should not be jogged or road-worked until the growth plates are fully closed, generally around 15 to 18 months of age.

TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

The number one reason for giving up a dog of any breed is lack of training. Proper training and socialization is even more important with a Dane because of their large size. While your young puppy may seem a perfect angel, lack of training when a youngster will create an unruly, pain-in-the-rear adolescent!

The first step in training is the attendance of a good puppy kindergarten class. Puppy classes are for very young puppies-the earlier you can get your puppy into class, the better. Puppy classes should be fun, low-keyed training based on positive methods. Puppy training is fun, and it is a must with a Dane. It is the strong opinion of this author that a Dane should continue through several sessions of class during the first year of its life.

Socialization is of equal importance. The young Dane should have extensive socialization for the first year of its life to become accustomed to new people, places, sounds, and objects. The tendency to “baby” or be over-protective is a common trait with new Dane owners, and is very detrimental to the social well-being of the puppy. The puppy should learn to be comfortable going with new people, staying in strange places and being left someplace other than home. Basically, a socialized puppy is very adaptable and accepting of new situations.

The proper use of a crate is invaluable. Crate training will help make housebreaking go faster and prevent destruction from chewing. Many breeders consider the use of a crate mandatory for Great Dane owners.

Some Danes have a timid or shy tendency. That individual will require extensive socialization to prevent it from becoming a possible fear-biter when an adult. Caution should be used to not reinforce this negative behavior by petting the dog or saying “it’s ok” when it exhibits this tendency. A human-aggressive Dane is dangerous and unacceptable. Shy or aggressive dogs should never be used in a breeding program.

OWNER RESPONSIBILITY

Owning any dog requires responsibility and commitment, but owning a Dane requires even more. Every dog owner should follow the basics of responsible ownership, but the Dane owner must have even a higher level.

Keeping the Dane confined to your own fenced yard is important. Danes should never be allowed to roam free. Being a large breed, they can easily frighten people. They set up territories, and that might include your neighbors property. They can chase and kill livestock, and get into all sorts of mischief. They can become protective. Chaining and invisible collars are not considered proper means of containment for a Great Dane.

Always keep your Dane leashed and under control when in a public area. If in an off-leash area, be sure your dog is under total voice control. Always

pick up after your dog. Respect that many people are frightened of large dogs and give them space.

BREED RESPONSIBILITY

You love your Great Dane...he's the best dog you've ever had. Why not take it a step further and be as educated about the breed as you can? Chances are you will be approached and asked questions about your Dane while on walks and at classes. To be fair to the breed, you want to answer those questions as correctly as possible.

To do this, you might want to do a little homework first. You can obtain excellent information on the breed at these two websites: www.gdca.org and www.ginnie.com. Information that you might want to pass on would be:

- There are six recognized colors; fawn, brindle, black, blue, harlequin and mantle. These are the only colors that can be shown.
- Danes can come in other colors. Colors coming from the harlequin color family are whites (often deaf), merles, blacks, blacks with white.
- Occasionally dogs from mixed color breeding (see www.gdca.org for more information) may be white with fawn or brindle patches. Termed mismarks, these dogs can make good pets, but should never be bred or considered "rare" colors.
- Any color of Dane can be registered with the AKC. Only recognized colors can be shown. Certain colors should not be bred. The Great Dane Club of America has a color code, please visit the site for more information.
- Danes have a short life-span and can be prone to many health problems. Concerned breeders do health testing on all adult breeding stock to screen for these problems.
- Danes are not for all families as they are expensive to care for and require a high level of commitment. They need to be housepets and an important part of the family. They do not do well as outside dogs.
- Not all Danes get along with other animals. Some may be prone to chasing livestock or being dog-aggressive.

- Anyone who is involved in breeding Danes should be fully aware of what is involved. New breeders should work with an established mentor. Any person considering breeding their Dane should volunteer at least 6 months to a rescue group so they know the scope of the unwanted Dane problem.

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