

Early Out walks

Veterinary behaviorists are "FOR" and tell you why

The owner who is considering or has just acquired a puppy wishes to put all the chances on his side to ensure good health. In this area, the veterinarian is his best interlocutor.

It is also crucial that the puppy becomes an pleasant adult, non-aggressive and able to adapt to family living conditions. For this the owner takes advice, sometimes before the acquisition, from the veterinarian who will follow his dog for several years.

The veterinarian must be able to position himself and be able to give good advices for the animal welfare and its integration into society as early as possible.

Giving good advice is essential to ensure the future well-being of the animal (1).

Advice on early taking out and early exposure (from the first few days after the arrival of the family), giving a scientific opinion, is part of these good advices, and participates in the prevention of behavioral disorders, which is essential for this well-being.

We present the arguments "Against" that the owners advance most often and the arguments "For" that can be opposed in the interest of their dog.

Against	For
Do not take out the puppy until he has all his vaccinations up to date. This is what the veterinarian advised me for my previous dog.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Before the first vaccine, the puppy is protected by the maternal antibodies (2). - New vaccines are more effective; From the first injection, the protection is effective quickly. (3). - This idea was already false and it is responsible for many fearful behaviours in adulthood. Fear reactions often lead to aggressions.
I read on the internet that vaccine protection is not complete before the 12th week.	<p>It's true but...</p> <p>No owner sterilizes his clothes and shoes before returning home. He can therefore bring viruses in the environment in which the dog lives. There are almost as many viruses in the house and outside.</p> <p>The injection at 12 weeks is essential and prolongs for one year the immunity already installed at 8 weeks (4).</p> <p>Protection is sufficient to ensure early outwalks.</p>
If I take him out too early, he'll be afraid of street noises. I can always do it later.	<p>The opposite will happen (5). Before the age of 3 months, the puppy gets used to novelties: noises, humans ... providing that it meets them in good conditions. And then he can encounter them again without fear.</p> <p>It is not reasonable to postpone these out walks, the favourable period ends at about 3 months.</p> <p>After 3 months, anything new is considered dangerous and can be frightening. An animal that has manifestations of fear is more likely to be aggressive in adulthood.</p>
The breeder does not want me to pick him up before the age of 3 months, because it is a more fragile dwarf breed.	Behavioral development is identical, regardless of breed, and of the size of the breed: miniature, medium or giant. The optimum discovery period of the world is completed around 12 weeks.

My breeder recommends not to take him out too much because it is a giant breed and because its growth must be carefully managed....	A puppy needs to encounter a large diversity of stimuli, very early in his life and in good conditions to then benefit from a fulfilling life. Taking him out does not compromise its growth and keeping it locked does not protect it further.
In the street, when we meet a dog, I take him in my arms because I'm afraid that the other will hurt him.	A well balanced adult dog will not hurt a puppy, as it will adapt its communication and movements, as with a child. A well-educated and sociable adult dog (of a friend, family...) will be an ideal partner of play and help to educate your puppy.
I do not want him to be sick. That he remains shy with strangers does not bother me.	A phobic dog is a sick dog. A high proportion of un-socialized dogs during their young age causes subsequent attacks on unfamiliar individuals (7). And these dogs are then often abandoned in shelters, or even euthanized.

As a practitioner, you hesitate between two strategies to give the puppy the best possible protection :

- Either advise not to take the puppy out before all its vaccines have been done, choosing first and foremost infectious prevention?
- Or advise to take the dog out everywhere before the age of 3 months to promote behavioral prevention? (8)

We recommend:

- **vaccinate the puppy, adapting the vaccination protocol if you consider that there is an increased risk if the dog goes out on the street from the age of 6-7 weeks,**
- **follow the behavioral recommendations of this article: socialization, habituation, familiarization.**
- A puppy needs to make encounters, very early, in good conditions and be able to live a fulfilling life**

TO KNOW MORE

The early behavioral development of puppies concerns all veterinarians, as a lack of socialization and habituation (familiarization) can lead to inappropriate fear responses responsible of attacks, which compromise the welfare of the animal as well as its owners 'one. (9)

The first month after adoption, from 8 to 12 weeks of puppy's age, corresponds to the sensitive period of development and ends around 12 weeks. It is decisive period for the future adaptability of the dog. Here are some details

Socialization

- Socialization is a process by which an animal learns to recognize and interact with the species with which it cohabits.
- For a wild animal, socialization is often limited to its own species. For domesticated species such as the dog, it includes the other animal species with which it lives: human, cat ...
- Knowing that these species, with their different behaviors and appearances, are potential friends reduces the likelihood of fear behaviors and aggressiveness related to fear.

- When interacting with other individuals, the dog develops communication skills that allow him to clearly signify his intention, to recognize those of others and to know how to respond to them.

Habituation, familiarization

- Familiarization is a process by which an animal becomes accustomed to mild environmental stimuli and learns to ignore them.

Sensitive developmental period

- During the sensitive period, experiences have a greater effect on the behavioral development of the dog than those of the future life.
- The timing and duration of the sensitive period are genetically determined, but environmental factors may cause them to vary.
- Its beginning corresponds to the maturation of the nervous system and the beginning of achievement of sensory perception skills and mobility, at 2.5 to 3 weeks of age. It lasts up to 12 to 14 weeks.
- During the sensitive period, the puppies are the most likely to accept the presence of new stimuli, but after 5 weeks a reluctance to approach begins to develop.
- Exposure to a wide range of harmless stimuli during this period is important for the confidence of the puppy to set up.
- To avoid a dog being coward and aggressive towards people, the ideal would be to adopt a puppy at the age of 8 weeks, born in a family atmosphere, and then expose it to an urban environment before the end of the period of socialization.
- The absence of various social experiences and encounters can lead to abnormal behavior in new situations and the development of behavioral disorders in the future.

This period is called sensitive or critical because it cannot be postponed in time.

Maternal Influence

- The maternal behavior and that of other adults of the group is shaping. The puppy will tend to replicate the attitudes observed in different situations.
- If the mother is fearful, the puppies will have a predisposition to become adopt fearful behaviors. They will have to be taken out more frequently and confident dogs may be useful to rectify incorrect learning.

Conclusion

- Contrary to an idea still too often conveyed as a healthy precaution, it is necessary to take out the puppies as soon as possible.

- The current vaccines provide adequate protection. Keeping the puppy at home provides no additional security but exposes it to the occurrence of developmental deficits.
- That is why we advise to acquire a puppy as early as eight weeks and to make him discover what will be his later life, as actively as possible, between eight and twelve weeks.

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