

## Puppy Growth Stages

- **STAGE 1: Birth - 3 Weeks**

The first stage in puppy development covers the first 3 weeks of your puppy's life.

Your pup is born blind, deaf and without teeth and these first weeks are a very important time in his development. For most of the first 2 - 3 weeks puppies needs are simple, food and sleep. The majority of their growth takes place while they sleep, so this is a critical period.

At about 2 weeks old, your puppy will begin to open his eyes, and by 3 weeks his ears should also be open and his tiny teeth will be appearing. By the end of this first puppy stage, he is aware of the world around him and is trying to crawl, bark and interact with his littermates.

- **STAGE 2: 4 - 7 Weeks**

This puppy stage is vital to your puppy's social development as well as his physical development.

He will continue to grow rapidly in size, but more importantly, he starts to get much more involved in social interaction with his mom, littermates and (very importantly) the humans in his life.

All kinds of things are learned during this stage of puppy development. Your puppy's mom (dam) will teach him basic manners and begin to wean him. He'll learn what kind of play is tolerated by his brothers and sisters. This is when 'bite inhibition' is practiced (learning to control how hard he can bite), and the 'pecking order' (order of dominance) within the litter is established. These are two of the reasons that it's recommended that you don't take a puppy from its mom and siblings earlier than 7 - 8 weeks of age. By the end of this stage of puppy development, your little one is able to be left by his mom for short periods of time, eat puppy food, walk, run, bark, wag his tail and generally behave like a 'puppy'!

At around 6 to 7 weeks old, your puppy should have his first set of puppy vaccinations and be de-wormed.

- **STAGE 3: 8 - 12 Weeks**

Between weeks 8 and 9, a puppy is mature enough to leave his mom and littermates, and to join his new human family.

At this stage of puppy development, your puppy's brain is ready to start soaking up all the lessons and experiences you can give him. He'll learn fast, so it's important to make sure you're teaching him the right things.

Learning basic manners and commands, going to puppy classes, and having lots of positive socialization experiences is very important during this puppy stage.

But it's also important to know that a puppy experiences its first 'fear period' somewhere between 8 and 12 weeks of age. Your pup may show fear or apprehension about people, places or things that he was previously unafraid of. It's important to continue with socialization in a positive, upbeat way and not to 'coddle' or spoil your puppy during this period. But, also be careful not to expose him to situations or experiences that are unduly nerve-wracking for him.

- **STAGE 4: 13 - 16 Weeks**

During this stage of puppy development, your puppy will show increasing independence and may even occasionally ignore/challenge you. It's kind of like the 'terrible twos' in humans, this is just the canine equivalent!

He'll also be teething at this time, and his sore gums will lead him to bite and chewing on anything and everything.

This is one of the puppy stages where you'll probably find yourself saying "no" an awful lot! But, remember never to use a harsh voice or physical punishments. Your puppy is just a baby and wants to please you, it's up to you to show him, with love and patience, what is expected of him.

Start basic obedience classes during this period to prepare your puppy to become a friendly, well behaved adult.

- **STAGE 5: 17 - 40 Weeks**

Your puppy will continue to grow and develop at an amazing rate during this period. It's critically important to continue his training and socialization experiences, as he'll be making assumptions and decisions about the world, and his place in it, during this stage of puppy development. He will continue to challenge you and test the limits too, so be prepared.

He may tend to act a little 'bratty' at this age, continue to 'stick to your guns' with the rules and behaviour you expect. Don't play games such as wrestling or tug-of-war, as it can encourage dominant behaviour in some puppies.

Get your pup spayed or neutered during this period. This procedure has a positive impact on your puppy's future health and helps to reduce the huge number of unwanted puppies born every year.

- **STAGE 6: 41 weeks - 1 Year**

Depending on the size and breed of your puppy, he may become a mature adult during this stage of puppy development. Small and miniature breeds can reach maturity between 8 and 12 months of age, but large or giant breeds may not be considered adult until 18 months or more.

Although your pup may look like an adult dog by now, he may still be quite immature in his behaviour. He'll also have tons of energy, but not necessarily a lot of common sense - think *'teenager'*!

Pups of some breeds may become quite challenging at this point, and may make subtle (or even quite 'in your face') attempts at dominance. It's important to continue obedience classes and socialization and to insist on good behaviour and compliance with your rules. Always use a firm voice and positive reinforcement when training and correcting behaviour, as shouting and harsh/physical punishment may cause a combative/aggressive response from your adolescent pup. A loving, firm and patient hand is always best.

- **STAGE 7: 1 Year+**

Somewhere between 1 and 2 years of age, most dogs reach full sexual and developmental maturity. Your puppy's growth will now taper off, although he will probably continue to 'fill out' over the next few months.

At this point you can start your pup on more vigorous exercise, such as jogging, agility etc. because his bones and joints are fully developed and less prone to stress injuries.

You can now switch your pup over from his puppy food to a premium dog food, as his nutritional needs are changing.

He should be obedient and well behaved (in the most part!) by now, and all your hard work over the past months will have paid off.