LEARNING MADE EASY

2nd Edition

Siberian Huskies

for dummies®
A Wiley Brand

Enjoy activities with your Husky

Keep your Husky happy and healthy

Welcome a Husky into your home

Diane Morgan
English instructor, writer, and happy owner of many breeds of dog

Siberian Huskies

2nd Edition

by Diane Morgan

for dummies®
A Wiley Brand

Siberian Huskies For Dummies®, 2nd Edition

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Introduction

The Siberian wind is a mute wind; there are no trees to make it roar, no grasses to let it sing or whisper. It rushes on, cold and silent, over the endless miles of tundra.

But there is sound, nonetheless. A haunting cry rides the wild wind, a cry chiseled out of frozen air, etched in darkness. Perhaps it is a wolf, for wolves abound here, following the vast herds of reindeer. But maybe not. Perhaps the cry is fuller than the howl of a wolf, sweeter, and more burdened with loneliness. Perhaps it is the song of the first Siberian Husky ever born.

Welcome to the world of the Siberian Husky. If you've ever wondered why your Siberian is different from all the other breeds, you've come to the right place. This book explains what made your Siberian the way he is and how you can get the most out of your relationship with this engaging, unique, and totally original breed. This is a book that will make your life — and your Siberian's — richer, more satisfying, and a lot more fun.

About This Book

Siberian Huskies For Dummies, 2nd Edition, dives into what you need to know about Husky ownership, covering everything from finding a Husky to training the one you have. I include the following information:

- **Part 1:** Here I explain the Husky's many fine qualities and needs, so you can better understand the breed. I also share some interesting tidbits about the breed's history, how Huskies got to the West, and what they're like today.
- **Part 2:** In this part, you discover where you can get a Husky and how you can prepare for your new dog's arrival.
- **Part 3:** Getting your Husky used to his new home is important. Here I provide useful tips so you can understand what your Husky is communicating with you and ways you can help socialize him with children, people, and other animals. I offer advice on how to train him to be a well-behaved member of your family, and I also share pointers to deal with behavior problems.

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- **Part 4:** More than anything, you want to make sure your Husky is healthy and safe. In this part, I give you the essentials on everything from feeding to grooming to choosing a veterinarian to dealing with general health problems.
- **Part 5:** Huskies are great outdoor dogs, and here I give you more details about how you can sled with your dog. Who knows? Imagine your Husky winning the Iditarod one day.
- **Part 6:** Every *For Dummies* book has the Part of Tens. Here I give you short bursts of fun advice about traveling with your Husky and some outdoor activities you can consider doing with your Husky.

In this book, I refer to your Husky as a male for consistency. I understand you may have a female. No matter your Husky's gender, this book can help you.

Foolish Assumptions

When writing this book, I made the following assumptions about you, my dear reader:

- **You're interested in getting a Siberian Husky.** You've read great things about the breed and want to find the right one for you to join your family.
- **You already have a Husky.** You're looking for some advice about living with your new family member. You may have kids or other pets, and you want to make the transition smoothly.
- **You want to discover the basics about taking care of your Husky.** You want the lowdown on feeding, grooming, exercising, and keeping your Husky safe and healthy.

No matter if any of these assumptions apply to you or you just love reading about dogs, then this new edition of *Siberian Huskies For Dummies* is for you.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, you'll find charming pictures in the margins next to certain paragraphs. But these aren't merely for your amusement; they actually serve a purpose. And I explain the purpose here:

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TIP

When you run across this icon, you know you're in for a useful bit of information on how to do things with or for your Husky.

REMEMBER

Some things are so important they bear repeating, and I use this icon to indicate what information will be good for you to stash away.

WARNING

This eye-catching icon alerts you to potential hazards or problems that you need to watch out for.

TECHNICAL STUFF

When you see this icon, you're sure to find some very useful information that's bound to impress your friends at the next neighborhood get-together. But it isn't essential that you pay attention to this stuff if you're just looking for the basics.

DUMMIES APPROVED

When you see this icon, you're sure to find products or services that are particularly helpful for Husky owners.

Where to Go from Here

You may not know much about Siberians, but the fact that you've picked up this book shows that you care and want to have a good relationship with your dog. In this book, you have all the information you need to get started on a lifetime of enjoying your Siberian Husky.

This book is a reference, not a tutorial. You don't have to read it from cover to cover if you just want to get a glimpse of owning a Siberian before you get down to the basics. Just use the table of contents or index to find the topics that interest you and go from there. Start with your needs and interests.

If you don't already own a Siberian and don't know much about the breed, start with Part 1. If you have a little more background with the breed, maybe you want to check out Part 2. Or maybe the chapters in Part 3 where you figure out how to live everyday with your Husky have caught your fancy. Go ahead and skip around. That's what this book is for.

You can also refer to `www.dummies.com` and search for Siberian Huskies for a handy Cheat Sheet for some helpful information that you can reference as you need.

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1 Getting to Know Your Siberian Husky

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IN THIS PART . . .

Get an overview of what inviting a Husky into your home means and what you can do to make it go smoothly.

Understand what the characteristics of the breed standard are and what makes a Siberian Husky a Siberian Husky, including size, body, neck, skull, teeth, color, and so on.

Know how to differentiate between a Siberian and the other types of dogs that are often confused with Siberians.

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Recognizing a Husky for what it is
- Choosing a new member of your family
- Bringing your Husky home
- Taking care of your Husky

Chapter 1

The Lowdown on Siberian Huskies, Just the Basics

Congratulations! You're leaning toward welcoming a Siberian Husky into your home, or perhaps you've already made that decision and Smoky is already a part of your family. No matter, this chapter gives you a brief overview to this book and serves as your jumping-off point to the world of Siberian Huskies.

Knowing What to Look for: A Husky's Breed Standard

Figuring out what a Husky is (and isn't) can sometimes be confusing, especially with all the lookalikes out there (like Alaskan Malamutes, Samoyeds, Alaskan Klee Kai, Northern Inuits, wolves, and wolf-hybrids, among others). To know that you're looking at a Siberian Husky, pay close attention to the following standards:

- Size
- Body

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- Front and back views
- Neck
- Skull
- Teeth
- Expression
- Eyes
- Ears
- Feet
- Tail
- Coat texture
- Color
- Nose
- Gait
- Temperament

Chapter 2 discusses these standards in greater detail to help you identify a true Siberian Husky.

HUSKIES STARTED WITH THE CHUKCHIS

The *Chukchis* are a semi-nomadic, reindeer-hunting people of northeastern Siberia. Today, the Chukchi population totals about 16,000; there is evidence that, in the past, the population was greater. Both the climatic and political oppression they have endured over the centuries have given the Chukchis the nickname "Apaches of the North." Of course, they don't call *themselves* that. They call themselves the *Luoravetlan,* which means "the genuine people."

The word *Siberia* is almost synonymous with "cold," but the earliest Chukchis probably enjoyed a milder climate than they do today. In those warmer times, they apparently relied on dogs primarily for help in hunting the plentiful reindeer. About 3,000 years ago, however, the climate changed drastically for the worse. The reindeer had to travel farther and farther to find food, and the deer-dependent Chukchis had to travel with them, taking their entire households along.

It was in this way that the Siberian dogs added sled hauling to their list of accomplishments. These animals were so highly prized that only very young, very old, and very sick

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Chukchis were allowed to ride in the sleds as passengers. The sleds were mostly used for hauling goods; the people walked. Sometimes the Chukchi women and children pulled the sleds also — right along with the dogs.

The Chukchis gave birth to a rich culture. They developed an elaborate religion and conceived of a heaven whose gates were guarded by a pair of their Chukchi dogs. Furthermore, they believed that anyone who mistreated a dog wouldn't be allowed into Chukchi heaven.

Because the Chukchis used reindeer to pull the heaviest loads, they placed a premium on developing their dogs for speed, endurance, and agility. It paid off. No other breed in the world can haul a light load as fast and far as the Siberian Husky — and on so little food.

The Russians are coming!

The Chukchis were always a thorn in the side of the Russians. They declined to surrender during the 1700s when the Russians had conquered every other Siberian people in their effort to control the fur trade. They'd just pack up their things and move farther on, making the Russians chase them some more. Sometimes, the Chukchis moved their entire settlement onto an iceberg and floated away. Finally, a Russian general named Pavlutskiy decided he could handle the Chukchis. In an incredibly stupid move, Pavlutskiy plowed into a narrow ravine to finish them off. The Chukchis were just sitting there in ambush, not daring to hope that the general could possibly be dumb enough to trap himself. But he was. The Chukchis then killed the Russians, including Pavlutskiy, and confiscated their guns. Because they had no idea how to use their newfound weapons, they captured some disaffected Russian serfs, who gladly passed along their firearms lore. The serfs didn't like the Russian army or the Cossacks any better than the Chukchis did. By this time, the Russians decided that it would be smarter all around just to leave the Chukchis alone.

The Communists versus the Huskies

In the 1930s, the Communists tried to destroy every vestige of traditional, non-Soviet culture, including the native dog breeds. They decided sled dogs were outdated and should be replaced by motorized vehicles. At least that's what they thought until they got to Chukchi land and found that all their up-to-date motorized vehicles got stuck in the snow.

In 1947, the Soviet Congress, which apparently had nothing better to do, decided that the Workers' Paradise really didn't need any sled dogs or reindeer-herding dogs, and they reclassified the hunting dogs into four new subdivisions, none of which corresponded to any real breed. The Husky was left out of these classifications; the Soviets, in their infinite wisdom, decided that they were too small to pull anything, even though they had been hauling sleds all over Siberia for the past few thousand years or so.

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The Siberians were indeed much smaller than the other Arctic breeds, topping out at around 50 pounds, which is why the Russians sneered at them. But the Chukchis knew that nothing could surpass their dogs for long-distance sledding. When the Chukchis needed more power, they simply hitched up more dogs. And because of the Siberian's excellent temperament, as many as 18 or 20 dogs could be hitched to a single sled. And there was no fighting.

Besides, Siberian Huskies had other advantages. Because they had been raised in a family setting and not left out to fend for themselves, they could be trusted with children, and they could run faster, longer, and on less food than any other breed in the world.

Understanding Why Huskies Make Great Pets

Siberian Huskies are great dogs. They're devoted to their owners and can be a great companion. However, Huskies do require attention because they're full of energy. That means if you're seriously considering buying or adopting a Husky, be prepared that he'll need lots of physical exercise, loving attention, and stability. Owning a dog, especially one with the relentless energy of a Siberian, is something you shouldn't underestimate.

That being said, consider these factors when bringing a new Husky home:

- **Children:** Most Huskies are good with children, although not every Husky is, but the good thing is Huskies are playful and can adapt as long as your children treat your Husky well.
- **Cost:** Owning any kind of dog can be costly, after you consider medical care, high-quality food, grooming, supplies, toys, training classes, and so on.
- **Your house:** If you prefer a meticulously clean home, a Husky may not be your best bet. They can shed, and if they don't get enough exercise, they can focus their attention on things you don't want them to, like your couch pillows or legs to your coffee table.

  Having a large fenced backyard is ideal because a Husky needs plenty of space to exercise. If you don't have a fenced yard, be prepared to take your Husky on a daily walk.

REMEMBER

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- **Climate:** Huskies prefer cooler climates because of their thick coats, and they're extra susceptible to heat exhaustion.
- **Time and exercise:** Huskies are balls of energy and require a lot of attention and exercise.
- **Other pets:** Siberians usually get along well with other dogs, but be mindful of other pets, including cats, unless the Siberian has been around the cat since puppyhood.

I provide more in-depth specifics about these points and others in Chapter 3.

Picking a Husky: Where to Go and Where to Avoid

When you're looking for a Husky, you have a few options, some options are much better than the other ones, ranging from shelters to breeders.

WARNING

I can't emphasize enough. Don't buy your Husky at a pet store because pet stores often work with puppy mills — dogs are treated poorly. Your chances of getting a sick dog increase exponentially, which means higher vet bills too.

Here are the best places to get a Husky for your family:

- **Breeders:** For a genetically sound, good-tempered, and healthy Siberian puppy, a breeder is by far your best bet. Breeders take special care in ensuring their dogs are healthy. Many breeders show dogs and participate in dog sports. However, they often sell their puppies that aren't suited for showing or sports, which makes for great pets for you.
- **Shelters and rescue organizations:** If you want an older Husky that was given up by its previous owners, shelters and rescue organizations are great. Their dogs are often loving and loveable and just need a good home.

  Just ask your local shelter or rescue organization about the Huskies they have up for adoption. They often let you visit and spend some time with the dog to see if you and the dog mesh well. Adopting and acclimating an older dog is often less time-consuming task than getting a puppy.

TIP

Chapter 3 explains in greater detail about these options and how you can find your new family member.

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OLAF SWENSON SAVES THE DAY

Sadly, there may be no pure Siberian Huskies left in the land of their birth. They disappeared during the Stalinist purges (along with most of the Chukchis and a few million dissident Russians). Happily, some Huskies were exported to North America first; the last of them made the trip in 1929. Arctic explorer and fur trader Olaf Swenson had purchased some at the then exorbitant price of $150. Swenson had cultivated friendly relationships with the Chukchis for many years. Indeed, he was the only outsider ever willingly allowed into Chukchi territory.

Swenson admired both the friendly temperament of the Siberians and the gentle treatment the dogs received from their Chukchi families. He understood that the two factors were related. Many of the other northern breeds received nothing but brutal treatment at the hands of their owners, and in time became brutal themselves.

There was one dog in particular Swenson coveted. He spent two years trying to buy a certain Billkoff (Snowball). He was always rebuffed, no matter how much he offered. Once though he went out of his way to perform a small favor for the Chukchi. Swenson didn't see his friend for a year, but when he visited him again, his Chukchi friend seemed glad to see him. Going over to Billkoff, he took the dog by the collar and led him over to Swenson. Then he placed his hand on the dog's head. "Your dog," he said solemnly. The man refused to take a penny for him.

Billkoff proved to be the finest lead dog Swenson ever owned. Even the most recalcitrant dogs on the team would follow his lead. This was a critical advantage. From the team's point of view, the lead dog may be even more important than the driver. After all, the driver has no reins to guide the team — they're following the lead dog.

Knowing that the unique Siberian Husky was in danger of disappearing forever, Swenson had some of the finest Chukchi dogs shipped to America. Some went to Maine; others were shipped to Quebec. Still others were bred to the dogs of the legendary Leonhard Seppala (see the later sidebar for more about Seppala).

Introducing Your Husky to His New Home

Helping your new Husky adapt and settle into your home can be daunting. After all, everything is new and strange to him. The experience can be enjoyable and help you bond with your new family member. Chapter 5 discusses everything from feeding him his first meal to reassuring him on his first night in your home. If your new Husky isn't potty trained, you'll also want to start housetraining as soon as possible.

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TIP

Before you bring home your new Husky or soon thereafter, make sure you make an appointment with your veterinarian for a complete checkup.

The following sections touch on a few other important areas to remember as you bring a Husky home.

Ensuring you have the right supplies

When you bring your new Husky home, you want to make sure you properly outfit him to make his and your life more comfortable. Here are some important supplies you need:

- **Collar:** A collar that fits is important because you attach the ID tag to it and the leash for walks.
- **Leash:** A sturdy leash, also called a *lead,* allows you to go on walks and keep your Husky out of harm's way.
- **Harness:** You may prefer a harness to a collar. A harness fits around your dog's chest and torso rather than his neck.
- **ID tag:** Huskies like to make a run for it, so having their name and your contact information on the ID tag is imperative.
- **Food and water bowls:** You want to feed and water your Husky in style, and the best option is stainless steel or chrome.
- **Bed:** A wide variety of types of beds are available. Just make sure it's machine washable to get rid of Husky hair and any odors.
- **Crate:** Even if you don't plan on your Husky sleeping in a crate, having one is so important because more than likely your Husky will like to get away from everything in the crate. A wide assortment are available.
- **Toys:** Toys are great ways to keep your Husky entertained. Use different types of toys to stimulate him so he doesn't get bored. Getting him a combination chew and toy is my top recommendation.

I talk about these supplies and more in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Listening to your Husky

Your Husky will communicate with you with both verbal and nonverbal ways. Being able to understand what he's saying or experiencing can help build the bond between the two of you and even alleviate any potential issues. These sections give you an overview of the ways your Husky may communicate with you.

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Verbal: Hey, listen to me

Dogs communicate verbally for an assortment of reasons. Here is an overview to them (Chapter 6 provides more in-depth explanations):

- **Barking:** The good news is that Huskies bark less than other breeds. They may occasionally bark to mark territory.
- **Howling:** A howl is long and drawn-out may mean your Husky is communicating with his pack or other Huskies, warning intruders, or expressing pain or sorrow.
- **Whining:** Your Husky probably wants something from you, like to be let in, go out, or petted.
- **Growling:** If he growls, he's more than likely warning whoever he's growling at.
- **Yelping:** Your Husky is in pain if he yelps.

Nonverbal: Pay attention to me

A Husky can also communicate to you through his body language. Here are some common behaviors to watch for and a brief explanation on each (I provide more details in Chapter 6):

- **Circling and sniffing:** Dogs exhibit this behavior when greeting other dogs.
- **Mounting:** Mounting is a sign of dominance where your Husky is trying to show who's the leader of the pack.
- **Pawing:** Sometimes pawing is a sign of dominance. Other times he may be trying to get your attention.
- **Bowing:** A Husky that bows is usually exhibiting play-soliciting behavior.
- **Belly-rubbing response:** Who doesn't like a good belly rub? Your Husky is no different.
- **Licking or tail-chewing:** These behaviors can indicate a wide variety of things, including a nervous habit, the need to eliminate, or fleas. Inspect your Husky to see if you can figure out what's causing this behavior.

Helping your Husky make new friends

You can socialize your Husky so he's comfortable being around other dogs and other people in these suggestions:

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- **Introduce him to all sorts of people during your daily walk.** As you walk around the neighborhood, have your Husky puppy meet different types of people — children, elderly people, people with canes, people riding bikes, and so on — to help him get accustomed.
- **Enroll him in puppy kindergarten.** A class is a great way for him to learn some new commands, obedience, and even housetraining.
- **Familiarize your Husky to children.** Make sure to introduce your Husky to children of all ages from infants and toddlers to tweens. Just keep a close eye on your Husky around little ones who may not know how to treat a dog.
- **Let him be around other dogs and animals.** Familiarity breeds not contempt but contentment.

REMEMBER

Socializing an unsocialized dog after he's 18 months old is next to impossible, so let him be around other people and animals. Chapter 7 discusses some ways you can socialize your Husky.

Incorporating some discipline and training

Providing some discipline and basic training can make all the difference when living with a Husky. Before you teach him some commands, make sure you figure out what your training goals are, which includes training your family to be consistent.

Some basic commands to use with your Husky are as follows:

- **Watch Me:** This command gets your Husky's attention to watch you as you teach him commands.
- **Come:** This command is usually difficult for dogs to master, but it's important.
- **Sit:** The Sit command is one of the easiest to master.
- **Stay:** This command differs from the Sit command if you want to teach your dog some patience.
- **Leave or Get Out:** You can use this command when you want your dogs out of your hair, like when you're cooking dinner and want them out of the kitchen.
- **Heel:** A dog that heels during a walk is so much more pleasant than one that doesn't.

Chapter 8 delves deeper into these commands and more and explains how you can teach them.

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Keeping an eye open for behavior issues

Your Husky can exhibit certain behaviors that can indicate a bigger problem that you need to address. Here are a few issues to watch out for:

- **The anxious Husky:** Huskies can demonstrate signs of separation anxiety for a wide array of reasons, including when you leave him home alone and when a family member dies or goes to college. You can deal with the anxiety in a number of ways, such as desensitizing yourself and your dog or medicating your dog, depending on the severity of the anxiety.

THE INFLUENCE OF LEONHARD SEPPALA

The greatest name in Siberian history has to be that of the Norwegian Leonhard Seppala. Seppala, who had been born in the fishing village of Skyjaevoy, 250 miles inside the Arctic Circle, was no stranger to bitter weather. He kind of liked it, actually. When he emigrated to the United States in 1914, he naturally chose Alaska for his new home. He began by working in the goldfields and driving freight dogs, but soon he, too, got bitten by the racing bug.

To begin his new hobby, Seppala bought some young racing Huskies from a certain Jafet Lindeberg. Lindeberg had originally intended to sell the dogs to the famous Norwegian adventurer Roald Amundsen for an attempt to reach the South Pole, but Amundsen had to abandon the try when World War I broke out. So, Seppala got to run his new team in the 1914 All Alaska Sweepstakes Race (refer to Chapter 15 for more information), but he was badly defeated. He got lost in a whiteout blizzard and came within a few feet of a 200 foot precipice. Only the immediate responsiveness of his native Siberian lead dog, Suggen, prevented complete tragedy. Undeterred by his scary experience, Seppala simply made plans to try again the following year.

Seppala went on to a brilliant racing career with his Huskies, winning the All-Alaska Sweepstakes in 1915, 1916, and 1917. (The races had to be halted when the United States entered World War I.) Seppala won races not just in Alaska, however, but also in New England and all over the east coast of the United States. Seppala proved the Husky's ability to race at all distances — not just the marathons. Today, Huskies excel at so-called *middle distance racing,* 30 to 60 miles. Well, it's middle distance for them, if not for us.

Seppala won so often than he was accused of being a superman, and of hypnotizing his opponents. Yet never, in all his years of racing, did Seppala ever strike his team. Only once did he even crack his whip — and that was in order to get the dogs up quickly after a short rest. Today, it's against the rules for mushers to even carry whips in sanctioned sled dog races.

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- **The fraidy cat (to thunder):** Eliminating a fear to thunder is impossible, but you can desensitize your Husky in a number of ways, including creating a calm environment, hugging your dog and speaking gently to him, using supplements, or even medicating him.
- **The digger:** Huskies love to dig. You can't completely control digging, but you can watch out for circumstances where your Husky demonstrates this behavior by diverting his attention, playing with him, and loving on him. You can also make sure he has enough exercise.
- **The chewer:** Huskies also like to chew, especially when they're puppies. When you see your Husky chew something, replace the item with something more suitable to chew. Make sure you've exercised your Husky.
- **The escape artist:** Huskies are notable for escaping — from your yard or the house — and retrieving them is extremely difficult. To keep him in, make sure your fence is secure and at least 6 feet tall, although 8 feet is better.

Chapter 9 discusses these problems and others in greater detail and gives you advice on how to deal with them.

Caring for Your Husky

When you welcome a Husky into your home, you want to provide proper care and some TLC. You may be a little overwhelmed at all the choices. After all, which food is best? What about vaccines? What if your Husky is choking on something? So many questions! Don't worry. The following sections give you a brief overview to get you started. Part 4 is chock-full of advice and guidance in plain English so you can keep going.

Making sure your Husky has proper nutrition

Feeding your Husky food packed with nutrition and taste is one of the most important things you can do. Reading the labels so you know what you're giving your Husky is a start. Some of the types of food you can consider giving your dog are

- **Dry:** Often called *kibble,* it's the most convenient type of food.
- **Canned:** Canned foods are much more expensive than dry food; you can mix canned with dry for taste.

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- **People food:** Fresh veggies and fruit, lean meat, and yogurt are okay. Stay clear of dairy products (milk can give your dog diarrhea) and processed meat. At all costs, avoid raw eggs, onions, chocolate, grapes and raisins, macadamia nuts, sugar-free gum and candy, and yeast, which can be deadly.

WARNING

Avoid semi-moist food. It's high in sugar and promotes obesity and tooth decay.

Chapter 11 explains dog nutrition and the different types of food that are best for your Husky.

Giving your Siberian a spa treatment

Good grooming is so much more than cosmetic. It also promotes health and happiness and a chance for you and dog to bond. Here are some important grooming to do with your Husky:

- **Brushing and combing:** Huskies have a double coat of hair that needs attention. Give your Husky a thorough brush at least once a week and lighter brushing and combing several times a week.
- **Bathing:** A Husky's skin is non-oily, so your dog doesn't need a lot of baths. When you do bathe him, use a mild, unmedicated shampoo for double-coated dogs and make sure you rinse thoroughly.
- **Trimming nails:** Stay on top of this task and do it weekly.
- **Brushing teeth:** Use a toothpaste designed for dogs and brush regularly to avoid plaque buildup.

Chapter 12 discusses these grooming tasks and more in greater detail. You may want to turn to a professional groomer for help with some of the more complex grooming, so I give suggestions on finding the right groomer for you and your Husky.

Ensuring your Husky is healthy

Making sure your Husky is healthy and happy is up to you. The best way to do so is regularly visit your vet who will check your dog's health. Your vet will discuss giving your Husky an assortment of vaccines, including the following:

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- **Canine parvovirus:** Commonly called *parvo,* this viral infection is highly contagious. Puppies should be completely immunized between 16 and 18 weeks of age.
- **Distemper:** Still the primary killer of dogs worldwide, distemper attacks the dog's nervous system. Puppies should be completely immunized between 12 and 14 weeks of age.
- **Hepatitis:** Similar to distemper, canine hepatitis is dangerous. Puppies should be immunized at 12 weeks.
- **Rabies:** This virus is 100 percent fatal to dogs and humans. Puppies should be immunized between 16 and 24 weeks of age.
- **Kennel cough:** This acute respiratory condition is often found in dogs that live in close quarters like kennels and shelters, hence the name. Puppies should be immunized at 16 weeks.

Your vet will also treat to avoid heartworm, fleas and ticks, and other conditions. Chapter 13 examines in greater details the different types of conditions your vet will treat.

Noting any changes in your Husky's health

Make sure you have a firm understanding of what a healthy Husky looks like so you know when your dog needs veterinarian help. Here are the important vital signs to keep an eye on:

- **Rectal temperature:** It should be between 100 and 102.5 degrees Fahrenheit.
- **Gum color:** The color of his gums indicates blood perfusion and oxygenation. They should normally be pink.
- **Capillary refill time:** This indicates your dog's circulatory health.
- **Heart rate:** A Husky's heart rate is usually about 60 beats per minute. (The bigger the dog, the slower the heart.)
- **Respiratory rate:** A normal dog breathes 10 to 30 times a minute, but heavily panting dogs can breathe 200 pants per minute.

Chapter 14 explains more about what to look for and what to do if you encounter any emergencies.

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THE GREAT SERUM RUN: MISSION OF MERCY

Leonhard Seppala's greatest feat occurred in January 1925. A raging diphtheria epidemic had overtaken Nome, and two Eskimo children had already died. The fear was that the native population, who had little exposure to the disease, could be wiped out. The city's cache of serum had been used up, and the nearest supply was in Anchorage — almost 1,000 miles away. Although three unqualified pilots gamely volunteered to fly some rickety planes to Anchorage and thence to Nome, the 80 mph winds and raging blizzards made it impossible.

Only Huskies could save the day. A serum package was relayed from Nenana to Nome. Under the leadership of Seppala, 20 expert drivers and more than 100 dogs were recruited for the grueling trip. To make things even more difficult, the mushers had to stop periodically to warm the serum; nobody knew if it would still work if frozen. (Reindeer skin, quilt, and canvas were used for insulating the serum containers.)

The dogs ran 658 miles in five and half days through blizzards and waist deep snowdrifts. It was snowing so hard that the drivers couldn't see the dogs in front of them. The temperature plunged to 62 degrees below zero. Two dogs froze to death in harness; their musher, Charlie Evans, took their place and, along with the surviving dogs, pulled the sled himself the remaining miles of his run. Seppala himself drove 340 of those miles. His 12-year-old lead dog was the great Togo. At first, Togo seemed an unpromising specimen; he ran away from home, bit the other dogs, and allowed no one but Constance Seppala (Leonhard's wife) to handle him. Gradually, however, he came around, and to everyone's surprise, became one of the greatest racing dogs in history.

Togo wasn't much to look at, but he could lead a team like no other dog. Fittingly, the great Serum Run was his last appearance. Aging and injured on the trip, the old hero was permanently retired afterward. He died in Poland Spring, Maine, in 1929, at the age of 14 or 15. Togo's stuffed remains took on a peripatetic life of their own. For a while they were stored at Harvard's Peabody Museum; then they were sent to the Shelbourne Museum in Vermont, and finally they were transferred to the Iditarod Headquarters in Wasilla, Alaska, where you may go look at them yourself.

The final leg of the serum relay, however, was run not by Seppala and Togo, but by Gunnar Kasaan, who reached Nome on Groundhog Day. Kasaan was driving Seppala's second string of dogs, using a dog named Balto as the lead. In Seppala's opinion, Balto was a second-rate dog. For once, Seppala was wrong.

Balto, who had suffered bad press as "just a freight dog," surpassed himself. When Kasaan became lost on the ice of the Topkok River, Balto scented out the right trail (in 50 mph winds) and brought the team in safely. If it had been left to Kasaan, the entire team would have plunged through the ice.

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Kasaan staggered into Nome at 5:30 a.m. on February 2, 1925. His dogs were cold and exhausted, their feet torn and bloody. But the serum was delivered. Kasaan handed it over to the only physician in Nome, and then he began to pull the ice splinters out of his dogs' feet. Within five days of the arrival of the serum, the diphtheria epidemic was halted. And so, out of the Great Race of Mercy to Nome, was born the modern sled race we call the Iditarod (see Chapter 16). Kasaan took Balto on tour (see the following picture of Balto after the Great Serum Run). Then the team was sold to a movie producer who made a film called *Balto's Race to Nome.* Afterward, the team was sold again and put on exhibit as a curiosity show. The dogs were abused, neglected, and forgotten until a Cleveland businessman, with the help of Cleveland school children, bought the six remaining dogs for the then astounding sum of $2,000. The dogs were brought to the Cleveland Zoo and lived out their lives in peace. When Balto died in 1933, he was stuffed and put on display in the Cleveland Museum of Natural History.

Carrie M. McLain Memorial Museum

During his travels in the east, Seppala left some of his animals with Harry Wheeler of Quebec, who began breeding them. All currently AKC-registered Huskies can trace their ancestry back to this foundation stock.

In New York City's Central Park stands a bronze statue of Balto, paid for by penny collections from children. Many Siberian aficionados resent the fact that it was this dog, rather than Seppala's beloved Togo, whose likeness is sculpted. But it doesn't really matter. The statue symbolizes the boundless courage of all the dogs who made that tremendous journey against the greatest of odds. Togo or Balto — he faces north, forever dreaming, perhaps, of his immortal run in the service of humankind. The inscription reads, "Dedicated to the indomitable spirit of the sled dogs that relayed anti-toxin 600 miles over rough ice, across treacherous waters, through arctic blizzards from Nenana to the relief of a stricken Nome in the winter of 1925. Endurance. Fidelity. Intelligence."

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Knowing the Siberian Husky breed standard
- Telling the difference between a Siberian Husky and their lookalikes

Chapter 2

Recognizing What a Siberian Husky Is (and Isn't)

Many people mistake Siberian Huskies for other animals, such as wolves or Malamutes. So in this chapter, I explain what exactly a Siberian Husky is, by filling you in on the American Kennel Club (AKC) breed standard. I also give you the scoop on what differentiates a Husky from these other animals. Not sure quite what a Husky is? Read on!

Examining the Siberian Husky Breed Standard

The original breeders of Siberian Huskies were more concerned with function than with form, so early Siberians came in a bewildering mix of shapes and sizes. Some were lean and leggy, some stout and thick-bodied. To be able to breed true, dedicated breeders in this country began to develop a conformation standard. (Animals *breed true* when similar parents consistently produce offspring who look like themselves.)

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The AKC recognized the Siberian Husky as a breed in 1930 and placed the breed in its Working Group. The Working Group is a diversified bunch of dogs that also includes Akitas, Great Danes, Newfoundlands, and Rottweilers. The Siberian Husky is a *Spitz-type* dog, a word that recalls its northern breeding (Spitzbergen is a group of islands in the Arctic Ocean north of Norway). Akitas, Samoyeds, Malamutes, and even the little Pomeranian are all Spitz-type dogs.

TECHNICAL STUFF

The first AKC registered Siberian Husky was a bitch named Fairbanks Princess Chena, who was born September 16, 1927. Her father, a more plebian type, was named Bingo. The first Siberian Huskies to become AKC Champions were Pola in 1931 and Northern Lights Kobuk, from the Northern Lights Kennel in Fairbanks, Alaska, the following year.

The Siberian Husky breed standard was first published in 1932; it has changed little since that time. The Husky is a dog built for both speed and endurance. He is one of the smallest of the Working Dogs but also one of the quickest. The Husky is, pound for pound, the strongest of all the sled or draft dogs.

The Siberian's smooth combination of grace and strength makes him a star wherever he goes. In 2019, he ranked 14th in popularity among all 195 AKC breeds, which is a good position. (Too high on the popularity scale invites dangerous overbreeding, whereas too low can indicate a too-small gene pool.) The keys to a good Siberian are balance, proportion, coat, and temperament. Males should be masculine, not coarse; females should be feminine, not frail. The Siberian Husky standard represents the ideal show dog, the goal toward which breeders strive. No Siberian except yours is perfect, but seeing how close a dog can come to the standard is always interesting and sometimes amusing.

REMEMBER

Don't worry if your own Siberian doesn't match the standard; many of the best obedience, racing, and companion dogs would bomb out in a show ring.

Check out Figure 2-1 for an illustration of the external features of a Siberian Husky and refer back to it as you read about the Husky's different body parts in the following sections.

Size

Males, referred to as dogs in the dog world, should stand between 21 and 23½ inches at the shoulder and weigh 45 to 60 pounds. Bitches (the term used to refer to female dogs) average slightly smaller — 20 to 22 inches at the shoulder and between 35 and 50 pounds. Weight should be proportionate to height.

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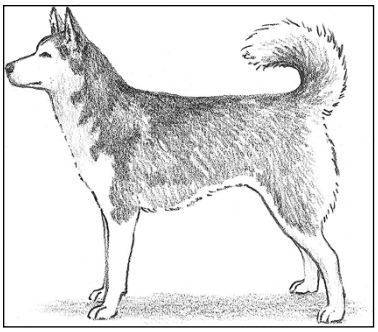

FIGURE 2-1: The external features of a Siberian Husky.

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Animals taller than the standard would be excused from the show ring as being oversized; however, the extra inches don't affect a pet's quality at all. Within the standard, judges don't give any preference to dogs at either end of the spectrum; a larger dog is as likely to win as a smaller one, and vice versa.

Body

A good Siberian should present a rectangular rather than a *square body profile*, meaning that the length of the dog from the point of the shoulder to the base of the tail is longer than the height to the shoulders. The ribs should be neither absolutely flat nor oversprung. Olaf Swenson, arctic explorer and Siberian Husky aficionado, believed that a good flank provided energy for long pulls. That idea is retained in the present day standard. Swenson also said that dogs with great stamina have vertebrae that are higher than those of the average dog, with deep depressions between the knobs. This advice is great to keep in mind.

The *topline* (or back and rump) of a Husky is level from *withers* (shoulders) to *croup* (rump). The Siberian's body is also a bit longer than his tail. The croup slopes away from the spine at an angle.

The chest should be deep, because it contains the heart and lungs, but not too broad. The shoulder is set at a 45-degree angle to the ground; a straight or loose shoulder is a fault.

Front view

The Siberian Husky's legs should be straight and parallel, moderately spaced, with the elbows close to the body.

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Back view

The Husky's hind legs should be parallel and moderately spaced, with well-muscled upper thighs. Rear dew claws should be removed, because they're of no use and can easily get caught in something during the dog's normal movement, hurting the dog.

Neck

The neck is of medium length and should be well-arched. A good neck is very important in the Husky world, because many muscles controlling the front pass through it.

Skull

The head should be medium-sized, slightly rounded at the top, and gradually tapered from the widest point to the eyes. The muzzle should be straight; the point of the muzzle should be neither pointed nor square. The dog should have a pronounced *stop* (the place where the muzzle meets the forehead), and the head should present a clean-cut appearance. A heavy, clumsy head is a fault; so is a too-thin muzzle.

Teeth

Siberian Huskies are expected to have a scissors bite, which means that the top teeth fit closely over the lower teeth. A *scissors bite* is most efficient for catching and devouring prey. A *level bite,* where the teeth meet evenly, top and bottom, is considered a fault in this breed.

Expression

Siberians are well known for their keen, mischievous expression, which exudes intelligence and a love of life. They wear a perpetual smile. The black markings around the eyes, nose, and ears are a distinctive characteristic of the breed.

Eyes

The Siberian's eyes may be of any color — brown, blue, or part blue and part brown all in one eye, referred to as *parti-colored* (or *speckled, pinto,* or *split*). The eyes may also be green or amber. The Siberian breed standard accepts dogs with bi-eyes (one of each color). The standard doesn't prefer one eye color over another, and most breeders don't either, although many owners have a penchant for those otherworldly ice-blue eyes.

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Whatever the color, the eyes should be almond-shaped, and set at a slightly oblique angle; eyes set too close together are a fault. Most experts agree that brown eyes are dominant over blue or green. This means that blue- or green-eyed parents will produce puppies with like-colored eyes.

Puppies who are born with dark blue eyes usually have brown eyes as adults. Those born with light blue eyes, however, will probably retain that color through adulthood.

Except for white and copper Huskies, the rims of the eyes should be black. (The eye rims of white and copper Huskies may match their coats.)

BLUE-EYED MYSTERY

Color in eye, coat, and skin results simply by the amount of *melanin* (which comes from a Greek word meaning *dark*) present in the tissue. This biological pigment is developed from a complex chemical process involving the oxidation of *tyrosine* (an amino acid). The melanin pigments are produced in a specialized group of cells called, sensibly enough, *melanocytes*.

DNA studies show that a genetic mutation (tandem duplication in chromosome 18) next to the ALX4 gene is responsible for those blue eyes in Siberian Huskies (and in non-merle Australian Shepherds). The mutated gene causes a loss in pigmentation (melanin) only to the eyes, but not the coat. Thus, even a dark-coated Husky can have blue eyes.

More than 6,000 dogs were tested in the study. In case you're wondering (and even if you're not), blue eyes in human beings is caused by something entirely different, a genetic variation of the HERC2 and OCA2 genes. Now you know. Blue eyes are a common trait in Siberians. The mutation of the aforementioned ALX4 gene leads to a decreased pigment production in the eye, which makes them appear blue.

At birth, most Siberian puppies have blue eyes, simply because their bodies are still "learning" to make melanin. By the fourth or fifth week of life, however, the color may start to change. There is an equal distribution of blue- and brown-eyed Huskies — about two out of five in each case.

If the melanin is unequally distributed in the body, your Husky may have one brown eye and one blue one, which is called *heterochromia* or more simply *bi-eye.* It's important to remember that this isn't a medical condition. Bi-eyed puppies can see just as well and are just as healthy as their brown-eyed cousins. About 15 percent of Siberian Huskies are bi-eyed. An even smaller number (about 5 percent) have parti-colored or *split* eyes, a condition in which each eye is a mixture of blue and brown. It's both eerie and gorgeous.

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People used to believe dogs are colorblind. Not true, although their daytime eyesight can't match a human's. They see green, yellow, and orange as yellowish, and blue and violet as blue. Blue-green looks gray to them. Their night vision, however, is superior to a human's.

Ears

The Husky's strongly erect, medium-sized ears are triangular with slightly rounded tips, set high and not too far apart. They should be well covered with fur, both inside and out. Furry ears are not only cute, but of paramount importance in an arctic dog. (The upright open ears of the Siberian help keep them dry and clean, a definite plus for the Siberian owner.) By the way, erect ears are also better for hearing than floppy ones. Huskies can hear frequencies both higher and lower than humans can; they can hear a frequency range of 40 to 60,000 Hz. A human's range is much narrower: between 20 and 20,000 Hz.

Feet

Good feet are absolutely critical in a dog bred for sled pulling. Siberian feet should be well supplied with fur between the pads and toes for obvious reasons. The pads themselves should be thick and well-cushioned, an absolute necessity in a sled dog. The feet are oval-shaped and neither too small nor too large, nor should they turn in or out.

Tail

The Husky has a *fox tail,* which means it's full and bushy all the way around. The hair should be of medium length. While in repose, walking, and pulling a sled, the Siberian usually carries his tail low, but in times of high excitement, the tail often curls over the Husky's back. The technical term for this carriage is *sickle tail.* The sickle tail shouldn't bend either to the left or right but remain curled (not too tightly) over the center of the dog's back.

Both the curl and furriness of the tail is typical of arctic dogs in general. Both serve a practical purpose, allowing the animal to sleep in a curled position with his sensitive nose buried in the thick warm tail fur, protected from the bitter arctic night. This is the famous *Siberian swirl.*

Coat texture

Huskies have what is called a *double coat,* which is a soft dense undercoat, with an outercoat of *guard hair.* The under- and outercoats have contrasting textures. The guard hairs should lie straight and fairly smooth. A silky or harsh outercoat is

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considered a fault. The hairs are medium in length, and should not obscure the Husky's profile. (All other northern breeds have long hair.) Conformation (show) dogs sometimes have longer hair than working dogs, but a shaggy coat is never correct.

Color

Huskies may be of any color — or any combination of colors — from pure white to pure black. No preference is given to any particular color. One difference between the AKC standard and the British one is that merle is a disallowed color for Siberians in the U.K. Siberian Huskies often have coat patterns, often spectacular, not seen in other breeds.

Color is a complicated topic. For one thing, no single gene is responsible for causing a dog to be any particular color. Scientists have identified at least ten genes for dog hair color patterns, as well as color type, distribution, and intensity; genes are also responsible for the characteristic Siberian mask. In Siberians, the undercoat and top coat of guard hairs may be of two different colors or shades. In addition, colors appearing on young dogs may change over time. Masks appear and disappear. Coats may change from dark to light, or vice versa. Some even change from dark to red. I have a friend whose Husky changes shade with every shed!

Most dog breeds have particular colors or patterns associated with them that are included in their respective breed standards. Samoyeds, for example, are always white, and Labradors are yellow, black, or chocolate. Not so for the Siberian.

A GOOD DOG IS A GOOD COLOR

Siberian breeders go by the old maxim, "A good dog is a good color." Even the arctic explorer Olaf Swenson had to learn this lesson. When he first went to Siberia to buy dogs, he decided that he wanted a striking-looking ensemble of dogs. He made up his mind that he would have an all-white team, composed of especially large, fine, well-matched animals, with handsome red harnesses and red sleds.

The native Siberian people, the Chukchis, were amused at the notion, but they obligingly hunted up the dogs for Swenson, and he finally obtained his white team. It looked splendid, and Swenson noted that it would have made the most impressive Christmas exhibit any department store could contrive. But as a sled team, the dogs were useless. There were a few good dogs in the team, but before long Swenson replaced half the team with new dogs who had stamina, speed, and intelligence. For years, the Chukchis joked with Swenson about that infamous white team, but he took it with good spirit.

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A Husky who has individual hairs all of one color is called a *monochrome* dog. This is true even if some of these individual hairs are white and some are yellow. In a monochrome dog, the individual hairs aren't *banded* (covered with white or yellow), even though one dog may have hairs of several different colors. Monochrome dogs may be white, copper, or black. Other colors, like gray, sable, and agouti, are never monochromes. The opposite of a monochrome is a banded coat.

Both skin and coat color are determined by the amount of melanin produced by certain skin cells. How much melanin is produced is a complex matter of genetics. The Husky genetic code allows the Siberian to appear in a gloriously wide array of colors and banding patterns, including *piebald,* in which the coat is predominantly white, with irregular patches of another color, usually black or brown, sometimes only on the ears. Some breeders don't consider piebalds to be acceptable for showing, so they may be available for a very reasonable price. This attitude may be changing, however, as several piebalds have recently received championships.

The Board of Directors of the Siberian Husky Club of America approves the following color descriptions: black and white, gray and white, red and white, sable and white, agouti and white, and solid white. In ordinary parlance, the word *white* is left off when referring to a dog's color, unless, of course, the animal is solid white.

- **Black and white:** Black and white Siberians come in the following shades:
  - **Jet black:** The guard coat is solid black, and the undercoat is black, charcoal, or dark gray. This is known as a monochrome coat. These hairs aren't banded, although occasionally a single white hair or two pops up. Most jet black dogs also have black pigment on their pads and the roofs of their mouths.
  - **Black:** The black guard hairs may be banded and some white may appear near the roots. The undercoat is a lighter color than that of the jet black dog; in fact, some buff-colored hairs may appear.
  - **Dilute black:** The guard hairs have a whitish banding, but the tips are black. The undercoat has a whitish cast and the longer hairs on the back and head are black. The shorter white hairs of the undercoat give the flanks a silvery cast.
- **Gray and white:** Gray and white Siberians come in the following shades:
  - **Silver gray:** The guard hairs are banded with various tones of white. The undercoat is whitish, giving the dog a silvery aspect, with a little darkening along the spine. This silvery tone is called the *chinchilla* factor.
  - **Gray:** The guard hairs are banded with cream or buff tones with black tips. The undercoat has a beige or yellow tone, giving the dog a yellow/gray cast.
  - **Wolf gray:** The guard hairs are banded with buff near the roots and are tipped with black. The undercoat is cream, giving the dog a warm brown/gray cast.

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- **Red and white:** Red and white dogs are sometimes called copper. In copper dogs, no black hairs are evident. The guard hairs are banded with various shades of solid colors other than black. Red and white Huskies always have liver-colored points (eye rims, ears, noses, and lips). If two copper Siberians are mated, the puppies are almost certainly copper. Copper Siberians may have eyes of amber or blue, but never brown.
- **Sable and white:** Guard hairs are banded with red near the roots but are tipped with black. Sable and white Siberians always have black points and black tipping on the fur. The entire dog has a reddish cast. This color is rare.
- **Agouti and white:** The guard hairs are banded with black at the roots and tips with bands of yellow or beige in the middle of the hairs. The undercoat is charcoal. The saddle area of the dog often has a grizzled look to it. *Agouti* is defined as the *wild color.* The Siberian Husky Club goes on to note that this is the color "most frequently seen in wild rodents," but I don't know that they actually needed to say that. (Technically, they're correct, though. An agouti is a tropical South American rodent, about the size of a rabbit. It has barred hairs, resulting in distinctive alternating light and dark bands.) For some reason, the agouti color is seen more often in racing lines than in other Siberians. Agoutis usually have very black whiskers and black toenails.
- **Solid white:** The guard hairs are either pure white or banded with very pale cream at the roots, although an occasional black hair may be present. The undercoat is solid white or silver, and the points may be either black or liver-colored. Most Siberian Husky lovers prefer that white dogs have black points, although there is no rule about this. White is a recessive color in Siberians; if two white Siberians are bred, all the puppies are white as well. Many breeders think, however, that the best color (solid white with black points) comes from breeding a dark parent (which carries a white gene) to a solid white. In this case, 50 percent of the puppies are solid white.

Nose

The Siberian's nose should be black for gray, tan, or black dogs; liver for copper or red dogs; and flesh-colored for white dogs. A pink-streaked *snow nose* is also allowable. The snow nose may be seasonal, disappearing in the summertime. (Actually, the whole nose doesn't disappear, just the pinkish color.) The appropriately named snow nose is quite common among Siberian Huskies.

REMEMBER

Smell is the most important sense for dogs and is far keener than a human's. Dogs and wolves can not only smell things humans can never detect, but they also can tell how old a smell is because the characteristics of any scent alter subtly over time, which is an incredibly useful ability. For example, the recent scent of a prey animal will stir optimism in the hungry canine breast, but if the scent is hours old, it may as well be disregarded. That rabbit is long gone.

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A DOG'S NOSE KNOWS

A recent study shows that dogs prefer the scent of human family members above all other scents. (The experiment was done by looking at the brain scans of dogs who were trained to lie completely still under an MRI.) Dogs were exposed to their own scent, that of an unknown dog, another dog in the household, an unknown person, and a person who lived with them.

Even though all scent evoked a response in the brain associated with positive expectations, the strongest emotional responses were associated with that of a known human. Therapy and service dogs, who work most closely with people, recorded the most intense responses.

REMEMBER

Although you can't tell just by looking, the noseprint of every dog is unique, just like human fingerprints. In fact, noseprints have been used to identify one dog from another. Unlike microchipping, you can't change or remove the nose pattern.

Gait

The Siberian should stride out in a smooth and effortless movement, showing good reach in the front and good drive in the back. He should be light and quick on his feet. The head is carried slightly forward when the dog is trotting. A short, prancing gait is considered a fault. Crabbing or crossing is also penalized.

Temperament

The Siberian was developed as a team dog. Consequently, his temperament should be alert and friendly; aggression is severely penalized. Siberians welcome everyone, including strangers. A well-bred Siberian Husky definitely wouldn't make a good guard dog. The best word to describe the Husky's temperament is *exuberant.*

Comparing the Lookalikes and Imposters

Many people think that wolves, Siberian Huskies, Malamutes, and "Alaskan Sled Dogs" are all pretty much the same thing. But they aren't. In fact, the original breeders of the Siberian Husky did little to alter his wolf-like appearance, other than his size. They wanted a smart, strong, domestic animal, who could run fast and wouldn't bite his owners. They paid little attention to nonessential, purely

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aesthetic factors, which is one reason that the odd and fanciful features of some breeds, like the Shar Pei's wrinkles, or the floppy ears of the Irish Setter, never developed in Huskies. (Their blue eyes must be purely serendipitous.)

The following sections look more closely at the breeds often confused to Siberian Huskies.

Alaskan Malamutes

Even though the Alaskan Malamute and the Siberian Husky bear a superficial resemblance to each other, the Alaskan Malamute has an entirely different history from the Siberian. Malamutes were developed by the Eskimo people known as the *Mahlemiut,* whose dogs became much in demand as freighting animals during the Alaska Gold Rush of 1896.

They're larger, slower, and more powerful than Huskies, and they never have blue eyes. Malamutes can also have a more difficult temperament than the merry, easygoing Siberians. Today, Malamutes are frequently used for drafting. The Alaskan Malamute, like the Siberian Husky, is an AKC-recognized breed.

Samoyeds

Another well-known and AKC recognized breed is the beautiful, startlingly all-white Samoyed. (Siberian Huskies can also be all white, but in the Samoyed it's a required breed characteristic.) The Samoyed is also a Siberian dog, used primarily for hauling sledges. This breed runs a little larger than the Husky and isn't as speedy. You're not likely to see them in the Iditarod.

Like the Husky, Samoyeds seem to be always smiling; aficionados claim the upturned corners of the mouth keep drool from descending and turning into icicles. I don't know whether this is true or not, but it makes a good story.

"Alaskan Huskies"

Now I'm deep into the weeds (or snowbanks). The Alaskan Husky isn't even a pretense of a breed. It's a mixed breed of various ancestry and disparate looks particularly suited for sledding. There are two main varieties. Most are crossed with Pointers, Setters, Greyhounds, and Salukis (sprinting group) and Siberian Huskies and Malamutes for the long-distance group. Anatolian Shepherd dogs, revered for their work ethic, have been tapped for both groups. Admirable as they are, these dogs aren't recognized as a breed by any major kennel club.

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"Miniature Huskies"

This dog first made an appearance in the 1990s. Although some people consider them to be a separate breed from the Siberian Husky, the Siberian Husky Club of America doesn't recognize any such variant nor is it currently accepted as a breed by the AKC. Britain's Kennel Club considers the miniature Husky as simply a size variation of the standard Siberian.

Miniature Huskies are about half the size of the original, recognized breed. The original breeder Bree Normandin was attempting to create a more manageable version of the familiar Husky. Obviously, this breed can't be counted on to pull a sled.

Alaskan Klee Kai

Almost indistinguishable from the Miniature Siberian is the tiny version of the Alaskan Malamute or "Alaskan Husky," developed in the late 20th century. Bred in three sizes, it can range from 5 to 22 pounds. It was developed in the 1970s by Linda Spurlin and isn't recognized as a breed by the AKC, although the breed certainly has its fans.

Northern Inuit Dog

Even though the name Northern Inuit Dog sounds authentically old and indigenous, the truth is otherwise. This cross breed was only developed in the 1980s by Eddie Harrison, whose idea was to create a dog that looked just like a wolf (for some reason). In pursuit of this goal, Siberian Huskies, German Shepherd Dogs, Alaskan Malamutes, and sometimes Samoyeds or even wolf-hybrids were used as *foundation sires.* No reputable breed club anywhere in the world recognizes the Northern Inuit.

Wolves and wolf-hybrids

WARNING

Some people find it macho or cool to keep a *wolf-hybrid,* a wolf crossed with a Siberian, Malamute, Akita, or German Shepherd. But keeping a wolf-hybrid is definitely a bad idea. Wolves, wolf-hybrids, and wolf mixes make dangerous pets.

Think about all the wonderful wolf acts you've seen in circuses. Oh. Right. You haven't seen a wolf act for one simple reason: There are no wolf acts. You can train a lion, a tiger, or even an elephant, but not a wolf. All the "tame" wolves have already decided it's a dog's life for them. The rest are out fending for themselves with no interest in being your pet.

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Many wolf mixes are obtained by crossing Huskies with wolves, possibly under the mistaken impression that the resultant puppies will inherit the Siberian's happy disposition. But this is simply wrong. Instead, a wolf/Siberian mix combines the worst features of both species. The crosses behave more like wolves than dogs, combining fear and aggression in an extremely unpleasant way. In many places, owning such an animal is illegal, and even where it isn't, it's just asking for trouble. The same applies to dog-coyote mixes, another unsavory trend.

WARNING

Wolf-hybrids can't be trusted around human beings. They have a bad track record of killing people, especially children. Wolves in the wild rarely kill human beings, by the way. That's because completely wild animals have a sensible fear of people and stay well away from them. The wolf mix or hybrid has no fear of humans, and he shows it. Still, a few people continue to keep children in homes where a wolf-hybrid is present, with predictable and sometimes fatal results. Some wolves or wolf-hybrids may appear tame, but no wolf or wolf mix is ever truly domesticated. Wolf-hybrids can never learn to read your face the way a dog can, either. If none of this deters you, consider they can't be housetrained. That fact alone should dampen your enthusiasm.

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2 Looking for Your Soul Mate

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IN THIS PART . . .

Find information and advice about helping you figure out whether a Siberian Husky is right for you.

Navigate the process of where you can get your Husky and what to look for in your new best friend.

Prepare to bring your Husky home and know what to have on hand the moment your four-legged friend walks through the door.

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Figuring out whether a Husky is right for you
- Locating a good breeder
- Picking a puppy

Chapter 3
Selecting a Siberian Husky

The Siberian Husky is an incomparably beautiful dog. And that's probably part of the reason why you want one. Or maybe you saw old reruns of Sergeant Preston and King on TV. Or you've heard about how wonderful Siberians are with children, how intelligent they are, and what terrific jogging partners they make. Maybe you were entranced with the legend of Balto and the Great Alaskan Serum Run. Someone may have mentioned something to you about how clean they are and their lack of dog smell. All these things are true. But it's also true that not everyone should have a Siberian Husky.

In this chapter, I start by helping you figure out whether you and a Husky would make a good match. Then I guide you through the process of finding a good breeder and choosing the right pup. Don't skip that all-important first part of the chapter, though. You owe it to yourself and your dog to be sure you're choosing the right breed.

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Determining Whether a Husky Is Right for You

Wise dog owners know that that dogs are sentient, intelligent beings with needs of their own. It's not enough to think about what you want in a dog. Considering what a Siberian Husky needs from you, mainly stability, physical exercise, and loving attention, is equally important. If your work schedule or home life can't reasonably accommodate these vital needs, you may want to rethink the idea of owning a Siberian Husky (or any dog for that matter). Don't underestimate the demands that owning a dog, especially one with the relentless energy of a Siberian, can present. In the following sections, I cover some important factors to consider when getting a Husky.

A Husky's heritage

As a prospective Siberian owner, your responsibility is to understand your dog's heritage and make the necessary accommodations to it. If you harbor any doubts at all about owning a Siberian (or any dog at all), don't get one.

REMEMBER

If you expect your new Siberian to act the way your old Labrador did, you may be in for a little shock. Labradors are retrievers, a breed genetically inclined to return obediently to their owners. Huskies are more free-spirited (and free-ranging) than many other popular breeds. They're bred to run and run in one direction. Don't think you can ever trust one off lead.

They're strong-willed animals, and most of them do better with an experienced dog owner. This doesn't mean that you can't have a Siberian for your first dog; it does mean you should know what to expect. (You've already taken a step in this direction by buying this book.) Some people consider Siberians stubborn, but it's more accurate to say that they're determined and persevering — necessary qualities in a good sled dog.

Sadly, many people don't understand enough about the background of this unique breed. The so-called "bad" qualities of Siberians were necessary components of dogs raised in an arctic environment for a particular purpose. The very elements that make Siberians great sled dogs can sometimes be inconvenient when Huskies are transported to a very different kind of life. In their previous lives, Siberians were expected to be determined powerhouses, sled-pulling dynamos. Today, those same qualities are sometimes referred to as stubborn or hyperactive. Siberian Husky owners should understand that these are qualities of a normal Siberian.

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Nor are Huskies suitable for people who want a guard dog. They tend not to be protective at all and enjoy of the company of anyone who will pay attention to them, including children and burglars. In fact, if you're looking for a watchdog, get a Chihuahua. Huskies not only like burglars, they seldom even bark at trespassers. They prefer to stand around silently wagging their tails while the thief makes off with your valuables. If you own a whole pack of Huskies, the miscreant may stay away from your house on the hunch that Siberian Huskies are dangerous. But he'd be wrong.

Children

Most Siberians are good with and for children; a very few aren't. A lot depends on the nature of the children. Careless and cruel children (and there are a lot of them) don't deserve a pet of any kind.

TIP

Huskies are adaptable to many situations. They aren't one-person dogs but enjoy the company of the entire family, particularly children. Because a Siberian is a family dog, be sure that everyone in your family wants a dog and that everyone agrees that the Husky is the right dog for your family. Siberians often live 15 years or more; so make sure you get a dog with whom you're willing to forge this lifelong bond.

In addition, Siberians are boisterous, playful dogs who can overwhelm a toddler, or even unintentionally injure one. Super vigilance is always required when dogs and children mix. Don't leave toddlers alone with a dog you don't completely trust to behave himself. And how much can you trust a child? I know of one situation in which an untended kid was trying to scissor out the hair between a Husky's toes. The child, sitting on the dog, missed a few times and injured the Siberian's footpads. Fortunately for the kid, the dog didn't retaliate, although he would certainly have been within his rights had he done so. Chapter 7 discusses important reminders when socializing your Husky with children.

REMEMBER

A child can't be responsible for a dog. No matter how much your kid promises to feed, clean up after, and walk the dog, he'll inevitably forget or start whining about it. Never buy a pet to teach a child responsibility. You are the adult; *you* have the responsibility of caring for the pet. You also have the job of paying for the inevitable vet bills.

TIP

Having your child help with pet care is wise; you may even want to make it the child's job to feed, groom, or walk the dog. But the dog is ultimately your responsibility as the adult. If the child forgets to feed the Siberian, then *you* must. If you yourself aren't willing to undertake the care of the dog when the child forgets, rethink owning any animal. If your child gets bored with the dog, then he becomes yours.

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WARNING

Because many children are allergic to dog hair and dander, I strongly advise prospective Husky owners to get their kids allergy tested before bringing home this shedding breed.

Financial considerations

Siberians can be expensive, but perhaps not in the way you imagine. The initial price of your dog, whether you get one free from your brother-in-law, spend $100 for an adoption fee, or spend $1,600 or more for a show-quality Siberian, is the cheapest part of sharing your life with a Husky. Your new friend needs high-quality food and medical attention throughout his life. You are responsible for these costs. And they can be considerable.

REMEMBER

Boarding fees, crates and other equipment, high-quality food, regular medication like heartworm preventive, and training classes cost more than you think. The first year, when you're buying the crates, barriers, dog bowls, and beds, is the most expensive. The American Kennel Club (AKC) estimates that the lifetime cost of owning a medium-sized dog like a Husky (with a life expectancy of 13 years) is $15,782. *Forbes* suggests a higher total: between $17,650 to more than $93,000. This all depends, of course, on wildly unpredictable veterinary costs, boarding expenses, grooming services, and other variables. Vet expenses, according the AKC, can run from $900 to $1,500 a year not including medications and emergencies.

Many people become so attached to their pets that they purchase designer collars and leashes with their pet's name inscribed, orthopedic beds, special treats, toys, and other accoutrements. They buy books about their pets (like this one); subscribe to breed magazines; and they join clubs and Internet groups. You may become addicted to showing or racing your Siberian. Besides, you may eventually want to get a second Husky as company for the first. Those costs add up quickly.

Your house

Meticulous housekeepers may not appreciate the joys of owning a Siberian. These dogs shed a lot and have a reputation for destructive behavior (although this tends to happen only when the dog isn't getting enough exercise and attention). Much of this reputation is undeserved, but it's fair to warn you that if you're obsessive about housecleaning and keeping a meticulous home, then more than likely owning a Siberian will add stress to your existence.

Despite their shedding, Siberians are exceptionally clean. They don't have the doggy odor typical of many breeds. They're also clean eaters, not apt to drop food everywhere. And they rank low in the drool department.

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The ideal Siberian home has a large fenced yard for Siberian play. If this isn't possible for you, make sure you have regular access to a dog park. Being a committed jogger helps as well. However, don't even think about letting your Siberian run free. (Most communities and parks have containment or leash laws anyway.) Siberians not only enjoy getting lost, but they have a strong predatory drive and may attack cats, rabbits, and even lambs or calves.

Climate

Unfortunately, climate is an important consideration that many people overlook. Although you can certainly keep a Siberian if you live in hot and humid South Carolina, you'll need to take extra care and precautions in the summer. Most Siberians are simply miserable in hot weather and are extra susceptible to heat stroke.

As a general rule, the colder it is, the better Huskies like it. If you live in Minnesota and like the winter, the Siberian is the dog for you! However, if you can't stand the cold, then you may want to match up with a less arctic animal. (Don't shave your Siberian's coat. I discuss this further in Chapter 12.)

Time and exercise

Huskies also require an enormous amount of attention. You can't expect to leave a Siberian Husky alone in a house for hours on end while you go to work or school. A lonely Siberian will entertain himself any way he can, and although his creativity is admirable, you may not enjoy the results when you return and encounter ripped curtains, damaged walls, and chewed shoes. (Confining such an active intelligent dog to a crate for hours isn't the solution either. You'll make him mentally ill with boredom or anxiety.) Siberians are intellectually independent and expert problem solvers, but emotionally they crave the human touch. The more time you spend with your Siberian, especially when he's young, the happier and better adjusted he'll be as an adult.

Siberians were meant to work in teams in partnership with their humans and enjoy rigorous exercise — every day. If you want a Husky, you need to be willing to provide your pet with the high level of activity he requires to keep him happy and healthy. These activities can include regular jogging, playing, swimming, or best of all, sledding. One Husky can keep several members of the family in top condition. Be honest with yourself about how much exercise you can give your dog. If you aren't willing or able to give your dog a lot of attention, consider a breed with lower activity level needs. Or hire a dogwalker. Or pay the teenager next door to play with him on a regular basis.

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Legal considerations

Make certain your lease or covenant agreement allows you to have a dog. You don't want to have to make an uncomfortable choice later on. And whether you're an owner or a renter, you should carry liability insurance if you have an energetic dog. In today's litigious society, even a playful nip can mean big lawsuits.

REMEMBER

If your Husky escapes and kills the neighbor's chickens, you'll be held responsible for the damage so keep a close eye on him.

Commitment

Who will be primarily responsible for the care of your new Siberian — financially, emotionally, and in charge of day-to-day activities like walks or feeding? Splitting these chores among different members of the household is okay, as long as everyone knows and agrees to his part. Too often, people complain that "I'm not the one who wanted the darn dog in the first place, and now I'm stuck with feeding/exercising/taking him to the vet." Decide on these things in advance, and then delegate responsibilities.

Finding Your Dog

When obtaining a Siberian Husky, the only two sensible ways are adopting one at a shelter or rescue or purchasing one from a reputable breeder. Getting a dog via newspaper ad, neighbor, or friend is a hit-and-miss affair. Think carefully and be sure you know why the dog is being given up in the first place (and scrutinize what they tell you).

Before you decide which route to take, know what you're looking for. Do you want to do recreational mushing, racing, showing, tracking, or just have a nice family pet? If you want to want to show your dog or engage in AKC–sanctioned activities, a breeder may be your only choice. If your heart is set on a puppy, a breeder is probably your best bet. However, if you want (or at least don't mind) an older dog, shelters and rescues may have just what you want at a fraction of the cost.

The following sections delve deeper into these two options and examine important points to remember.

WARNING

Don't ever buy a dog from a pet store. I explain at the end of this section why doing so isn't a wise choice.

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Your first option: The breeder route

A reputable breeder is your best bet for a genetically sound, good tempered, healthy puppy. A quality breeder has a reason for breeding dogs. Most of them are active in the breed and enjoy showing dogs and attending dog sports. Breeders usually have several animals available who may not be suited for the show ring or sledding, but which nevertheless make great pets. This would be an excellent break for you, because you can purchase a well-bred puppy at a very reasonable price.

It's an axiom in the dog world that a good dog comes from a good breeder, a reputable breeder. But how do you know who is reputable and who isn't? Check out the following sections for help.

WARNING

If you come across a backyard breeder who claims to sell only pets, your hackles should rise. This person probably isn't knowledgeable about Husky genetics and probably doesn't have the proper health or genetic tests done. You're better off going to a show or working dog breeder, even if you're only interested in a companion dog.

Get recommendations from reputable breeders

Ask around to get recommendations for good breeders in your area. Check with your local Siberian Husky Club. Members will be happy to refer you to a good source. The AKC can provide you with the phone number for a breeder referral representative from the Siberian Husky Club of America. You can visit the AKC website at `www.akc.org` for more information. Breed magazines also advertise upcoming litters. You can also ask your vet for a recommendation.

Go to dog shows

If possible, attend a few AKC dog shows. This experience will give you a good idea of what a quality Siberian Husky looks like. You may also get a chance to speak with a few exhibitors who can give you information about good local breeders and may know about a forthcoming litter. This can be tricky, though. Most people show up for their own breed class (say at 10 a.m.) and then pack up and go home. You'll need to call in advance to find when the Siberians are showing or come at 8 a.m. and hang around all day. Exhibitors may be busy at dog shows and may not have the time to talk. However, they may be available after the show or may be willing to give out their phone numbers or email addresses so you can contact them later. A good breeder should be eager to talk to a perspective Siberian owner. If they aren't, cross them off your list and look elsewhere.

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TIP

If you shell out the money for a show catalog (which usually costs about $5) you can see the names and addresses of the exhibitors. If you notice a dog whose looks you especially like, don't hesitate to contact the owners after the show. They should be pleased with your effusive compliments and be happy to point you along the path toward getting your very own Siberian.

You may get really lucky and be able to view one of the few benched shows left in the country. A *benched show* is one in which all the dogs in competition are on display (although not necessarily actually on a bench) all day. Breeders hate these shows, because they're hard on the dogs and themselves, but spectators love them. The most prestigious All-Breed Shows are benched, which is why exhibitors continue to subject themselves to them. These shows include the legendary Westminster Show and the National Dog Shows.

Interview a breeder before deciding to buy a puppy from her

Check out the breeder personally. Ask questions and look for these marks of a quality breeder:

- **A quality breeder specializes in only one or two breeds.** Breeders who have half a dozen breeds for sale might more properly be labeled puppy millers. It takes many years to gain a thorough understanding of just one breed.
- **A quality breeder has puppies for sale only occasionally, not every day of the year, and especially not specifically for the holidays.** Many breeders won't even sell a puppy around the holidays, precisely because people tend to buy pups as presents for people who may not be prepared to care for them.
- **A quality breeder makes her kennel areas available for viewing.** The kennels should be clean, comfortable, and odor-free. The puppies should be kept safe in a *whelping box* (where the mother gives births and the newborn puppies are kept), as shown in Figure 3-1.
- **A quality breeder has developed a breeding plan with the goal of producing high-quality Siberians.** The breeder should be able to explain her breeding goals to you. She may be focusing, for example, on agility or sledding, as conformation.
- **A quality breeder has well-socialized dogs and puppies.** The dogs and puppies interact well with you and with each other.

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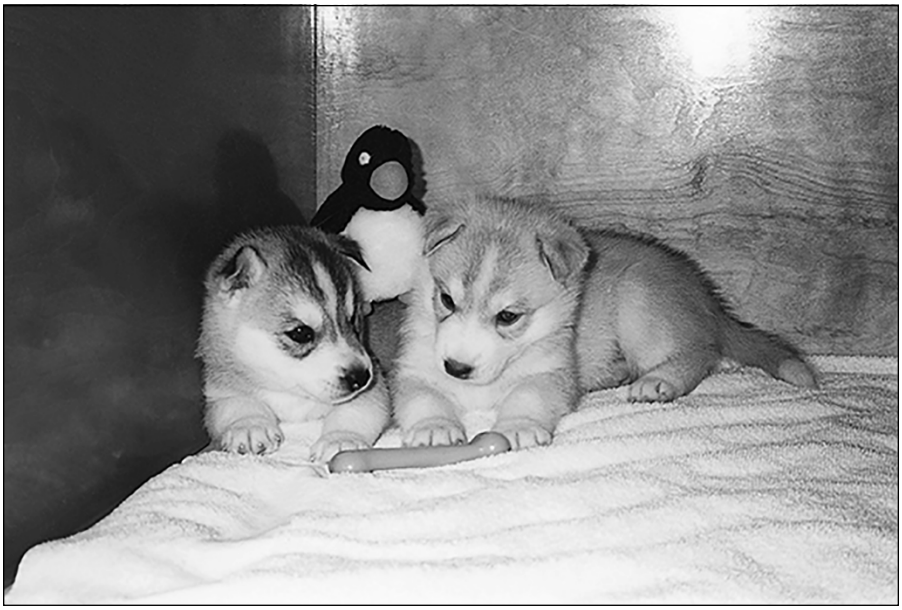

FIGURE 3-1: These healthy Siberian puppies are kept safe in a whelping box.

Photo by Jeanette and Dominic DiBalsi

REMEMBER

- **A quality breeder doesn't sell inexpensive dogs.** A good pet-quality puppy will cost in the range of $500 to $1,600. If you think you may like to show your dog, expect to pay even more.

  Choosing a pup for show purposes is always a gamble. No one, not even the sharpest-eyed breeder on earth, can accurately predict which puppies will "make it." This works both ways, however. I once purchased a puppy as a pet that turned out to be a winning show dog much to everyone's surprise, including mine. The breeder should be able to explain to you exactly why she undertook this particular breeding and what she expected from it. Her response can give you some idea of whether the dog would be good for showing.

- **Quality breeders have people waiting in line for their dogs.** Six months or more isn't an unreasonable time to have to wait for a puppy. Just think how much you can learn about Siberians in that period.

- **Quality breeders won't sell puppies before they're at least 9 weeks old.** Breeders who are showing or racing may keep puppies longer, because they're trying to evaluate the litter for show or sled potential.

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- **Quality breeders have healthy puppies.** The puppies should have been vet checked and vaccinated. The *sire* (father) and *dam* (mother) should have been screened for genetic diseases. In particular, they should be checked by the following:
  - The Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA), certified with a minimum rating of "good."
  - The Canine Eye Registration Foundation (CERF) or the Siberian Husky Ophthalmologic Registry (SHOR) with recent eye checks, certified with a rating of "clear." The eye checks are very important in Huskies. Make sure you see this paperwork; don't just take the breeder's word for it.
- **Quality breeders are actively engaged in showing or racing, and they should have the ribbons to prove it.** They're involved in their local Siberian Husky Club. If you don't have a recommendation, ask for the name and phone numbers of other people who have bought puppies from the breeder. Then call them to see how their dogs turned out.
- **Quality breeders provide an AKC registration paper.** This registration paper is often referred to as a *blue slip.* A pedigree is the family history of your puppy. It should go back three generations, but you can apply (for a fee) for a longer one, if you want.
- **One or both parents of your puppy should be champions or winning sled dogs.** If they aren't, find out why. If you're buying a sled dog, find out what his parents have accomplished. (The AKC doesn't currently provide titles for sled dogs, so it won't be recorded on the pedigree.) The Siberian Husky Club of America, however, does grant titles: SD for Sled Dog, SDX for Sled Dog Excellent, and SDO for Sled Dog Outstanding.

The following initials after the dog's name stand for the following:

- *Ch.* means AKC champion.
- *CD* (Companion Dog), *CDX* (Companion Dog Excellent), or *UD* (Utility Dog) means the dog has an obedience title.
- *UDX* (Utility Dog Excellent) in the family history means something special. Only a handful of Siberians have achieved that level.
- *TD* (Tracking Dog), *TDX* (Tracking Dog Excellent), and *VST* (Variable Surface Tracking) are tracking titles.
- *NA* (Novice Agility), *OA* (Open Agility), and *AX* (Agility Excellent) are a few of the agility titles that a dog can earn. Sledding titles aren't part of a dog's AKC registration.

  The AKC is constantly adding new titles to its various programs, and the Siberian Husky Club of America has its own as well. Visit their websites for updates.

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REMEMBER

Having both parents on the premises isn't necessarily a sign of a good breeder. It may just mean that the seller owns two dogs of opposite sexes; it's no guarantee of quality. Breeders frequently outcross to a particular sire who may live across the country. Some of the best bred dogs are the result of artificial insemination or a long-distance liaison. The breeder should be able to provide you with a photo of the sire, however. (The dam should obviously be on the premises.) Take a good look at her, but don't be alarmed if she's a bit bald. Sometimes the hormonal changes that come with pregnancy produce this effect. The puppies should all have hair, though.

- **Quality breeders will interview you.** Although you may find some of the breeder's questions intrusive, a good breeder is only trying to choose the best home for her puppies.
- **Quality breeders will have a purchase agreement for you to sign.** Don't be surprised if the breeder requires that you spay or neuter your Husky as part of the deal. That's the breeder's way of making sure that only her very top-of-the-line dogs will be out there propagating. Keep an eye on your growing Husky. If you think you may have a show-quality dog after all, call the breeder and ask her to evaluate him for you.

REMEMBER

For many AKC events, only unneutered/unspayed dogs can be shown.

The purchase agreement should also provide a certain number of days for you to get your puppy checked by your veterinarian. The breeder agrees to replace an unhealthy puppy or to refund your money. Some contracts even require this. Make sure you get your puppy checked immediately. It may save you heartache.

- **Quality breeders will agree to take back a puppy who doesn't work out.** Discuss the details of this beforehand.
- **Most quality breeders raise their puppies in the household.** Although some show and sledding breeders keep their pups in a kennel, you're risking getting a dog insufficiently socialized with human beings. Don't do it if your primary interest is getting a good pet.
- **Quality breeders provide more information than you can absorb.** Most of them will chat on and on about their breeding goals. Find out what you can, but make sure anything really important will be given to you in writing.
- **A quality breeder will stay in touch, long after the puppy becomes yours.** Good breeders often try to hang on to their puppies as long as possible. Some breeders who are looking for good show and working prospects often won't sell a puppy until close to the 12-week mark.

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TIP

If possible, arrange to get your puppy a little earlier — 9 to 10 weeks is ideal. After all, you want your puppy to bond with you, and it's extremely important for puppies to bond with a person prior to 12 weeks of age even if it isn't you. If the puppies are kept in a kennel without much human contact, you should try to get your puppy as close to 8 weeks as you can. Dogs separated from their litters too early, however, may have problems adjusting to other dogs in the future.

WARNING

Some people have had good luck buying from a distant breeder, possibly without even first seeing the puppy, and having the puppy shipped to them. I never recommend doing this. You really need to see your new puppy before buying him. Besides, dogs sometimes get lost on airplanes, just like your baggage does.

Your second option: The shelter/rescue route

Perhaps a young puppy isn't for you, or maybe you want to provide a loving home to a previously unwanted or neglected dog. In this case, try your local Siberian Husky Rescue, your county shelter, the Humane Society, or the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). Usually, adopting and acclimating an older dog is a much less time-consuming task than it is with a puppy.

Rescue organizations are one of best sources for a first-rate Siberian. Siberian Husky Rescue (`www.siberianrescue.org`) specializes in the breed and usually has many available for adoption. Most rescue groups are choosy about whom they adopt to. Expect to fill out an application and to pay an adoption fee, usually around $150. A house check or vet references may also be required. Rescue groups will often lower this fee for older or special-needs dogs. You may be able to get a retired sled dog or one who just didn't work out as a racer. Figure 3-2 shows a Husky that was rescued. After being given lots of love and affection by her new family, she makes a wonderful pet.

TIP

Find out all you can about your prospective new family member. Play with him, take him for a walk, and spend some time with him. See how he reacts to children, cats, and other dogs. Find out if your local shelter does temperament testing before placing a dog on an adoption list. Sometimes you may also be able to contact the former owner to get more information about the dog and why he was given up. Get all his medical records if possible, and take him to the vet for a checkup as soon as possible.

You may be able to rescue a sick puppy from an unhealthy situation. If your heart tells you to do, then do it. People often take dogs from the shelter for the same humanitarian reasons.

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Photo by Jolie and Kimberly Runyan

FIGURE 3-2: This beautiful Husky was rescued.

REMEMBER

Giving or taking on a new dog at the holidays isn't a smart choice. First of all, the holidays are an extremely busy time of year with lots of people coming and going. There's a risk that the new family member will get either too much or too little attention, and he'll certainly be overwhelmed by the confusion of the company. A quieter season, when there's plenty of get-acquainted time, is better.

WARNING

Never give a pet as a present. People should choose their own dogs. Even though you know that a Siberian is the best pet for Aunt Hilda, she may have her heart set on a guinea pig. Shelter and rescue groups are overwhelmed every February and March with the annual holiday return. Think of it this way: If the new pet doesn't work out for your loved one or friend, are you willing to adopt him into your family?

Avoiding pet stores

Don't purchase a puppy from a pet store or pet supply store. Ever. You risk buying a sick dog and you'll pay much *more* than you would from a good breeder. Most pet store puppies come from puppy mills where dogs are treated like commodities and raised in brutal conditions.

You may be tempted to rescue a pet store puppy, but doing so only perpetuates this cruel practice. (Pet supply stores are now illegal in more than 280 jurisdictions. Indeed, several states like Maryland have banned or are working to ban

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them altogether.) In December 2019, there was an outbreak of a multidrug resistant virus contracted from pet store puppies. At least 30 people in 13 states were affected by *Campylobacter jejuni*, an agent commonly implicated in food poisoning. A similar outbreak occurred in 2016.

REMEMBER

Although it may break your heart to walk away from a puppy, it hurts a lot worse if you make the wrong decision. Impulse buying is a very dangerous thing when it comes to dogs.

Choosing the Right Puppy

If you decide on a breeder (rather than a rescue or shelter), you're ready to start thinking about what you want in a puppy. Being faced with a whole litter of adorable pups (like the 9-day-old little ones in Figure 3-3) can be difficult. They're all adorable. But be sure to look at the whole litter, not just one dog; you need to be able to make comparisons. Ask the breeder whether this litter is the first from this sire and dam or whether the pair have been mated previously. If the latter is the case, ask to see photos of the grown puppies from the first litter. (If the breeder has kept in touch with previous buyers, as she should, these should be available.) These photos are the best guess as to how the current litter will turn out.

FIGURE 3-3: These 9-day-old Siberians aren't anywhere near old enough to go home with new owners.

Photo by Jeanette and Dominic DiBalsi

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These following sections take a look at your prospective pet. Refer to Chapter 2 for some basic characteristics of Huskies.

General condition

The puppies should be active and plump, but not bloated. A bloated belly is a sign of roundworm. Although many puppies are born with roundworm, it shouldn't be evident at the buying stage. The stools should be fairly firm and well-formed. There should be no evidence of diarrhea or staining under the tail.

Foul breath in a puppy may indicate problems, although many are blessed with a characteristic puppy breath, which smells a little like garlic. Male show-quality puppies must have two testicles, which should be detectable at a young age. (This is one of the things a vet will check if you're uncertain.)

Size

Siberian puppies should be compact in build. Expect some differences in size, especially between male and female puppies. The biggest may not necessarily be the best; the biggest is just the biggest. In a show ring, a Siberian can be disqualified for being too big, so if you're interested in a show prospect, you may be better off not getting the biggest, especially if both parents are very close to the upper limit.

Sex

Female dogs tend to housetrain more easily, mature sooner, and be less dominant than males. Some people think they are more loyal. Females are less strong than their brothers, however, which may be a consideration if you will be doing serious sledding. For recreational sledding, either sex is fine.

Females are usually more loving (some would say demanding) and probably easier to train. Males are more physically impressive and stronger. They're probably more independent and challenging of human authority than females.

Some people claim that males have a better temper than females. If true, it may be because the female's heat cycle causes hormonal swings. In any case, unless you plan to be a breeder, you will have your Husky spayed or neutered, which eliminates these hormonal mood swings. In general, I recommend a female for families with small children, because they tend to be tolerant of children's mistakes.

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Color

Most Huskies are born dark, except those destined to be pure white. The characteristic Siberian masks will be present in puppies, but their coat colors may change somewhat as they mature.

Eyes

The puppy's eyes should be bright and clear, no matter what color they are. Dark blue eyes may change into brown later on.

Ears

Most authorities agree that Siberians have some of the keenest ears in the dog world. Some Siberian puppies have floppy ears. Don't worry; they'll stand up later. The ears should have no discharge or unpleasant odor.

REMEMBER

Sometimes a Husky's ears will revert to floppiness when he's going through his teething period.

Temperament

The puppy should be friendly and curious. A shy puppy will grow up to be a shy dog. Step a few feet away, crouch down, and call to the puppy softly and encouragingly. If the puppy toddles over to you, it probably means that he has a happy, friendly disposition.

WARNING

Don't confuse normal boisterous play with a neurotic condition sometimes called *spinning.* Sometimes pups who have been confined in too-small kennel areas display a compulsive whirling round and round. Avoid these puppies. They have been severely traumatized and will never be normal.

Many breeders today do a temperament test on their dogs. These tests look for early signs of assertiveness, outgoingness, and so on. The results are usually given numerically. In one popular test, the Puppy Aptitude Test, the scores range from 1 to 6, with 1 leaning toward the dominant, aggressive, watchdog side, and 6 being very submissive or lethargic. For most pet purposes, you would like to see a puppy score close to 3. (Potential watchdogs score 1, show dogs 2, and so on.) Of course, these tests aren't foolproof; they're dependent on the giver of the test, but they can give you an early indication of temperament.

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Age

Puppies should be at least 8 weeks old when they are adopted. This is the legal minimum in many states. If you are planning on sledding, you may want to leave the puppy with his littermates for a longer period of time to increase his peer socialization skills. If your pup is destined to be an only dog, you want to get him closer to the 8-week mark, so that he will bond with you.

REMEMBER

Don't be scared off from getting an older puppy, or even an adult dog. Siberians are not one-person dogs. They're able to form a bond with people at any age. Dogs often end up in rescue or an animal shelter through no fault of their own. With Siberians, it's usually because the first owner was unprepared to deal with the Husky's relentless energy or the shedding that comes with the breed. You'll be doing a good deed, building good karma, and saving a life. What could be nicer?

Puppies are cute and charming, but they aren't housetrained, and are usually quite interested in chewing everything in sight. Besides, puppyhood doesn't last forever.

Older dogs are usually housetrained and very grateful to have a new home. The older dog is often the perfect choice for older people as well. Considering that Siberians may live for 15 years, it may make more sense for an older person to choose a pet who won't outlive him — besides, an older dog is quieter around the house and needs less exercise. I have an older friend who adopted a quite elderly female, saying that they could be old ladies together.

HOW OLD IS OLD?

Remember the general thought that one human year equals seven dog years? The truth is more complicated. Aging partly depends on breed and size, and current studies have been done with Labrador Retriever DNA. However, Husky owners can still benefit from this research. By the age of 2, the Labrador DNA was equivalent to a person in her early forties! After that, however, aging in dogs slows down.

By the age of 10, a Labrador is like a person of 68. At 12, the Lab equals a 70 year old human, showing that the dog and person have ages at exactly the same rate after the dog reaches 10. Whether you find this comforting or not, I leave it for you to decide. (It should be comforting for Husky owners to know, in any case, because Huskies tend to live longer than Labs.)

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REMEMBER

Housetraining an older dog who is used to being outside all the time may be difficult. If your new older dog has been confined in a kennel for a while before you have adopted him for a house dog, expect that his housetraining skills may not be up to par. Prepare to teach him all over again. Siberians are extremely anxious to please in this regard. On the positive side, though, older dogs have bigger bladders than puppies, and they can hold it much more easily. Chapter 5 addresses housetraining. For more in-depth information, check out the latest edition of *Housetraining For Dummies* by Susan McCullough (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.).

Recognizing When Your Husky Puppy Matures

Like human children, Huskies experience milestones in their development as they mature. The following list provides some general guidelines, but each dog is different, again just like people. If you're worried about your puppy's physical development, talk to your vet. His social development is in your hands. Make the most of it.

- **Birth to 6 months:** Puppies have rapid growth.
- **3 to 5 weeks:** Puppies become aware of their environment.
- **2 to 3 months:** This is a critical socialization period, in which dogs should be introduced regularly to new people and environments.
- **6 months:** Puppies have complete bladder control.
- **6 months:** Puppies get their adult teeth.
- **6 months:** Puppies' nipping should cease.
- **6 months:** Male dogs lift leg to urinate.
- **6 to12 months:** Unneutered dogs may show interest in opposite sex.
- **6 months:** Behavior resembles that of a teenager. Erratic.
- **6 months:** Puppies may start practicing various Husky noises, especially howling.
- **1 year:** Growth stops, but your dog may begin to fill out.
- **1 year:** Your dog may become calmer.

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Buying all the supplies you need before your puppy arrives
- Finding ways to keep your puppy occupied
- Knowing what's safe for your puppy to play with

Chapter 4

Outfitting Your New Husky

Don't let your new Siberian come home to an empty house. You need to fill it with Husky paraphernalia. This chapter lets you know the necessities for life with a Siberian.

REMEMBER

I hope you'll never need a first-aid kit, but preparation is better than regret. Chapter 14 discusses what to include in your first-aid kit and other important details.

Selecting the Right Collars, Leashes, and Harnesses

Free-loving creatures that they are, most Huskies would probably prefer to live a life free of restraint. However, because almost all domestic dogs live in a world of set boundaries, traffic, and other dangers, civilized dogs need the safety of leashes and collars, which I discuss in these sections.

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Collars

Collars are important for you and your Siberian Husky because they carry his identification, make a quick "handle" in emergency situations, and attach to leashes for walks. Figure 4-1 shows a variety of collars that you may use for your Siberian Husky. These three include the following:

- Flat or rolled leather collar, as in Figure 4-1a
- Choke or slip collar as in Figure 4-1b
- Martingale, as in Figure 4-1c

You can buy either a rolled-leather buckle collar or the flat kind made of leather or nylon. The rolled collar leaves less wear on the neck. Some of these collars are adjustable, and many are equipped with a kind of quick-release system.

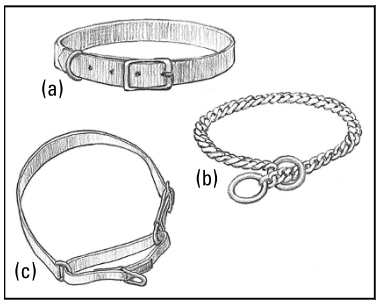

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FIGURE 4-1: Collars are an important safety measure when you own a dog.

A choke collar works by putting pressure on a dog's neck. Most people use a choke collar to keep their dogs from forging ahead when they walk. Yet, the choke collar is the least effective collar on the market for this purpose, and if you incorrectly keep using one, you're liable to damage your dog's neck.

If correctly adjusted, the pressure is *not* great and self-corrects quickly; however, most choke collars aren't carefully adjusted or properly fitted, much less applied. The important thing is, if needed, figure out how to use the collar correctly. Most choke collars also tear out fur, although a fur-saving model is available. An incorrectly applied choke collar can cause trauma, a collapsed trachea, or even death. Is it worth it? I don't think so. Good relationships shouldn't depend on pain.

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that most people don't know how to use a choke collar correctly. If you plan to use a choke collar, check out Figure 4-2 for the correct way to put the collar on your dog. If you must use one when walking,

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leave it off when he's alone in the house. Choke collars are more likely than regular collars to get caught on something and, unlike regular collars, can do some damage to the dog's neck.

FIGURE 4-2: The correct way to put a choke collar on your Husky.

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TIP

If you do decide to use a choke collar with an older puppy or adult dog, put it on the dog correctly; otherwise it won't work or may even injure your dog. Make the collar into a "P," with the loop in your right hand, and the tail hanging straight down. Approach the dog from the front, and slip it on. The tail of the loop will now be on his right. Attach the lead, and keep the dog on your left.

TIP

Some Siberians have a problem with respect to their fur when wearing a choke collar; the guard hairs poke through and can be broken off. To prevent this from happening, you can make a cloth "collar wrapper" for the chain or you can buy a collar known as a Fur Saver, designed to protect against this problem.

WARNING

If you're working with a young puppy, never use a choke collar; you can bruise or damage his windpipe, which in puppyhood is insufficiently protected by muscle.

WARNING

I'm not a major advocate of the choke collar. Choke collars work by making dogs uncomfortable. This collar can be useful at times, if you have an uncontrollable dog. If you train your dog correctly right from the start, you won't need one.

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Taking your friend on a walk: A leash

You need a leash for taking your Husky on those long walks he'll require. If a leash is an unfamiliar item to your dog, allow him to drag it around the house or yard for a while as he becomes accustomed to it. Don't leave him unattended, however — your Siberian will certainly attempt to devour the thing. The leash may also get tangled up in the furniture or bushes and panic the dog.

TIP

Leather leashes are easy on your hands, but they're slippery when wet. Nylon leashes can give you rope burn if you're not careful. Dogs seem to prefer to eat leather leashes, but Huskies are fairly omnivorous in this regard.

The Flexi and other similar brands are a matter of personal choice. These leashes adjust to various lengths at the push of a button and come in lengths of up to 23 feet. They are perfect for long walks in the meadows. I personally hate them; others swear by them.

I am a fond of thick, reflective nylon leads with a secure clip. The best ones are made of lightweight mountain climbing rope — easy on your hands and practically indestructible.

Protecting your dog's neck: Harnesses

Many people prefer harnesses to collars, and they are traditional wear for Huskies. (Sled dogs use harnesses not collars while working.) A harness encircles the dog's chest and torso, rather than the neck. Although there are dozens of types, I include a few of my favorites them here. Don't be afraid to experiment until you find the right type for your dog and situation.

I'm a big advocate of harnesses, and if ever a breed was born for them, it's the Siberian Husky. Harnesses are available for every conceivable purpose. Your options include the following:

- **Walking harness:** A light harness designed to attach to the leash and used in place of a collar when you're out for a walk.
- **Classic X-back:** These are used for sledding. They're working harnesses that are usually padded and more substantial than the walking harness.
- **Siwash harness:** These harnesses are used for drafting (also referred to as carting). They usually include a padded collar around the dog's neck, allowing free motion of the shoulders and legs. They also have a belly strap connecting to the shaft of the wagon or cart, while the collar is what attaches to the traces that run to the wagon. Obviously, this harness isn't for an ordinary pet.

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» **No-pull brands:** These types prevent forging. The best harness to prevent forging is a front-loop design, which dogs take to immediately and which gives you a lot of control. Dogs also seem to love front loop harnesses, which combine easy of control and comfort for the dog.

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Another option that isn't really a harness or a collar is a head halter like the Gentle Leader or Halti head collar in addition to, or in place of, a regular collar. Head halters, however, are used only for walks, not around the house. Furthermore, they can't carry identification.

Choosing the right harness is a sticky problem for Husky owners who want to use their dogs for these activities. When your Husky is working, you *want* him to pull; when you're just walking, you don't. So you either need a Husky who is perfectly voiced trained (good luck) or you need to resort to completely different gear when walking or working.

REMEMBER

In addition to the myriad varieties of collars and harnesses available, consider the types of closure: snap, Velcro, buckle, slip-on, and breakaway. You have your pick.

Using ID Tags

Have your Siberian wear a collar with ID tags at all times. Some people fear that their dog's collar will get caught in something around the house, but the collar is a real lifesaver. My friend Debbie was away from home when a fire broke out in her home. Because her Tibetan Terrier, Dalai, was wearing a collar, it was easy for the firefighters to capture him and lead him to safety.

Besides, any dog can escape or be lost, and Huskies are a lot better at this than most. A collar and some identification are the simplest way for you to be reunited with your delinquent pal. My dogs' collars have their names and my phone number sewn on them in big letters (available from pet catalogs), but you can accomplish almost the same thing with a laundry marker. Having your dog wear visible ID creates the best odd for getting him home safely.

WARNING

Huskies are just clever at pulling out of a collar; you don't want to be caught standing with the leash *and* the collar in your hand. Ideally, collars with tags should be the reflective type; they help protect runaway dogs from cars.

TIP

If your Husky runs away, check the local animal shelter personally to see if your dog is there. Don't rely on just a phone call. Believe me, I have learned from personal experience that many shelter workers don't know a Coonhound from a Cocker Spaniel. Go look yourself. Half the time, after you retrieve your Siberian, you'll get an incredulous, "Huh, whaddya know Husky, huh? We thought that was a Rottweiler/Dachshund mix."

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You can register your dog with a lost-pet service, which may provide for tattooing or microchipping your dog. ID tags are in addition to microchipping, which you'll have done at your vets. All dogs should be microchipped and all dogs should have visible ID. Period. These procedures don't hurt and can be effective, but they should be used in conjunction with a collar, not as a replacement of one.

TIP

Keep some clear and recent photos of your dog handy on your phone. If your Husky gets away, you'll want to make flyers with his picture on them.

Choosing Food and Water Dishes

The best pet food dishes are made of stainless steel or chrome. (You can buy weighted ones or anti-skid bowls that your Husky can't push around so easily.) Some of them have tapered sides, to make cleanup easier. Stainless steel, dishwasher-safe bowls are much easier to keep clean than plastic ones. Plastic dishes can also develop tiny crevices from being chewed on by dogs. Some dogs are also allergic to them; if that's the case, you'll see some irritation around the mouth. Heavy stoneware is usually acceptable, but even that can chip or develop minute cracks. These small fissures can become hiding places for all sorts of creatures you don't want in your kitchen or in your dog's digestive tract. There are enough awful things in there anyway.

TIP

To keep water cool longer, I suggest insulated dog bowls. Many have a skid-resistant bottom.

WARNING

If your dog spends time outdoors in the winter, provide him ceramic rather than metal bowls. Dog tongues can easily stick to metal (like yours), and you don't want that happening. You can also purchase a little immersible heater that will keep water temperature at 40 to 50 degrees, or even get electrically heated food and water dishes.

THE SLOPPIEST DRINKER AWARD GOES TO . . .

Why are dogs such sloppy drinkers, anyway? Without hands, they must use their tongues like spoons. It doesn't work all that well. Dogs, in fact, rank as the sloppiest drinkers in the animal kingdom. You can find dog bowls for sale that promise to reduce or eliminate slobber, anti-drip bowls, no-spill water bowls, anti-splash water bowls, and the like. It seems as if the best of American engineering has gone into the development of the perfect water bowl.

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Focusing on Grooming Tools

Grooming tools are a necessity for keeping your Husky healthy and beautiful. Here are the essentials:

- **Pin brush:** Ones made for people are fine. Pin brushes (see Figure 4-3a) resemble the wire brush, but the tines have tiny balls attached for a bit more comfort. There is also a wider gap between the tines.
- **Wide-toothed metal comb:** This is also called a *Collie comb.*
- **Slicker brush:** Used for removing mats and dead hair, the slicker brush (refer to Figure 4-3b) resembles a wire hairbrush for humans. The tines are usually made thin metal wire, embedded in a foam or rubber mat.
- **Rake:** A rake (see Figure 4-3c) is a wooden instrument with two rows of teeth. It removes dead hair and keeps the coat healthy.
- **Dematting tools and their kin:** Dematting combs, mat splitters, and mat breakers have extremely sharp steel blades to slice right through the mat. The regular dematting tool has a straight-line blade, making it easier to use. Mat splitters and mat breakers use curved or right-angle blades that are trickier to handle for the amateur.
- **Spray mist bottle with water:** Frequently spraying of the dog during grooming may make your job easier.
- **Grooming table:** This item isn't necessary, but nice to have.

I discuss grooming tools in more detail in Chapter 12.

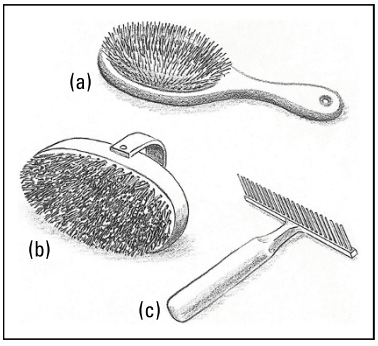

FIGURE 4-3: Brushes and a shedding rake help you keep your Husky healthy and beautiful.

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Picking a Place for Your Husky to Sleep

Your Siberian should have his own bed. More than most breeds, Siberians are content to sleep on the floor, but they deserve their own special place.

Beds come in every size, material, shape, and color. (Although dogs aren't completely colorblind, color doesn't seem to matter to them. Suit yourself in this manner.) My suggestion is to get a color that matches the color of your Husky for obvious reasons.

As for materials, you can choose from fleece, suede, flannel, denim, or microfiber. They can be round, rectangular, oval, or square. They can be stuffed with cedar, foam, or polyester.

I like dog beds with at least some cedar bedding inside; they smell nice and fill the house with a fresh, outdoorsy fragrance. They also repel fleas, although in this day and age all dogs should be on flea prevention anyway. It's little comfort to know that fleas are repelled from the dog bed but are wandering all over the rest of the house. Unfortunately, a few dogs simply won't go near a cedar bed.

TIP

You may have to experiment a little. No matter which bed you finally decide on, make sure at least the cover is machine washable. Being able to wash it helps get rid of that pesky Husky hair and as well as the inevitable odors that can emerge from even this cleanest of breeds. Use the gentle cycle and tumble dry.

Here are some other more specialized options:

- **Nesting beds:** These dog beds have raised bolsters around the whole or part of the circumference. Many dogs find these beds comfortable to curl up inside or rest their chins on (usually for the purpose of staring at you and wondering when you're going to take them out).

  A kind of super nesting bed is the *donut bed,* which is usually extremely soft and cuddly with a wider bolster. Older dogs enjoy so-called *orthopedic beds* with special supportive memory foam. They help prevent pressure sores for elderly Siberians.

- **Raised cot beds:** Many companies sell raised cot beds, usually made of vinyl-coated synthetic yarn in an open weave construction, designed to dry fast. They're non-odor-absorbing and often contain a fungicide to prevent mildew. They're raised off floor and are suitable for outdoor use. Huskies really seem to enjoy them.

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- **Cooling beds:** These types of beds are something to consider. These beds are typically made of plastic filled with a nontoxic gel-like material to help dissipate the heat. They don't require any external power source. Heated beds are also available, but most Siberians won't ever need them.
- **Anxiety-reducing beds:** These calming, flexible beds come in dozen of styles (largely dependent on how your dog sleeps, most are designed to cuddle and encircle your pet's body).

TIP

If you like making up your own dog beds from zippered liners and pillow cases, 25 pounds of cedar chips will make you about seven Husky beds.

Finding the Right Crate

Crates are a necessity for every dog owner even if you *never* plan to have your Siberian sleep in one. Remember, crates aren't prisons, and most dogs have no problem making one into a bedroom. Many dogs seem to enjoy them because they're a comfortable place to get away from everything. The following sections examine when to use crates and which types of crates are available.

TECHNICAL STUFF

You may have heard many people explain to you that dogs regard a crate as a den. Wild dogs and wolves do make use of dens but only in the case of a mother with pups. Dogs do seek out-of-the-way places to hide when they're frightened, but their first choice isn't a crate unless they're accustomed to it. To get a dog to like a crate, he has to be trained to like it. It's not a natural instinct.

Understanding when to use a crate

Here are some important reasons for you to acquire a crate:

- A crate can be a housetraining tool.
- A crate makes transporting your pet safer and easier.
- Many hotels and motels accept only dogs who are confined in crates.
- A crate prevents your small puppy from wandering around the house at 2:30 a.m., chewing wires, electrocuting himself, and burning the house down.
- If your dog incurs an injury or needs surgery, a crate can keep him quiet and calm for a period.

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Even if you don't plan to use a crate on a regular, day-to-day basis (I don't), you're doing a dog a tremendous favor by allowing him to have one. A crate should never become a prison — or a babysitter.

Considering your options

A full-grown Siberian needs a crate measuring about 36 inches long by 24 inches wide by 26 inches high. You can buy a larger crate if you want and use dividers as a housetraining aid when he's very small. Make sure the crate has an attachable cup for the inside to keep him well hydrated. A crate bed or crate liner is also important for your dog's comfort. The cost of each type of crate depends on its size. New crates can be expensive, usually more than $200.

Several types of crates are available including:

- **Heavy-gauge welded wire mesh:** These crates allow excellent ventilation and provide better visibility for your dog, reducing the feeling of loneliness for a puppy. They're also easy to clean and fold up for easy transport. The best ones have two doors. I recommend them for Siberians, because with their thick coats, they need lots of ventilation.

  However, a few dogs feel insecure in them, and they aren't best for air travel. The biggest disadvantage of the wire crate is that some of them are extremely heavy. And sadly, escape artists like the Siberian Husky can sometimes — somehow — manage to find a way out of them. They're also not the most aesthetically pleasing from a human point of view, but you can purchase crate covers to make them look a little better.

- **Heavy-duty plastic:** These usually come in two pieces, with ventilation areas on the sides (see Figure 4-4). This is the kind airlines usually require. They are cozy and den-like. As in the wire crate, the best ones have two doors.

  REMEMBER

  Make sure you get one that is very tough, because Siberians are addicted to chewing plastic. Other than the chewing problem, however, these crates are nearly impossible to escape from. Although this crate is a step up from the wire crate in the beauty department, it would be an exaggeration to say it adds anything positive to your home's ambiance. Most plastic crates aren't as well ventilated as the wire kind and are also more difficult to clean.

- **A lightweight, fabric, soft-sided crate that folds up like a tent:** Some crates weigh less than 6 pounds; you can stick them in your car or under your arm (as long as there's not a Siberian there). A Siberian should be supervised while he is in this type of crate; he can hop across the floor in it. These are best for shows, hotel and motel rooms, and other activities where you are there to supervise. They're hard to clean and easy to escape from.

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- **Crates that are more than crates:** Several manufacturers have developed wood polymer composites that are handsome enough to double as end-tables. If a crate is to be a permanent part of your homes, it's nice to get one that look like furniture.
- **Special crates:** These types are designed for especially destructive dogs. Many are airline approved and come with wheels for easy transport. They can cost around $400 or more, however. You're better off training and exercising your dog so that this kind of crate isn't necessary in the first place.

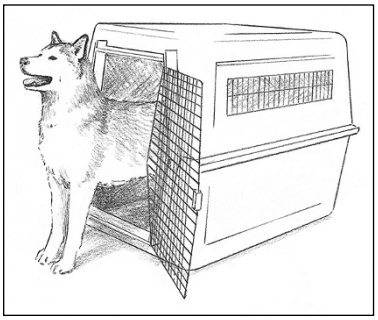

FIGURE 4-4: A heavy-duty plastic crate is great for airline travel as well as everyday home use.

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Used correctly, your Husky will consider the crate his own and go into it voluntarily when things get too much for him. Overuse of the crate, however, or using it for too long a period or as punishment, won't create the desired result.

TIP

See if you can buy a secondhand crate from the classifieds or local yard sales. Or check with friends. It's amazing how many people have extra dog crates lying around their basements. You may even be able to borrow one, especially if you plan to use it only until your Husky is housetrained.

Getting Chew Toys

If your Siberian is stuck in a barren house with little to entertain him, he'll make his own fun. This is when tension chewing starts. And because your Husky has no stamp collection of his own, he may start working on yours. Try getting him some of his own toys, and alternate them frequently so that he doesn't become bored with them. Use toys of different shapes, hardness, and textures. These sections examine the best toys for your Husky and the toys you should avoid.

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Considering great toy choices

The days of the simple squeaky toy are past. Some very creative and interesting dog toys are now on the market. Some toys make a variety of noises. They bleep, baa, snarl, honk, crunch, and roar. Most dogs find these things fascinating. (I do, too!)

Here are some toy suggestions for your Husky:

- **Combination chew and toys:** To entertain your Siberian in a handsome style, consider purchasing a combination chew and toy in the form of a Kong (or SpaceBalls and related products). You can insert a treat in these bouncing toys, and your dog will have a delightful time, attacking and chewing the toy, rather than the furniture.

  Kongs are microwaveable, so for a special treat, you can melt a bit of cheese, peanut butter, and dry dog food together inside it. It'll take your greedy dog hours to get all of it out. Kong toys are the best of the best; throughout the years they have evolved into a dozen permutations, and they've kept their indestructibility and their charm. A Kong Wobbler Treat Dispenser toy stands up to the extreme wear a Husky may provide. It comes in various sizes and strengths suitable from puppies and senior dogs to over-the-top adult chewers.
- **Chase toys:** For dogs that like to chase rather than chew, I recommend the CHUCKit Flying Squirrel. It's made of a flexible canvas that is gentle on teeth, and it provides interactive fun for as long as you can stand it.
- **Puzzle toys:** For dogs that are inquisitive, the Trixie pet toy is a food puzzle with lots of compartments in which you can add lots of treats.
- **Retrieve toys:** For lazy people like me, you can buy the iDogmate Automatic Ball Launcher. That says it all.

A ton more are available. Keep in mind that your dog's favorite plaything is *you.* Praise your dog for chewing appropriate toys. You can even play along with him when he chooses the right ones.

Steering clear of certain toys

Not all toys are ideal for dogs or for Huskies. In fact, consider this section a big Warning icon. Avoid the following:

- **Dangerous toys:** Avoid toys are too hard or that have pull-off pieces your dog can swallow**.**
- **Battery-powered toys:** These self-powered playthings are designed to move around on their own. Although these toys are a lot of fun (as much for the dog

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as the owner), you must supervise your dog while he's playing with it. Batteries (including hearing aid batteries, which are unsettlingly frequently consumed) are deadly if your Husky swallows them.

- **Rawhide bones:** They can cause digestive upset and even pancreatitis, especially in dogs who manage to chew the things in huge chunks and then swallow them.
- **Dog bones, cow hoofs, or antlers:** The number one cause for broken teeth in dogs is chewing on bones and antlers.
- **Old shoes:** Dogs can't distinguish them from the things you don't want chewed, and you'll be very unhappy at the result.
- **Socks:** They don't make good chew toys for dogs either, because a dog can easily swallow a sock. Apparently they like the taste way too much. A sock can become impacted in the digestive system, and the dog may require surgery to have it removed.
- **Human toys:** They aren't acceptable for dogs, because dogs are much rougher on toys than even the most destructive toddler. They simply won't hold up.
- **Small balls:** Never give your dog a ball so small that he can swallow it! (Siberians can crush and swallow tennis balls.) If a ball gets stuck in his throat, you'll need to open his mouth and reach in with pliers to get it out. And if you don't catch it soon enough, he could die.

TIP

If you're going to buy your Husky a stuffed animal, remember the best stuffed animal toys are made of acrylic fur and 100 percent polyester filling that washes easily. You don't have to make a habit of it, but when the mood strikes you, you can put them in a mesh bag and throw them in the washer with some dog towels for balance. Of course, some dogs will destroy this toy in 18 seconds (I clocked it), but you never know.

Some people recommend letting the dog chew real sticks; letting him do so is fine when he's outside, but inside it's too much to expect your pup to know the difference between an oak branch and your Windsor chair. I can't always tell the difference myself.

Considering Pet Doors

Although a pet door isn't strictly necessary, it's a really desirable convenience. A high-quality pet door allows your dog to go from the yard to the porch or kitchen at will. If you're a working owner of a Husky, or if you're tired of letting your dog in and out of the house five times an hour, then a pet door is a necessity in your life!

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Pet doors have come a long way from the simple flap of my youth. As with everything else in the dog world, you have a host of options. In addition to standard dog doors you can buy extreme weather dog doors, dual slide lockable doors, high tech smart doors that use radio frequency technology, and even screen-fit doors which, as the name suggests, can be installed in your screen door. Go wild.

Considering an Outdoor Kennel

A kennel with a run is a useful item for outdoor-loving Siberians, especially if you have no fenced yard. The minimum size should be 6-x-12 feet and 6 feet high. If you have a choice of shape, the best kennels are long and narrow rather than square. The long run encourages a kenneled dog to run and get exercise.

The outdoor kennel isn't a replacement for your home. Modern Siberians don't enjoy being separated from their families, so the kennel is simply an addition to your home and a way to help them get some exercise.

TIP

A concrete ground surface is easiest to clean, and it's also impossible for your Husky to dig out of. However, concrete can be hard on a dog's feet. Some people recommend filling the kennel area with pea gravel or sand, at least in the middle, in order to give the dog a digging spot. Make sure the run is shaded as well.

Adding a Dog Gate

A dog gate is handy to keep your pup confined to one room — or excluded from another. Most dog gates are made of metal, coated metal, or wood, but plastic and even fabric gates are also available. Gates come in flexible widths and various heights, and many are compatible with stairs. Some are pressure mounted, whereas others attach to walls by hardware. Hands-free and walk-through gates are also available.

Don't use them as dog sitters, though. Some Siberians eat or jump over doggy gates with ease. Choosing the right gate for your Siberian can be a challenge, so make sure you consider the many appropriate variables.

WARNING

Don't buy a baby gate designed for kids. You dog can get its head stuck between the bars. Even the biggest Siberian head is narrower than a child's.

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3 Living with a Siberian Husky

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IN THIS PART . . .

Know what to prepare for when you bring home your Siberian Husky for the first time and help him adapt to his new surroundings.

Figure out what your Husky is communicating with you, no matter whether it's verbal sounds, body language, facial expressions, and so on.

Examine the best ways to socialize your Siberian with other dogs, children, other people, and other animals.

Understand the basics to training and how to use important commands like Sit, Stay, and Down.

Identify odd behavior that your Huskey may exhibit and be equipped to know how to deal with it when you see it.

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Finding a vet
- Helping your dog adjust to his new home
- Making it through the first night with your new Husky by your side
- Figuring out whether your Husky will live indoors or outdoors
- Knowing how to housetrain your dog
- Cleaning up after your new Husky when he has accidents of every kind

Chapter 5

Welcoming Home Your Husky

Bringing a new dog or puppy home is truly one of life's greatest joys. But it's not without its problems either. So, in this chapter, I give you all the information you need to make the transition easier for you and your new family member — everything from selecting a vet for your Husky and making it through that very first night to deciding whether your dog will live outdoors or inside. It's ultimately your responsibility to provide a dog-positive environment for your life with a Husky.

You simply can't keep a house in pristine condition after your furry bundle of joy bounds through the door for the first time. No matter how careful you are, accidents will happen. Something you treasure dearly will be eaten, peed on, clawed, or crushed by your pet. But, in this chapter, you can find suggestions for ways to deal with the messes that come with the territory.

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REMEMBER

Dogs and puppies each have their own sets of challenges, but pups and adults may suffer from the same problems: housetraining, loneliness, sense of abandonment, and confusion. (Even a previously housetrained grownup dog may forget his training in a new and, therefore, stressful environment.) On the other hand, many dogs make a smooth transition from one situation to another, either because of a more adaptable personality or because less stress was involved. The critical thing is for you to be aware of any eventuality. You never know what may happen.

Choosing a Veterinary Practice

When you decide to add a Husky to your family, you need to make sure you have a relationship with a veterinarian. You, your Husky, and your veterinarian will form a three-way partnership — a partnership for life. So finding a vet you trust, like, and respect is important. Selecting a vet isn't a decision to be taken lightly. The life of your Husky may depend on your decision. You can ask your dog's breeder, knowledgeable friends, or the local kennel club for recommendations, but you should also do your own research. Here are some major factors to consider:

REMEMBER

I emphasize selecting a veterinary practice rather than a single vet, because nowadays a good vet practice can offer more than shots and basic surgery. I prefer a large practice, where you have a choice of vets, expanded hours, and access to various specialties.

- **Location:** The closer you are to your vet's office, the better. Location isn't merely a convenience; it may save your dog's life someday. The outcome of accidents, poisoning, bloat, and other emergencies often bear a direct relationship to how long it takes you to get him to the vet.
- **Practice orientation:** Some vets prefer to work with cats, birds, horses, or other pets. So when you're considering a vet, ask what percentage of the vet's patients are dogs, and even Huskies.
- **Breed familiarity:** Your vet should be familiar with the Siberian Husky's special health concerns, particularly eye problems. The more accustomed your vet is to doing eye examinations, the better. This doesn't mean your vet needs to be a veterinary ophthalmologist, but she should be able to get you in contact with a good specialist, if necessary.
- **The facility:** The veterinary clinic should be clean, well-lit, and free of clutter or unpleasant odors. Pay attention to how the staff interacts with other clients and their animals. Are people and pets treated with courtesy? Does the vet schedule appointments so that each client has time to talk to her? How long do you usually have to wait? Do you feel rushed? Ask to see the place where

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animals are kenneled if they need to stay overnight, and check to make sure the kennels are clean and offer enough room.

TIP

Many veterinarians operate a boarding facility. Although they may not offer all the amenities of some private boarding facilities, particularly in the all-important area of exercise, your Husky is sure to have veterinary attention within minutes if he needs it.

- **Office hours:** If you work long hours, you may need to find a vet who is open on weekends or evenings. Find out what the regular office hours are and who covers the practice when the vet isn't available. Is there 24-hour coverage onsite, and if not, how often does someone come by to check on the animals?
- **Expense:** Although cost shouldn't be a deciding factor, there's no reason why you can't take it into consideration. You have a perfect right to call around and get prices for routine procedures like spaying and neutering, office visits, and shots. Care and quality being equal, there's no reason not to choose the less expensive option.

REMEMBER

Most vets nowadays take credits cards or have payment plans, at least for expensive treatments. (If you find yourself in financial straits over an unexpectedly high credit card bill, you may be able to apply for a CareCredit credit card, which can pave the way for your dog to get the care he needs without exhausting your savings. Check out `www.carecredit.com` for more information.)

- **Philosophy:** More important than cost or location is the quality of care the vet provides. You want to find a vet whose philosophy about vaccines, acupuncture, herbal medications, and diets agrees with your own. Ask your vet in advance how she would treat common conditions like cataracts, hip dysplasia, and other ailments.
- **House calls:** Many vets make emergency or compassionate house calls, especially when the time comes that you need to have your dog euthanized. It's much less traumatic for a dog to spend his final hours in his own home. Find out whether your vet will do this and for what cost.
- **Behavior with animals:** How your vet handles animals is one of the most important items for consideration. Any vet who is rough or seems to dislike animals (and sadly, there are some) shouldn't be your vet. Take note of how your puppy responds to the vet.
- **References:** Check around with friends, owners of other Siberians, and your local Siberian Husky breed or kennel club to see whether they've heard anything about the vet you're considering.
- **What procedures the vet performs:** All veterinarians perform regular care, but some can do more. Find out what your vet can do. Is your vet certified in a specialty? If not, is she willing and able to recommend a specialist if such care is needed? Does her practice include stem cell therapy, herbal medicine, acupuncture?

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Naming or Renaming Your New Dog

Although dogs recognize and respond to their name, they probably don't associate a name with their identity or self-worth. It serves mostly to get their attention. (One rescue organization I know simply names all the dogs "Good Boy" or "Good Girl" [with a number attached for bookkeeping purposes] so when the adopter brings home their new pet, they can simply add their new chosen name. The dog will also continue to respond to "Good boy" or Good Girl," of course.

TIP

If you're adopting a pet and dislike his name, you can easily change it by gradually adding a new name to the old and gradually dropping the old one.

As for choosing a name, the trend for decades has been to pick a human name like Elsie or Cooper or Fred. Old-school dog names like Spot and Wiggles are less common nowadays. Don't name your dog anything negative or embarrassing like "Puddles." The dog doesn't care, but it looks bad for you. Here are a few tips I suggest:

- **Choose shorter names.** They're easier to say and probably easier for your dog to remember. Anything over two syllables can be confusing.
- **Stay away from names that sound like a command.** "Fletcher" may sound like "Fetch!" to a dog and "Comet" to "Come!" In like manner, stay away from "Noah." It sounds too much like "No!"
- **Avoid popular names for your sanity**. I've been in dog parks when someone yells, "Molly," ten dogs rush over.
- **Pick a name associated with cold climates and winter.** After all, you're bringing home a Husky. Some ideas include Tundra, Polar, Stormy, and the like. You can always go for Umky, which means *polar bear* in the Chukchi language (if you're into heritage names).

Surviving the First Day and Night

If possible, arrange for your new dog to arrive in the morning, so you can have the whole day to become acquainted. Ideally, this should be a quiet time, with only the family present. Take your new puppy out for a walk right away, even before you bring him into the house. Walk him to the area you want him to use for eliminating, and praise him lavishly when he uses it. (Praising puppies often includes jumping up and down with joy.) The following sections lay out in greater detail what you can do to make your new dog's first day and night go more smoothly.

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Feeding your new dog his first meal

When you feed your Husky his first meal, give a bit less than he has been accustomed to receiving. He'll be nervous and excited, and too much food may make him sick. If he eats dinner without a fuss, you can give him a treat later on.

At first, feed your new dog the same kind of food he was receiving from his breeder or previous owner. He's just had a major change in his environment, so you'll want to preserve as much continuity in his life as possible. Abrupt diet changes can also cause stomach problems. If you want to change his diet, do so gradually over a week or so.

TIP

When your new dog is eating, sit near him and handfeed him a treat or two. Practice taking away his food and returning it to him. This is one way to establish the fact that you're his master and in charge of the food. It will also help prevent food possessiveness later on.

Helping your dog adapt to his new family

The first few days will be strange and new for your Siberian, so make sure you give him plenty of nurturing and lots of hugs. At this stage, love is more important than play. Gently handle your new dog a lot and don't allow the kids to keep waking him up. You want your Husky to know that you're a safe haven from the vacuum cleaner, the mean cats, and any other household hazards he may encounter. (This doesn't mean you should feed his phobias, but you should be there to support him the same way you would a young child.)

Make introductions to the rest of the family gradually. If you bring home a puppy, teach your children the correct way to hold him — with both arms. Don't allow very young children to carry a Husky puppy around; sooner or later they'll drop him on his head. Don't leave puppies and children together unsupervised; the trouble they can get into together is unimaginable. (I have a friend whose young child dyed their yellow Labrador Retriever pink. In this case, the "young" child was 15 years old.)

Reassuring your dog on his first night

Letting your new dog sleep in your bedroom with you is the best option, especially during his first few nights. He'll be reassured by your presence, and you can tell if something is wrong or he needs to go out.

Even in your immediate presence, your new dog, especially if he's a puppy, may cry the first night. Never yell at him or punish him for doing so; if you do, he'll feel even worse. You can ignore his crying, after you've first made sure he's secure in his crate with a chew toy. (This takes nerves of steel, but it pays off in the long

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run.) Or you can give in and sleep near the puppy or just transport him to your bed. If you do this, he'll probably be there forever, though.

WARNING

In rare cases, a dog interprets your allowing him onto your bed as meaning that you accept him as an equal. Obviously, this isn't a good plan. If you're the slightest bit doubtful about your ability to control your new dog, let him sleep quietly in his own bed at your feet.

Even during the daytime, your new dog may cry when placed inside the crate, at least at first. Never let him out of the crate while he's actually crying, whining, or barking. That just teaches him that he can get what he wants by annoying you. Wait until he's quiet before you release him. On the other hand, he should regard his crate as a friendly place for relaxing and sleeping — not an all-day prison. When you're home during the day, keep the door open, so he can go in and out at will. Feeding him there may be a good idea.

Determining Whether Dog Is an Indoor or Outdoor Dog

Siberian Huskies really enjoy being outdoors in the cold. In fact, they prefer the outside to the inside. Even young Siberians can be acclimatized to living outdoors; after all, they *are* arctic dogs. In the Iditarod, when temperatures routinely plunge to –65 degrees, the Siberians sleep comfortably, curled up in the snow. Their drivers, however, wearing heavy fur parkas, face masks, and mittens, frequently suffer severe frostbite.

REMEMBER

Despite their love for cold outdoor weather, Siberians are extremely family-oriented. An outside Siberian must not be an *ignored* Siberian. Siberians suffer badly from loneliness. Dogs belong inside at night with their owners. (If you feel like spending the night out in the freezing cold, however, I'm sure your Husky won't mind joining you.)

The following sections discuss important points whenever your dog is outdoors or indoors.

Securing your Husky outdoors

Winter or summer, your Siberian will require a secure fenced yard. Never chain a dog outside. For one thing, it's dangerous. Dogs can get the chain wrapped around their necks or legs and be killed. Also, dogs who are chained outside for long periods tend to become territorial and snappish. Dogs who are tied out temporarily

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need to be under supervision. Chains can be made much safer with a swivel, and using one is preferable when you need to tie out your dog (like when you're engaged in an outdoor activity with him).

Electronic fences are an extremely bad idea. Stick with chain link. What happens during a power outage? What if your dog loses his electronic collar? What if, driven by uncontrollable *prey drive* (the instinctive urge to follow, attack, and kill a smaller animal, which most Huskies possess in greater or lesser degree) he pushes "through" the fence? He won't be likely to get back in. And how about the vicious neighborhood bully (human or animal) who isn't wearing a collar? What's to stop him from coming in and hurting your dog? And I don't know about you, but the idea of shocking my dog isn't a pleasant thought. The major advantage of an electronic fence is that they're cheap, but I don't think that's enough of an advantage.

Keeping your Husky hydrated outside or inside

In both hot and cold weather, your Siberian needs fresh clean water. For the outdoors, a heavy, no-tip ceramic bowl is the best choice. Water in metal dishes freezes quickly in winter and heats faster in summer. Metal dishes pose another winter danger as well — your dog's tongue could freeze to it. Water in a deeper dish will stay liquid longer than in a shallow one and stay cooler in the summer also. Choose a dark color for winter, and a lighter color for the summer.

TIP

If you leave your dogs in the yard for any length of time in the summer months, have plenty of cool water and shade available. Toss some ice cubes into the dog dishes during the summer. It keeps the water cool, and the dogs like to play with the cubes. In very hot weather, use a whole block of ice.

Automatic dog waterers are a wonderful invention; they allow your dog to drink cool water whenever he wants. You can attach one right to your outdoor faucet or hose, eliminating worry about dog dishes tipping over, running out of water, or becoming foul.

Wintertime fun: Keeping your Husky outdoors

Although Huskies handle cold weather remarkably well, they do need to become acclimatized to it. Sudden repeated fluctuations between warmth and cold is much harder on your Siberian than continued cold weather.

The Husky's love of the cold outdoors created no conflict back in Chukchi country, where everybody lived outside, but it can be a problem today. Most well-loved

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Huskies nowadays are housedogs, simply because most people want their pets close to them. You can always move outdoors with your dog.

If your Siberian does come in during cold, wet weather, don't let him out again until he is thoroughly dry. If he goes out wet, the wet hairs could freeze and give your Husky a bad case of hypothermia. *Hypothermia* is a fancy way of saying *subnormal body temperature.* The symptoms include intense shivering and frostbite on a dog's toes, ears, and genitals.

You'll probably find that as the temperatures plunge, your Husky's activity level rises. Even as you long to toast your toes before the fireplace, your dog will be urging you to come out and frolic with him in the subzero night. Strange creatures, aren't they?

Summertime blues: Helping your Husky avoid heat stress

Huskies generally have no problems in the winter; it's the summer heat that's dangerous to them. All dogs suffer the effects of extreme heat, but Siberians, because of their northern heritage and heavy coats, are particularly at risk. Because Siberians are working dogs with high energy levels, they are in danger of exercising or playing too hard in the hot weather. Old dogs, black dogs, and fat dogs are especially vulnerable to heat stress. Dogs don't sweat through their skin, and direct sunlight can raise the temperature of a Siberian faster than you'd believe possible.

For refreshing the outside as well as lubricating the inside of your dog, provide a wading pool, like the one shown in Figure 5-1, for summer comfort. Your Siberian will probably lie in the pool during the hottest days of the summer. Remember, however, that mosquitoes lay eggs in standing water, so dump the contents of the pool into your garden every night and use fresh water the next morning.

WARNING

If you have a puppy, don't leave him alone with a wading pool or even a deep bucket of water. Believe it or not, puppies have drowned in them.

DUMMIES APPROVED

You can even buy a portable dog cooling kit with an adjustable nozzle which sprays a fine mist, lowering the ambient temperature about 25 degrees. If your Husky likes the idea, it's a terrific way to ensure his comfort. Or you can get a cooling mat. One brand, The Polar Pad, is first soaked in water and then let dry on the outside. It stays at 62 degrees for three days and doesn't need refrigeration.

While your dog is enjoying alfresco dining in the summertime, you may notice ants sharing his dinner. You can avoid the situation by partly filling a big shallow pan with water and putting the pet dish like an island in the middle. (A commercial bowl on the market does the same thing.) The ants drown trying to get to the

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food and your pet won't get his nose pinched. This won't work with those army ants you see in the horror movies, though. Those little suckers can make bridges out of their own bodies and get across that way. On the other hand, if you have hordes of army ants in your backyard, you have bigger worries than the pet dish. Call the Marines.

FIGURE 5-1: A child's wading pool is a great place for your Husky to cool off in the heat of the summer.

Photo by Jeanette and Dominic DiBalsi

Giving Your Pup the Love, Exercise, and Discipline He Needs

Your pup's first few days home should be times of affection and love. Building a trusting foundation makes everything else easier. So in these sections, I give you the basics on these essentials of rearing your new family member.

Knowing when your Husky needs exercise

Siberians need lots of exercise, particularly at the following times:

- Before a bath
- Before grooming and nail clipping
- Before you leave him home alone
- Before taking him in the car for a ride
- Before company comes

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- Before he goes to bed
- When he wakes up
- When he looks bored

In other words, most Siberians are desperately in need of exercise almost all the time. This is part of the fun of owning a Siberian! It's also a great weight loss plan for you.

Rewarding your dog

Like children, dog thrive on kind, consistent discipline. Discipline is *not* a punishment. It's a set of guidelines that help your dog navigate the inexplicable world of human beings. Proper discipline means a happier, more tractable pet; it makes your own life easier as well.

TIP

The first few days with your new Husky are critical when it comes to discipline. If you have a new puppy, he's so cuddly that you may be tempted to let him do whatever he likes, thinking you can correct mistakes when he gets older. Why upset the sweet little thing when he's so new, right? But be forewarned. If you don't want your big dog to do something, don't let your puppy do it either. Failure to observe this simple rule is one reason why so many Huskies end up in animal shelters or with rescue organizations.

Your sweet little puppy has inherited the determined and obstinate nature of the persevering sled dog, and allowing him to run uncorrected will result in danger for him and heartache for you. Besides, your puppy actually *wants* to know what you expect of him. He's used to being nipped by his mother for improper behavior. He won't hold it against you when you keep him in line, although nipping your dog isn't permitted nor any other punishment that cause physical pain. A dark glare and a firm "no!" works perfectly well.

Housetraining Your Husky

Believe it or not, your Husky *wants* to be housetrained. By nature, he's an extremely clean dog who doesn't want to mess up his living quarters. All he needs is for you to explain to him what you want. But remember, a puppy is a baby; you can't expect his bladder control to be perfect. Even though he may learn very early what he should do, sometimes it's just too hard for him to wait. Most dogs don't have sufficiently developed sphincter muscles to be completely housetrained until they're 4 or even 6 months old. Besides, their bladders are small. So having patience is important.

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TIP

Train without pain. Never use physical punishment to housetrain your puppy. Puppies between the ages of 8 and 10 weeks (the very time when they're learning housetraining skills) are extremely sensitive to any painful experiences. If you use physical punishment at this stage, you may have a fearful dog forever. Some mistakes simply can't be undone. This is the time to use petting, love, and positive reinforcement. Your puppy will then associate pleasant sensations with doing what you want. It's the most effective training device in the world.

REMEMBER

Even if your Siberian spends most of his time outdoors, he still needs to be housetrained. He needs to learn that eliminating indoors is never appropriate. Training now will save you a lot of embarrassment later when you visit friends, pet sitters, the vet, and motels.

In this section, I give you all the information you need to housetrain your Husky with ease.

Using crates to help housetrain

For housetraining, a crate is a reliable tool. But first you need to crate train your dog, and by that time, the housetraining may get left behind. Keep a favorite toy in the crate, and have your Husky sleep there with it. He'll soon get accustomed to the idea of the crate as his bedroom. Because dogs hate soiling their sleeping quarters, you can take him outside as soon as he awakes from his naps and he won't have had time to have an accident. He'll soon extend the idea to the whole house.

TIP

For a small puppy, you can even use a playpen, so that the pup can observe all the goings-on. Put down a shower curtain, plastic liner, or pee pad inside the playpen, under a mat.

REMEMBER

During the day, don't keep your new family member in a crate for more than two hours. If you do, he won't be able to control his bowel functions, and then he'll lose any inhibitions he may have about messing in his crate.

How long can a puppy stay in a crate without needing to eliminate? The longest time any dog ever should be confined is eight hours (and that should be only in an emergency). Just consider your pup's age in months. Although many dog trainers say young dogs should be able to be crated for as many hours as they are months old. A 4-month-old puppy should be able to last four hours, a 5-month-old puppy for five hours, and so on, I disagree. Cut those times in half. Puppies are intelligent young folk who need to explore their environment safely. Sitting in a crate prevents that.

REMEMBER

Your dog won't get sufficient exercise if he's kept in a crate too long. He should have at least an hour, and preferably longer, between each crating session when he's allowed to run and play actively.

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When your not-yet-housetrained dog is out of his crate, you may want to tie a leash to him and hook the other end to yourself. Then go about your daily activities. This way, you'll be sure that he won't sneak off to pee, and you can keep a close eye on him. This technique is especially useful in housetraining an older dog. It also helps to bond you and your dog together — literally.

I strongly suggest you don't get your dog from a pet store. Pet store puppies are used to using their cages as a bathroom, because it's their only choice. So a puppy coming from this kind of environment will naturally have a more difficult time understanding that his crate is for sleeping only. (Refer to Chapter 4 for more reasons why a pet store dog isn't a wise choice.) You should be able to get your dog housetrained in three to four days if you devote yourself to it completely.

REMEMBER

Dogs need to urinate more frequently in hot weather when they're drinking more water. Remember to accommodate their increased need.

You don't need to use a crate for housetraining. Watch him and his special signs that he needs to go, such as whining, circling, or pawing. Take him out very frequently and praise him when he does the right thing. If you see him make a mistake, follow my advice from earlier in this section.

Getting the basics of housetraining

When you have a puppy, you're responsible for taking him outside at all the appropriate times — in the morning and after naps, after a meal, and just before bedtime. Very young puppies may have to go in the middle of the night as well. ***Remember:*** The housetraining process is trying, but extra effort now will save you a lot of aggravation later.

TIP

Set your alarm clock for about three hours after you go to bed, quickly take the puppy out, and do it again three hours later. Don't worry, he'll soon sleep through the night. In the morning, take him out before you do anything else.

REMEMBER

Don't wait for your young puppy to inform you of his needs. He won't think of them himself until it's just about too late. And by the time he manages to get your attention, it's *really* too late.

Responding to accidents

If you actually see your puppy having an accident, yell, "Outside!" in an alarmed (not angry) voice, and race outside with him. (If you say "No!" he may think that eliminating is wrong, and that's not the message you want him to receive.) If he happens to use the bathroom again while outside, praise him mightily. Keep praising him excitedly every time he does what you want.

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REMEMBER

Timing is everything. You must go outside *with* your puppy when you see him start to make a mistake. If you just scold him and toss him outside, the message he's getting is, "Peeing is wrong," not "Peeing has its own special place — outside." If he thinks "Peeing is wrong," he'll soon start to pee everywhere when your back is turned to avoid a scolding. (Obviously, he can't just stop peeing.)

If you don't actually see the mistake being made, just clean it up without comment. There's no point in telling him after the fact that he's made an error. Have the puppy out of sight when you clean up after him. If he sees you "playing with his pee" he may think he's pleased you. Also, because his mother cleaned up after him, he may think this is normal activity, so why should he change anything?

WARNING

Don't drag your dog over to the mess and rub his nose in it. He won't have a clue why you're doing this. He may know you're upset with him, but he just can't make the connection. Besides, assuming that a dog's messes smell as bad to him as they do to you is wrong. He may even eat the stuff, thinking that's what you want. And of course, never strike your dog for making a mess — or for any other reason.

TIP

Use the same door every time you take your dog out until he's thoroughly housetrained and goes to that door every time. Use a particular area of the yard for your dog's bathroom duties. This approach will encourage him to think of this area as his for this particular purpose. Also, using the same part of the yard will make cleanup that much easier. Go with your puppy. Don't leave him alone to wander around aimlessly. Praise him greatly when he does what's wanted!

TIP

At first, leave a little of your precious Siberian's poo in the area you want him to use. This will remind him of his duty the next time he goes out.

Sticking to a schedule

Eight-week-old puppies should go out every couple of hours. Puppies new to the household should go out even more frequently, because nervousness and excitement stimulates their bladders. Most adult dogs can be left alone for eight hours, but this is variable, just as it is with people.

When your Siberian knows that he can depend upon you to take him out at regular times (dogs have clocks in their heads), he'll be more inclined to wait for that moment. If he doesn't have a clue when or if you're going to take him out, he may feel as though he has nothing to wait for. So, as far as he's concerned, he may as well go now.

REMEMBER

Keep a strict schedule with your dog's eating times as well, because the two events — eating and elimination — are connected. If you have to leave your dog alone all day, and he can't hold it, think about hiring a dog-walking or pet-sitting service. Or take some of that unused vacation time. Your Husky will appreciate the company, too.

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If you can't teach your Husky to bark when he wants in or out, you can buy a doggie doorbell designed to prevent scratching. A pad can be placed on either side of your door at dog-height. When the pet touches the pad, a built-in wireless transmitter activates a door chime. Or you can install a pet door. Some owners train their dogs to come and sit in front of them when they have to go out.

Figuring out what's behind the accidents your Husky has

One of the most thrilling things about canine urination is that it can mean so many things. For instance, it may translate into: "I'm very submissive — don't whack me." Or it can mean the opposite: "I'm a big tough dog. I'm leaving my mark." Or it can mean: "I'm not feeling well, and I wish my owner would be smart enough to figure out why I'm peeing all over the place." Or it can mean: "Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy! We're goin' for a walk! I can't control myself!" Or maybe the dog just needs to use the bathroom. Here are some reasons for the urination.

The marking of territory

Male dogs tend to mark areas they want to claim as their own. Unneutered male dogs, especially if they're new to an area, typically lift a leg against a chair, a wall, or a lamp. They're leaving something besides a wet spot: They're leaving important information for other dogs. This behavior usually begins between the ages of 4 and 9 months. Even dogs who don't do this in their homes may be tempted to mark indoors elsewhere. Neutering is one way to reduce or even eliminate this problem.

REMEMBER

If there has been a recent change in household structure (typically if the dominant partner leaves), a male dog may attempt to elevate to a position at the top of the new pack. One of the ways he may try to assert his authority is by urinary marking in the home. When the proper dominance order has been reestablished, the marking should stop.

Illnesses

Diabetes is a disease that first declares itself by increased urination. If your dog exhibits unusual thirst, coupled with urinating in the house, suspect diabetes, and call the vet.

Cushing's disease, certain medications like prednisone, and chronic kidney failure can also cause increased urination, as can urinary tract infections. Urinary tract infections are more common in females than in males; symptoms include unproductive straining and licking of the genitals. Bladder stones, tumors, and polyps may also be culprits in urinary incontinence. If straining accompanies the urination, suspect a urinary tract infection rather than Cushing's, kidney failure, or diabetes.

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Leaking

Older, spayed females may also have problems with leaking, especially at night. In their case, the cause is loss of estrogen, which apparently results in weakening the urinary sphincter. Obviously, treating this condition is very important, because, in addition to the urine-soaked carpet and furniture, the prolonged contact with urine can cause skin ulcers in your dog. Luckily, there's a solution. Medications like phenylpropanolamine often work magic; they stimulate the secretion of *norepinephrine,* a hormone that increases the sphincter muscle tone.

Fear

Some dogs urinate whenever they're scolded. This response is rooted in fear. Don't punish your dog for urinating; that will only frighten and depress him more. Often urination is a normal canine response to a dominant companion and is called *submissive urination.* You're more likely to see submissive urination in puppies than in adult dogs.

TIP

The only way to cure submission urination is to let your dog know that she has nothing to be afraid of. Punishing him will merely confirm his fears. Praising him, on the other hand, will make him think peeing while scared is the correct move. Simply ignore the urination, clean it up, and otherwise just pretend it never happened. Gradually, he'll become more confident and lose his fear of you.

Excitement

Many dogs, particularly younger ones, don't have complete bladder control, especially when they're excited or overwrought. You need to reduce your Husky's excitement level by being calm yourself when exciting things happen. If your dog urinates when you come home, don't make a big deal over him when you walk in the door. Simply be blasé, and avoid eye contact for about ten minutes. If you don't make a big fuss, your dog will become less anxious and excited. Hug and cuddle him later, to make up for your apparent indifference to him when you first walked in the door.

Cleaning Up: Siberian Housekeeping

Dogs are truly man's best friend — and Siberians are among the best friends you can find. But (isn't there always a but?) the downside is that dogs — all dogs — tend to find their way into messes. So in this section, I help you figure out how to quickly clean them up — whether inside or out — and get back to the joy of owning a dog.

REMEMBER

Make sure you thoroughly wash your hands after dealing with doggy waste.

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Taking care of the yard

One of the joys of dog ownership is the challenge of trying to maintain a beautiful lawn while giving your dog room to do his business. In the following sections, I give you great strategies for doing exactly that.

Picking up after your pooch

In my house, we just pick up the messes using plastic bags or rubber gloves we've designated for that purpose. If you're squeamish, you can opt for a variety of fancy pooper-scoopers that will save your back and nose. Most are a two-piece deal that operate on the rake-it-in-and-shovel-it-up plan. A few are actually designed to work in grass and gravel. (The most environmentally friendly way is to use newspaper rather than plastic for pickup, but many people are too squeamish.)

TIP

Pick up stools from around the yard twice a day if possible. They look bad, smell awful, carry disease, and make a mess if you step in them.

Getting rid of lawn spots

Those hideous yellow and brown spots you see all over your lawn are burns from urine and feces. They're just another reason for getting your Husky to use one corner of the yard for his bathroom responsibilities; at least you can reduce the damage that way.

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Besides keeping your yard picked up regularly, you can add products like Grass-saver or G-Whiz to your dog's diet. They act to neutralize your dog's urine and control odors. Other products like Spot Check and Green-Um, sprayed or sprinkled on the damaged area, will help reestablish grass. If you actually catch your dog in the act, rinse the grass immediately with 2 or 3 gallons of water.

DUMMIES APPROVED

A chemical remedy is K-9 Turf, which is safe for both pets and kids. It's an all-natural product that doubles as a lawn fertilizer. Use it once a month and your problems with lawn spots should be over. Other good products include Spot Check and Dogonit. Dogonit gets rid of winter salt damage also.

If your dog is in the habit of urinating on and consequently destroying a bush, don't dig up the bush! He'll just urinate on another one. Leave the shrub there, while you attempt to discourage the dog from this habit. He may just continue to urinate only on the dead one.

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Taking care of the grass

Almost no amount lawn care can keep up with a Siberian who has the run of the yard. You can try using a tougher grass if it's right for your area, but I have a simpler, more radical solution. Get rid of the grass. Yes, my recommendation may seem extreme, but native plants are better for the environment and much more interesting for your dog. My fenced backyard is grass-free but gemmed with beautiful Florida natives like beautyberry, necklace pod, wild coffee, firebush, and maypop.

Find out what's native in your area. Help improve the neighborhood, save your time and money, interest your dog, and please butterflies, birds, and other wildlife. Of course, do your research and don't plant anything poisonous. Contact your local native plant society (they'll be glad to help) and get out of the endless, boring, water-fertilize-mow your lawn cycle. After you do so, you and your Husky will enjoy spending time outdoors together.

If you're not keen on planting native plants, you can also try my other suggestion — just mulch the whole yard and forget about the grass.

Getting rid of urine stains

The best solution (in both senses of the word) is to buy a pet urine enzyme cleaner for fresh stains. These cleaners work by breaking down the chemicals in the urine that cause the stain and odor. They also don't require rinsing. Just follow the simple directions on the package.

In an emergency, mix a tablespoon of dishwashing detergent with two cups of water. Add a tablespoon of vinegar and pour the solution over the stains. Take care about adding too much vinegar though because dogs are attracted to the smell to want to urinate over it. If the stains have aged a bit, use an oxygen-based cleaner (it won't bleach out fabric like chlorine will). You can spray the stuff directly on the upholstery.

WARNING

Don't use ammonia for cleaning urine. Ammonia smells like urine to a dog, and he'll be encouraged to repeat his error in the very same place.

If the urine goes through the carpet into the backing, you're in trouble. You may have to get the carpet professionally shampooed, and even that may not work. If the carpet has suffered quite a few accidents of this sort, you may have to remove it altogether.

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TIP

If your dog urinates on a hardwood floor, you can't always remove the odor. But you can seal them in. Apply a coat or two of polyurethane to the floor. It does wonders and looks nice as well.

Dealing with vomit

If your dog vomits on the carpet, the first and most obvious step is to pick up the vomit (that's always the worst part). Vomit, having just emerged from your dog's digestive system, is an acidic substance. The best cleanup (unless your dog has a housetraining block) is a solution of 1 tablespoon of ammonia to a half cup of water, unless you have a wool carpet. (Don't ever use ammonia on wool!)

Cleaning up blood

If your Husky bleeds for any reason, your first consideration should always be to figure out what has caused the bleeding and get your dog the help he needs right away.

After you've gotten your Husky taken care of, you can follow these tips for cleaning up blood stains:

1. **Apply cold water to the stain.**
2. **Apply ammonia to the stain.**
3. **Add more cold water to the stain, and rinse fast.**

REMEMBER

Make sure you use cold water so as not to set the stain. And if your dog has a housetraining problem or if you have wool carpeting, don't use ammonia.

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Listening to what your Husky has to say
- Noticing your dog's body language
- Making sense of your Husky's "strange" behavior
- Reading your dog's confidence level by observing the way he sleeps

Chapter 6

Figuring Out What Your Husky Is Telling You

All over the world, dogs speak the same language, and although that language isn't classical Greek, there's a lot more to dogtalk than a few grunts and sniffs. After all, dogs aren't Neanderthals. Canine communication takes the form of auditory signals, facial expressions, and body language, not to mention that ineffable soul-to-soul communication. In this chapter, you figure out how to make sense of all of these.

Dogs, like all sentient creatures, experience the world through their senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. (There is undoubtedly a mystical sixth sense as well, enabling dogs to somehow understand their owner's emotions, but researchers can't as yet fully understand how it works.) Unfortunately for humans, even though dogs can undoubtedly gather a great deal of information about you by smell, including where you've been, your emotional state, and even the presence of disease, people usually can't do the same in regard to them — unless your dog has been rolling in something nasty.

And like most other animals and people, dogs are able to relay and communicate their emotions, desires, and demands by using visual, audible, and olfactory cues. (We humans aren't very good in the olfactory department; however, we do know that dogs leave plenty of scent-driven "messages" for their fellow canines.)

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Picking Up on What Your Dog Is Saying: Audible Cues

Dogs communicate partly through *auditory* signals (signals that can be heard, like barks and growls). They use auditory signals to communicate over long distances among themselves. In their ancestral days, running wild in a pack, they needed to be able to communicate messages like, "Wait! It's this way!" or "You'd better leave Enid alone; she's promised to me!" Dogs haven't forgotten their roots; they still use auditory signals today.

Barking and howling are apparently no harder on a dog's vocal cords than talking is on ours. That's why they can howl or bark for so long, much to the irritation of some of us humans. Here I examine the different audible cues your Husky may use and how you can translate them.

Barking

Although a bark is a juvenile noise, located acoustically somewhere between a snarl and a yelp, the science behind it is pretty amazing. Scientists have recently discovered that dogs have elasticity in their vocal cords, a trait that enables them to alter their barks to convey different messages. Researchers found this out by using *spectography,* which shows distinct differences in amplitude, pitch, and timing that vary according to a dog's purpose. (Most dog owners have figured this out for themselves, but it's nice to have some scientific backing.) It appears that dogs have a bark for strangers, and that both people and dog instinctively react to it.

Siberian Huskies, true to their heritage, bark less than many other breeds. When they do vocalize, they tend to woo, howl, sing, chirp, and chatter softly. The reason for the Husky's infrequent barking may be that barking is largely a territorial call, and Huskies are almost uniquely nonterritorial. Huskies do occasionally bark to stake a claim on their territory, but not as often as other dogs.

REMEMBER

Some Husky barking is an invitation to play, a particularly juvenile trait. It's also a by-product of domestication. Wolves don't bark, and neither do some extremely primitive dogs like Basenjis. Huskies, another ancient breed, bark very little, preferring other kinds of vocalizations.

Howling

Howling is a *primitive* trait in dogs, which means that breeds of ancient lineage are much more likely to howl than more modern breeds like the Irish Setter or Toy dogs, such as the Shih Tzu. Siberians, Malamutes, and hounds are howlers of high

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order. Unlike a bark, which is brief and explosive, a howl is long and drawn-out. The howl is a low-pitched sound with a long duration — the two qualities needed to carry it for miles.

Some estimates say that a Husky howl can be heard for 10 miles, but I suppose the conditions have to be exactly right. Siberian Huskies, by the way, are considered to be one of the more likely breeds to howl, along with the Scenthound breeds.

Howls, which are individual, appear to have multiple uses, including the following:

- **Recognize and communicate with packmates:** Wolves are known to recognize packmates by the unique sound of each member's howl. There is no reason to suspect it otherwise in dogs. (A howl travels a lot farther than a bark.)
- **Mark territory and ward off would-be intruders:** Dogs do this primarily a depositing urine (marking) a spot. Other dogs can read the markings, which contain information about the age, sex, and health of the marker.
- **Express sorrow or pain, both physical and emotional:** Like people dogs express their joy by leaping up, "shouting," and exuberant running. Milder expressions of happiness include tail wagging and bowing to invite play. Sorrow, even anguish, can be expressed by howling, or simply lying around and staring at the wall.
- **Bond and communicate with other Huskies:** Pet owners all know that dogs sometimes howl when they're bored, but they're equally likely to howl amidst the company of other Siberians, in which case it may be a bonding strategy. The howl has another purpose, too: long-distance communication. (Many Huskies howl simply as response to a similar noise, like that of an ambulance or train whistle.)

  If you own more than one Siberian, you may find that they get up a community howl now and again, which is very pleasant indeed. Their eerie, wolf-like cry is haunting and evocative, sending a thrill down the back of the sensitive listener. Because the animals howl at different pitches and use different, modulating tones, which echo and bounce off walls, a pair of Siberians can easily sound like a dozen. Wolves use this trick too, and often fool their opponents into believing that the pack is much larger than it really is.

  It usually takes more than one Siberian to get up a howl. You'll find that one dog will nearly always initiate the howling; the others will follow. This is called a *chorus howl.*

  Even though one early study, based only on a survey, suggested that only 5 percent of dogs howled, the Tokyo research indicated howling may be more common than originally thought, with about half the dogs studied exhibiting this behavior.

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REMEMBER

The dog with the deepest howl or bark is usually the alpha dog.

Dogs belonging to breeds that don't howl often look curiously at dogs engaging in this peculiar behavior. They probably can't imagine what the fuss is all about. A nonhowling Siberian can be taught to howl by his howling packmates or even by a human who is willing to crawl around on the floor like a dog and bay.

TECHNICAL STUFF

There is no evidence to show that animals howl at the moon. There is a theory, however, that they howl more during a full moon, when they can see better and are consequently more active.

Siberians also tend to howl along with fire engines or police sirens, as well as when the phone rings.

Wooing

The plaintive "wooing" sound is a Siberian trademark. It could mean anything, but it often says, "No, I don't want to," or "Please don't leave me alone quite yet."

Whining

A whine is a care-soliciting noise. It's also a sign of submission. If your Husky is whining, you can bet he wants to come in, go out, or eat dinner. He may want to be petted as well.

Growling

Growling is best interpreted as a warning. It's commonly seen when Huskies are trying to protect their food from other dogs.

Yelping

When a Husky yelps, it's an unmistakable sign that he's in pain. He could yelp for something as minor as accidentally getting his toes stepped on. Or yelping could be a sign of greater pain. If your Husky is yelping, and you can't determine the cause, call your vet.

Soundless chattering

Sometimes an unneutered male Siberian snaps his teeth together very quickly, usually in the presence of a female. This behavior is a mark of sexual excitement

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and may be accompanied by trembling. Teeth chattering may also mean the dog wants to go for a ride or eat dinner. Of course, he may just be cold.

Interpreting Your Husky's Body Language: Visual Cues

Even the vocal Siberian doesn't always speak in dog words; so interpreting his body language is very useful. Visual communication is more important in Siberians than it is among some breeds. Lop-eared dogs, curiously enough, are at a visual handicap, because they can't lay back their ears to show aggression. Dogs with docked tails can't wag their tails completely. A Siberian, on the other hand, has full use of his ears and tail, so he can communicate very well. He may be saying something more than, or other than, you think.

Pay attention — it's up to you to be the interpreter. A missed cue can be dangerous for both of you. Your dog may be trying to tell you that he is ill, or that he has delusions of grandeur, or that he really doesn't like your Maltese all that much. The following sections explain some visual cues you may notice and how you can interpret them.

Circling and sniffing

Circling and sniffing are the universal greeting among dogs. Greetings between dogs start nose-to-nose. If all goes well, the sniffing proceeds to the other end. (It seems rude, but it really isn't — at least when it's among dogs.) Your Husky will try to greet human guests in the same time-honored manner. Obviously, he needs to be discouraged from doing this.

Mounting behavior

Mounting another dog or attempting to mount a person isn't usually an expression of sexuality. Females do it as well as males. It can be an indication of dominance. Your Husky is trying to tell you or his fellow dogs that he's the boss. If he mounts other dogs in his household, you'll have to let them sort it out among themselves. When the correct dominance order is established, the annoying behavior should stop. But if your Husky persists in mounting human beings, it's a signal that he is thinking of becoming leader of the pack. Disabuse him of this notion immediately.

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Your dog may actually be expressing sexual feelings (have you been around a female dog earlier in the day?). If so, your dog may be just trying to masturbate. Dogs have no sense of appropriateness when it comes to these things. If you dog does this, turn your back on him immediately and walk away.

Pawing

A dog who places his paw on the shoulder of another dog is trying to demonstrate his dominance over that dog. He may try the same thing with a person. On the other hand, the pawing may indicate something quite innocuous, such as: "I want a treat!" "Let's play!" "Where's dinner?" "Pet me!" Or "I need some reassurance."

Bowing

A Siberian who crouches down in front, wagging his tail quickly, is performing play-soliciting behavior. He looks as though he were taking a bow. He may jump backward and forward, making weird little noises. He may put his head low to one side, and stare cockeyed at you. Have a good romp with him when you see him bowing. You'll both have a great time.

Nudging or punching

A Husky who nudges or punches with his nose is also designed to get you to play or pet him. It's a more dominant signal than bowing or pawing; in effect the dog is demanding, rather than asking, that you pay attention to him.

Wanting a belly rub

Most (not all) dogs enjoy a good belly rub. There's reason for this. The rub produces a pleasurable reaction when the hair follicles are stimulated. There seems to be a link between stroking and social grooming.

You scratch your dog's belly and you seem to activate a hind leg that begins scratching at dog's belly. What's going on? Scientists have observed a cluster or nerves just under the skin that seem to activate the scratch response via the spinal cord. This reflex may be an involuntary response, to encourage the dog to rid himself of fleas and ticks. In other words, your dog is responding to you as if you were

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a parasite. Most dogs seem to enjoy the scratch; those that don't will just move away. In any case, when your dog rolls over and allows you to scratch his belly, it's a sure sign he feels happy and comfortable around you.

Hand-holding

Your Husky may gently take your hand in his mouth. This is a gesture of love and affection. He is also requesting your trust in him not to bite you. Allowing him to do so shows him that you have faith in him. This is a bonding strategy.

Mouth-licking

In puppies, mouth-licking is a care-soliciting behavior, in which the youngsters seek food from their mothers. This behavior often persists into adulthood. Sometimes a dog just licks the mouth of the other dog; sometimes he actually pokes around in there, lifting the corners of the mouth and sniffing away. The dog may be looking to see what his friend has been dining on. Most of the time, the submissive dog licks the mouth of the more dominant dog.

Constant licking or tail-chewing

In younger dogs, paw licking or chewing could be a simple nervous habit, indicating the need to eliminate. Chewing the base of the tail can mean fleas.

WARNING

A dog who spends a few minutes or an hour licking everything in sight may be nauseated; he is about to throw up. Get him outside as soon as possible.

TECHNICAL STUFF

If licking behavior continues for weeks with no apparent organic cause, especially if carried to the point of raw or bleeding paws, suspect an obsessive-compulsive disorder. Like obsessive-compulsive disorder in human beings, this is *not* a psychological problem. It isn't caused by loneliness, neurosis, or boredom. It's very seldom cured by getting another dog or by giving your dog something else to do. So-called behavior modification doesn't work very well either. The only treatment that cures genuine obsessive-compulsive behavior is certain antidepressants. Only antidepressants that help control obsessive-compulsive disorder in human beings work with dogs; Anafranil and Prozac produce good results. Substantial

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improvement is seen in two out of three cases. (The National Institute of Mental Health performed the study.) Like obsessive-compulsive disorder in human beings, the precipitating cause may have been a raging infection, possibly not even diagnosed, that left an identifiable protein marker on the surface of certain cells. The protein marker responds to the antidepressant.

Reading Your Dog's Facial Gestures

Although lacking the almost infinite variety of expression employed by human beings, dogs can still say a lot with their faces. The Facial Action Coding System (FACS) has recorded 27 human facial expressions and 16 dog facial expressions. Here are a few:

- **Tongue flicking:** This serpent-like gesture may be a sign that your Siberian needs to eliminate. It's the canine equivalent of a child crossing her legs.
- **Head tilting:** When your dog tilts his head to one side, with a quizzical look, it means he is puzzled or curious about something.
- **Rubbing his face in the carpet:** Usually this behavior just means the dog has an itchy face, but constant face-rubbing may indicate an inhalant allergy.

THE EYES HAVE IT

Dogs talk with their eyes as well as with their voices, and the reason your Siberian's gaze melts your heart is that scientists have discovered that when you and your Husky stare lovingly at each other, you mutually get a good dose of the chemical *oxytocin,* a bonding chemical that acts the same way as when mothers and babies look at each other.

Eyebrows are controlled by tiny muscles: the levator, anguli, and oculi medials, which pass through parts of the lid to the hairs on the eyebrow, allowing for a great deal of individual, specialized movement. (If you're interested, look at `https://wagwalking.com/behavior/why-do-dogs-move-their-eyebrows`.)

In conjunction with the loving gaze, you have surely noticed the inner eyebrow raise. Researchers have checked it out and realized that dogs raise their eyebrows more often when people are staring at them. (They're probably wondering why you're staring.) As with people, raising the brows seems to indicate pleasure. (You raise your eyebrows when you taste something you like or meet a friend.)

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Watching Your Husky's Tail

Siberians generally relax (and pull sleds) with their tails down. Excitement causes their tails to curl up. A dragging tail, on the other hand, means a tired dog. When a dog wags his tail, he's giving the same message he does when he smiles. In other words, usually it's because he is happy, but sometimes he's nervous. It all depends upon exactly how the tail is wagged. The following helps you decipher your Husky's wagging tail:

- Wagging a tail horizontally and fast means the dog is happy. Usually the whole rear end wags with the dog. Nervous dogs also wag their tails sometimes. It's not necessarily that they're happy to see the vet; they may just be nervous to be there.
- A slower, incomplete wag from an erect tail may indicate dominant aggression, just like the smiling villain in those old westerns.
- A tail held between the legs is a sign of complete submission or fear. Some low-status dogs eat with their tails between their legs, in the hopes that the dominant dog will take pity upon them and not steal their food.

  A recent Italian study determined that when dogs wagged their tails to the right, they seemed to be in a happy mind-set. Leftward tail wagging, however, signaled a more sinister feeling. (In like manner, heart rate went up for left-wagging dogs. Right waggers, however, maintained a steadier, lower rate.) In case you're wondering how this experiment was performed, some family dogs were placed temporarily in cages and introduced to their owner, a stranger, a cat, and an aggressive strange dog. The owner appears, the dogs wagged their tails vigorously in a rightward swirl. The aggressive dog got a halfhearted wag to the left. Both the human stranger and the cat elicited cautious wags oriented slightly to the right.

REMEMBER

Dogs express happiness by going soft all over. They wag their whole body, not just their tails, and their eyes grow tender.

Making Sense of Weird Behavior

Sometimes dogs just don't act like people. They don't even live up to our idealized version of how *dogs* should behave. Still assume that dogs have reasons, however bizarre, for their behavior, even though you aren't sure what the reasons may be. Here I examine a few odd behaviors.

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Rolling in nasty stuff

Rolling in foul treasures like deer carcasses and cow manure may be a scent enhancement technique for dogs. Unlike cats, who depend on stealth to catch prey, dogs are uninterested in how they smell to their potential victims. In the wild, dogs rely primarily upon running their dinner down. Consequently, the smells they collect serve purpose within the pack, perhaps to help establish dominance.

Scooting

If your dog scrapes his rear end along the ground, he's *scooting.* Some people think dogs who scoot have worms, and they may, but more than likely, dogs who scoot are trying to empty their *anal glands,* which are small pouches, one on each side of the anus. On occasion they can become full or even impacted.

Most dogs can accomplish this feat quite satisfactorily on their own, but in some cases you may need to see your veterinarian or your groomer. They'll teach you how to express the anal glands yourself. It's not hard, but it *is* smelly. If you attempt this task, you'll probably need two assistants, one to hold the dog, and the other to hold your nose for you.

REMEMBER

Wear disposable gloves when you're expressing your dog's glands. Canine researchers aren't positive what the purpose of this stinky stuff is, but it's probably to mark territory. In rare occasions, if the anal sacs have become seriously impacted or infected, a simple surgery is required.

Eating grass

No one *really* knows why dogs eat grass. It seems to be a natural behavior that has been observed in wild dogs also. (Dogs sometimes eat other plants too, but they like grass best.) Some people think that dogs use grass to obtain roughage, which they may require in their diets, but grass is simply indigestible in dogs. Nonetheless, they persist in eating large quantities of the stuff and vomit it up everywhere. Actually, vomiting may be the idea behind the whole thing with grass acting as an *emetic* (something that causes vomiting). In any event, eating grass seems to cause them no harm, whatever the vomit may do to the furniture. If there's anything harder to remove than grass stains, it's grass stains mixed with dog stomach acid.

REMEMBER

Your Husky's interest in eating grass is just one more reason not to use lawn chemicals on your property. Plant native plants that will thrive in your area without using chemicals.

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Rock eating

Some unfortunate dogs (and more commonly puppies) have apparently decided that rocks are an excellent mineral supplement to the diet, which is obviously dangerous. He may be just curious. He may be bored. Although some experts have suggested possible physical causes like anemia or an electrolyte imbalance, no research seems to be bearing out these guesses. More likely it's just a bad habit. (When a dog or person makes a habit of consuming non-food items, it's called pica.) Cures for the problem range from removing tempting rocks from the yard to putting a basket muzzle on your dog to prevent this harmful behavior.

Eating feces

The formal term is for feces-eating is *coprophagia.* No one knows precisely why dogs sometimes engage in this disgusting behavior; it's probably programmed into their genes. A mother dog will eat the feces of her very young puppies, for example. This is normal behavior; it keeps the den clean.

But in most cases, feces-eating is counterproductive. Manure is notoriously ill-supplied with vitamins or anything else useful. That's why it's excreted as waste. Still, dogs continue to engage in this behavior. They may eat their own waste, the waste of other dogs, or even those of other species (cat and horse manure are particular favorites). Coprophagia is not only disgusting, it's also dangerous for your dog.

WARNING

Nearly all dogs will voraciously devour cat excrement. Cat excrement is especially dangerous, because it carries *Toxoplasma gondii,* which can cause all kinds of hideous things. The solution is to keep the litter box out of the dog's reach and to clean up the yard frequently.

Coprophagia is more common in young dogs between the ages of 4 and 9 months, so it's possible your Husky may just grow out of it. On the other hand, he may learn to like the taste of poop and get worse.

Some medical conditions seem to induce coprophagia, including:

- Exocrine pancreatic insufficiency
- Pancreatitis
- Overfeeding a high-fat, high-carbohydrate diet
- Intestinal infections
- Certain malabsorption conditions

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Check with your veterinarian to rule out any of these disorders.

Another possibility is that your dog is merely bored. Dogs are notoriously maladaptive when it comes to entertaining themselves. They never want to collect stamps or do anything educational. So they turn to something that does interest them: feces.

TIP

Some people suggest sprinkling hot sauce on the feces in the hope that the dog will learn not to go near it, but I doubt this is effective. Dogs have an excellent sense of smell and will simply learn to not eat feces that smell like hot sauce.

Certain products are available that are designed to discourage coprophagia. You can start with something cheap, like meat tenderizer or monosodium glutamate (MSG) added to your Husky's food. Apparently the stuff makes dog waste taste bad even to dogs. If that doesn't work, you can try Deter, an over-the-counter pill you can give your dog every two weeks. There's also a veterinarian-prescribed product called Forbid that does the same thing.

TIP

Try changing your dog's diet to one lower in fat and higher in protein. You should expect results in a month or so.

Noticing Your Siberian's Sleeping Style

Dogs sleep a lot — more than 14 hours a day (more than any other mammal)! (The actual amount of time your own Husky spends sleeping depends on his exercise and boredom level.) There's a scientific reason for this: Humans spend about 25 percent of their sleep time in rapid eye movement (REM) cycles (the most restful stage of sleep), but only about 10 percent of dog sleep time is spent thus, resulting in less restful sleep. Hence, dogs need more sleep to get enough rest. Researchers haven't answered the deeper question of why dogs get so little REM time.

And noticing the body position of your Husky as he sleeps tells you a lot about his comfort levels and his self-image.

In cold weather, the Siberian does what is known in the trade as the *Siberian swirl*, carefully tucking his tender nose under that furry tail for warmth.

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A Husky curled snugly close beside you probably isn't so much interested in keeping warm (he's hotter than you are) as he is keeping safe. If he's an alpha dog, however, you may notice that he keeps himself a little distant from you — maybe just a few inches. He wants to be secure, but at the same time he's letting you know that he is perfectly capable of handling anything that comes up. A dog further down on the dominance scale may snuggle more closely.

If your Husky prefers to take his ease flat on his back, legs in the air, you may take comfort in knowing that you have a supremely confident, friendly dog without a care in the world. He is totally at ease. This is an extremely vulnerable posture, and only the most self-assured dog will assume it.

WARNING

A dreaming dog exhibits the REM found in people. Don't disturb a dreaming dog. You may be walking right into his nightmare. The gentlest dog in the world has been known to snap if awakened at the wrong time.

A Siberian lying flat on his stomach, legs sprawling in every direction, is probably hot. He is trying to dissipate his body heat as efficiently as possible.

REMEMBER

A yawning Husky doesn't necessarily mean a tired Husky. Yawns may also indicate anxiety or tension. You'll often observe them, for instance, when getting your Husky ready for a walk or a ride.

ARE DOG YAWNS CONTAGIOUS BETWEEN PEOPLE AND DOGS?

Sort of. Research from a team of Japanese scientists has revealed that dogs do indeed often yawn after people, but this behavior is much more common when the original yawner is the dog's owner. Dogs pay much less attention to the random yawns of strangers, as they should.

The scientists considered this evidence of an emotional bond between humans and their pets. To an experienced dog owner, this research isn't surprising. (Although yawning is widespread in the animal kingdom, contagious yawning is much rarer. It's been observed, for instance, in chimpanzees, bonobos, and stump-tailed macaques.) If you're wondering what good are yawns anyway, scientists has suggested that they help cool the brain. Yawns are seen as a calming signal to dogs as well.

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Playing with your puppy from his first day home
- Getting your Husky used to other animals
- Helping your Husky and your children become the best of friends

Chapter 7
Socializing Your Siberian

Dogs are social animals, and among dogs, no breed is more social than the Siberian. Bred to live in groups and in close proximity with human beings, the Siberian Husky presents no particular problems in socialization — with the single possible exception of the family cat. Nevertheless, socializing your dog is an important part of his education. And in this chapter, I let you know how to go about making your dog a welcome and loving part of any family.

Interacting with Your Puppy

Your Husky puppy should be from 8 to 12 weeks old when he arrives. This critical period in the life of a dog is sometimes referred to as the *human socialization period* — the time when your Husky learns to adapt his behavior to the human environment. (The earlier period is the *canine socialization period,* when the puppy learns to associate with other dogs.) If a puppy isn't sufficiently socialized with others of his kind, he could turn into a fighter. Luckily, Siberians rarely have this problem. They're among the most sociable of creatures, both with people and other dogs, although not always with other species.

REMEMBER

Socializing an unsocialized dog after he is 18 months old is extremely difficult. It's not impossible, but the biological socialization window has closed.

The following sections explore the many ways you can help your Siberian become a civilized member of both human and canine societies. Although dogs are

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naturally social beings, some of the nuances of modern life, such as maintaining a basically friendly or at least open attitude to strangers needs to be reinforced. Socializing a Husky is quite similar to raising a child.

Visiting with your Siberian

If you want your dog to share your life, it's important that he learns how to get along with your friends and neighbors. It's so much more convenient taking your dog out with you than going by yourself and wondering what kind of mischief he's getting into at home.

Restrict the number of visits with your Husky pup until he has had his second set of shots. That doesn't mean you shouldn't take him out at all, but you should limit his contacts with other dogs. Many contagious diseases are lurking around. Be particularly careful when going for a walk in the park, because many people don't clean up after their dogs and lots of viral diseases are carried in feces (another good reason to check your own shoes when returning from a walk — you may have stepped in something unpleasant yourself). And your curious puppy will want to investigate everything (and I mean everything!) he finds.

REMEMBER

Have your Siberian puppy meet 100 people by the time he's 4 months old. This includes babies, elderly people with canes, disabled folk using wheelchairs, people on bicycles, people crawling on the floor, people wearing weird hats and sunglasses, and the like. Dogs often react poorly to unusual situations, so the more you can make things usual for him, the better. Introduce him to strangers once or twice a week and in different environments. Take an active part in seeking out these places. All dog-human encounters should be pleasant experiences for your dog; it helps if the friendly stranger feeds or pets him.

TIP

The absolutely easiest way to socialize your dog is to take him for walks every single day in the neighborhood. Meeting strangers in a familiar environment makes for a more pleasant experience, especially for a shy dog. If your Husky acts nervous or shies away, stay calm. Don't scold the puppy or try to push him into close proximity of another dog or person. Don't make a big deal of it, but quietly encourage your pup to meet a new friend. Treats may help. If it doesn't work, try again another time. If a daily walk is impossible, consider hiring a responsible dogwalker. Your Husky will thank you.

When you do make your first visit, don't feed your puppy immediately before venturing out. The intense excitement of going on a trip may cause an upset stomach and subsequent upchuck. Not the best way to impress your friends with your new puppy. It's also a good idea to exercise your puppy before bringing him to a new place. The thrill of being in a new house may well make him wish to christen it — or worse.

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DINING OUT WITH YOUR SIBERIAN

Currently nine states allow local governments to override state health safety codes to permit dogs in outdoor seating areas or patios. These states include Rhode Island, Florida, California, Illinois, Maryland, Tennessee, New Mexico, Minnesota, and New York. In addition, some cities and municipalities may pass an ordinance that allows restaurants to apply for a permit to allow dogs. Enjoying a meal with your Husky is a great opportunity for him to get politely acquainted with others.

Staying safe: No dog kisses

Even though kissing your dog seems irresistible to some people, doing so isn't a safe practice. (Face it: It's not always a great idea to kiss other people, either.) Kissing your dog places you at risk of picking up parasites like hookworm, roundworm, and giardia. And even if you're pretty sure your Husky doesn't have these problems, you know his nose has been up his own butt and other equally dodgy places.

When he grooms himself with his tongue, everything is spread all over his fur and then into your mouth. The safest practice is to avoid exchanging slobber with your dog. This goes double if you have a weakened immune system.

Enrolling in puppy kindergarten

If possible, enroll your Husky in a puppy kindergarten class. You can usually enter your puppy at 3 months, with graduation at 5 months. These classes are valuable because they help your puppy develop socialization skills with people and other dogs. Siberians excel at this, so you may just have the class valedictorian on your hands. Your puppy will also learn some elementary tasks, and you'll pick up tips on basic obedience as well. Puppy kindergarten teachers can give you some good housetraining advice as well.

Introducing Your Siberian to Children

Huskies and children were made for each other. With reasonable precautions, the introductions will go smoothly. Remember that the children and new dog will be curious about each other — maybe too much so. They may knock each other over, roll on each other, and steal each other's toys. So never allow young children and dogs to play unsupervised.

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TIP

Clip your Husky's nails; more harm to children results from scratches than from bites.

These sections explain what you need to know to help your children when you bring a Husky into your home. Here you can also find out how to prepare your Husky when you bring a new baby home.

Training the children to be pet-friendly

Children need firm instruction on how to be kind to animals; some of them are unaware of how annoying their teasing can be. They don't usually mean to be cruel; they just don't know any better. Sometimes children chase a small puppy relentlessly or scream in the pup's ears. This behavior is courting disaster. Even a gentle Husky may need to protect himself against this kind of abuse.

If children misbehave around animals, it's often the fault of their parents. I have seen adults sit around, seemingly oblivious, while their kids pummel, bite, scratch, or pull the hair or tail of a dog. Also, children copy their parents' behavior. If kids see their parents pet, rub, and love their dog, they'll do the same. On the flip side, if kids see their parents slap, annoy, or neglect a dog, they'll do the same. Families like this are better off with pet rocks.

WARNING

Although most children's abuse of pets is unintentional, sometimes it's deliberate. Maltreatment of animals is not only dangerous in itself, it's also a warning of future, escalating problems. If your child exhibits purposeful aggressive behavior toward animals, take him to a therapist and find a better home for your dog.

Most of the time, though, Huskies and children are born friends. Take advantage of their natural comradeship. Reward your children for responding appropriately to the dog. Most dominance problems occur because kids don't know how to be good leaders (not bullies but friendly people in charge).

Dealing with toddlers and your dog

Siberians are extremely family-oriented dogs, and few cases of aggressive biting in Huskies have ever occurred. However, it can happen and does happen, as with any other breed, so it doesn't hurt to be prepared.

Toddlers are in more danger from potentially aggressive dogs than are other family members. Not only may they pull a dog's hair or ears, but their low stature gives them direct eye contact with a Husky-sized dog. A potentially aggressive, dominant dog may perceive this as a threat. In addition, toddlers, unlike babies, are running unchecked all around the house, getting into everything. (You may have noticed this phenomenon yourself.)

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Actually, young children are in considerably more danger of being knocked over by an exuberant Siberian, being scratched by overlong nails, or being playfully chewed on, than they are of being bitten. Toddlers often can't distinguish this behavior from an aggressive attack, however, so always watch your child around all dogs.

In the few cases where Huskies bite children, the incident is often triggered by some gesture of affection from the child, usually a hug or kiss. Dogs regard a person leaning over them as an expression of dominance, and although they may accept the gesture from an adult, some dogs apparently don't consider children in the same category and will unexpectedly attack. Have your child practice obedience commands with your dog. (Refer to Chapter 8 for some basics about training.)

WARNING

Never allow any dog who has *ever* shown aggression against any person near a child. I've heard of cases where as many as four years passed between bite incidents. In one such case, the dog suddenly raced out from under a table and ran into the next room to attack a visiting 2-year-old who hadn't gone near the animal.

Getting your Husky ready for a baby

Unexpected problems may arise with the arrival of a new baby, especially a first baby. For one thing, the family structure has been altered. Things have changed. Some dogs may feel that the baby is an interloper, or at least a very junior pack member. Even dogs who have never shown any dominance tendencies need to be watched carefully in this situation.

What's more, the new person is very, very small. Because size matters in a dog's world, your Siberian is likely to consider himself dominant over the new arrival. It's even possible that a Siberian could confuse your child with prey. Of course, this isn't acceptable, but don't expect your dog to automatically understand. He doesn't automatically comprehend that the new baby belongs to the family unless you teach him so.

The best way to cure this problem is to make sure it never occurs in the first place. Even before the arrival of the new family member, prepare your Husky:

- **Review all obedience commands.** Sit, Stay, and of course No! are especially helpful.
- **Allow your Husky to meet new babies while he's on a short lead.** This way, the sight of a baby won't completely freak him out.

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- **Carry big dolls around the house and practice changing diapers, and so forth.** Your Husky will get used to the sight of you attending to this new creature.
- **Make a recording of a crying baby; let your Siberian get used to the sound.** Don't exhibit any undue alarm when either the recorded baby or the real one starts to cry. Your Husky may misinterpret your reaction and regard the child as a threat to you. A baby's high-pitched cry can even sound like wounded prey to a dog. (It sounds like that to *me,* sometimes.)

Helping your Husky welcome a baby into your family

Your Husky shouldn't be present when the baby is brought home, for a number of reasons. For one thing, you'll have your hands full with the baby, and you won't be able to give the dog all the attention he wants right away. Also, if your Husky is brought in when the new child is already at home, he'll be more likely to think of the baby as a new family member than as a guest. It's a territorial concept.

REMEMBER

The greatest danger is not that your Siberian will attempt to bite the baby, but that he'll try to jump up on you while you're holding the baby.

When he meets the new baby, give your Husky plenty of personal attention at the same time. While one parent pays attention to the dog, the other parent or another family member can hold the baby. Give the dog a new toy or a nutritious treat; he'll associate the appearance of the baby with something pleasant for himself. But keep him on a leash.

Allow him to sniff the baby's blanket; you can give him one to sleep with so that he becomes accustomed to the scent. He can sniff the baby too, while he's on a short leash, but he doesn't need to be right in the baby's face to do so.

WARNING

Guard and secure the baby's dirty diapers, because your Husky may want to eat them. In the wild, animals devour the feces of their young to prevent the scent of vulnerable infants from wafting around the area.

Introducing Your Husky to Other Animals

Your Husky lives in a world populated not only by humans, but by other animals, primarily dogs and cats. The more accustomed Snowflake is to sharing space non-aggressively with them, the safer and happier everyone will be. Familiarity breeds not contempt but contentment.

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Other dogs

Siberians are happiest when they can share their lives with other dogs. The Chukchis bred their Huskies to be social — it's one of their most endearing characteristics. Still, rivalries may pop up from time to time, and you must be prepared to deal with them.

WARNING

Small dogs may excite a Siberian's prey drive. In some cases, Siberians make a distinction between large and small dogs, playing happily with dogs their own size or larger, but regarding tiny dogs as being on a level with rabbits and attempting to hunt them. Don't leave your Husky with a small dog until you're absolutely sure they're fast friends. Most of the time, it's best to crate one of the dogs or separate them in some other way when you are gone.

TIP

Don't wait too long to introduce your new Husky to his animal housemates. They'll smell each other anyway. Do the introductions in a controlled setting, with potentially disorderly dogs on a leash. Remove the leash as soon as you see they have good intentions. Most dogs simply walk away from other dogs they don't like or aren't interested in. If the animals can meet in a neutral setting like a sparsely populated dog park, the introduction is much more like likely to be peaceful.

Cats

Siberians are often poor housemates to the family cat. Sometimes they chase them, and they may even regard cats as prey animals. But if brought up carefully together, it's possible to avert this natural disaster. The dog and cat may even become the best of friends. This desired result is somewhat more likely if the cat is the prior occupant; however, you may be able to introduce a new cat to your Husky by carefully holding the cat close to you often. Let the dog clearly understand that the cat belongs to his family. But don't restrain the cat; let her run away if she's worried about the dog. If she does leave, don't follow her. Never let your dog see you chase the cat. He'll want to join in, and Fluffy won't appreciate it in the slightest.

If you're considering adopting an older Siberian, make sure he's safe with cats before you bring him home. Don't leave your cat and Husky alone together until you're very sure that they're friends. If they sleep together, it's a good sign. Still, always make sure your cat has a safe, Husky-proof area to which she can escape in case of trouble.

Having more than one Siberian makes the situation more difficult, because they may gang up on the cat. Like adolescents, Huskies seem to forget about polite upbringing when they're in a pack.

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WARNING

Even if your Husky gets used to the family cat, he may still chase or even kill other cats. Dogs are quite capable of distinguishing between family and strangers. Keep your Siberian restrained on a leash, in another room, or safe in your yard at all times. He should be taught the Drop It command in case he gets hold of a cat or rabbit. (Chapter 8 discusses the Drop It command in greater detail.) When your Siberian gets used to your cats, you can usually have additional cats without problems. However, sometimes dogs accept the old cat but not newcomers.

Birds

Everyone knows that cats kill birds; you may not realize (until it's too late) that dogs kill birds, too. I have seen Siberian Huskies actually stalk and kill birds around a feeder. Because it's impossible to train a confirmed bird-killer out of his disturbing habit, you'll need to place the feeder in an area inaccessible to your dog.

Livestock

If you or your neighbors own sheep or cattle, you must absolutely keep your Siberian away from them. Huskies regard sheep as prey animals and sometimes injure or kill them. And they've been known to attack young calves, especially when the dogs are in groups. A pack of dogs is always more dangerous than a single one.

Small pets

No Siberian Husky can be trusted to interact safely with small pets. Your dog may seem to ignore the little rodents for three years. Don't lull yourself into complacency. The minute you relax your guard, the cage could be destroyed, and the guinea pigs shaken to death or simply — gone. Keep your pocket pets safely in another area of the house. Even if your dog doesn't want to kill your smaller pets, the little charmers will live in a constant state of terror that it will happen. You don't want that.

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Working together as a family when you train your Husky
- Establishing what you want to accomplish
- Being aware of which commands your dog should know and training him to follow them
- Working with a professional trainer

Chapter 8
Training Your Husky

Siberians have an unfair reputation of being difficult to train. But anyone who has seen a well-matched team of Huskies pulling together, responding instantly to voice commands from a musher, turning left, turning right, slowing down, speeding up, or stopping on command, knows that Siberians, far from being stubborn, are almost infinitely trainable.

But you as an owner of a Husky need to be trained to work with this amazing breed. Doing so may be daunting at first; Siberians have such strong leadership qualities that they respond only to people who earn their respect. They're also highly intelligent and bored by routine.

TIP

To best work with your Husky, you need to understand his natural character. Part of this character is species-specific (common to dogs in general), part is breed-specific, common to all Siberians (refer to Chapter 2 for more about the breed), and part will be his very own individual personality. Dogs vary in their temperaments, like people, and your best chance of success comes through understanding your particular dog's natural bent. Never assume that a technique that worked with your other dogs will work with this one, even if they are littermates. And if one technique doesn't work, try a different one. Every dog has his own learning style. Training a Husky requires creativity. You'll need to work as hard as he does, but the rewards are immense — for both of you.

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This chapter gives you an overview of training your Husky. If you want more in-depth help, check out the latest edition of *Dog Training For Dummies* by Wendy Volhard and Mary Ann Rombold-Ziegenfuse (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.).

REMEMBER

A Siberian will never be a slave; he's a loyal friend and trustworthy companion you can be proud of.

Training the Family before You Train Your Dog

Before you can even think about training your Siberian, you must train the Siberian's family. Too many times, the family dog responds only to one person; but when that person is not at home, the dog is practically untrained. Training the dog needs to be a *family* project, even though it's best to have one person be the training leader. The training leader will do the actual teaching of new skills, and then practice them with the dog and the rest of the family. Everyone will then master the same commands and be able to enforce them. A dog who will sit or come only for one member of the family isn't trained. Furthermore, a family member who allows a dog to do as he pleases undermines the entire training project.

REMEMBER

Consistency is the key to successful training. A dog has a difficult time learning when it's okay to be on the couch and when it isn't, or that it's fine to leap up on the teenagers but not on Great Aunt Rose, or that it is permissible to beg for food once in a while. You'll be much more successful in the long run if you never allow your Husky to do something that's usually prohibited. Siberians are so smart that teaching them right the first time pays off; you may not get a second chance.

THE WEAK LINK

A Siberian is smart enough to discover the weak link in the family — the one person who will let him do anything: beg for food, charge the door, pull on the lead, and so on. This person can unwittingly undermine all the careful training done by the rest of the family. Of course, the weak link is usually a child, so train your children to be pet smart at the same time you train your dog to obey. This includes lessons in kindness, consistency, and healthy leadership behavior on the part of your child.

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Setting Your Training Goals

Every training session should have a specific goal. If you have no goal, you won't have any idea whether you've accomplished anything. Keep the following tips in mind to help make your training sessions more successful and fun for you and your Siberian:

- **Begin training your Siberian immediately, whether you have a new puppy or a recently adopted older dog.** Siberians are strong-willed and independent, so you must establish yourself as *alpha* (the leader) right away. Do what it takes to earn your dog's respect — which is *not* the same thing as making him afraid of you.
- **Wait until you're in a calm and relaxed mood to work with your dog.** Siberians are psychic when it comes to picking up on moods, and your dog will respond to your mood. If you want your Husky to associate training with happiness, you have to, well, be happy.
- **Before you begin training, exercise your Siberian, just to take a little of the edge off.** Your energetic, life-loving Siberian has a lot to occupy his mind. Start your practice in a quiet area where neither of you will be distracted. Train often but for short periods. I recommend about three times a day for 15 minutes each, but with a puppy, 5 minutes at a stretch is long enough. He has many things to think about!
- **Use the right collar, leash, or halter.** Basic training requires only two items — a collar and a leash — both of which can be bought at your local pet supply store. And, although not absolutely necessary, a few small treats (like a little bit of carrot or a very thin sliver of cheese, not a whole dog biscuit) are always helpful.

  TIP

  To train without pain, begin by using a simple buckle collar. If it doesn't work or the dog is a confirmed puller, you can ratchet up to a choke collar, or even, in extraordinary cases, to a prong collar, but there is absolutely no reason on earth not to begin as gently as possible. If you train correctly, a buckle collar may be all you ever need. Many people have the best luck of all with head-halter type collars, which let children walk even large dogs with ease. Refer to Chapter 4 for more discussion on leashes, harnesses, and collars.
- **Work on only one command at a time.** If you get three correct responses from your puppy — three good Sits, Downs, or Heels, for example — then it's time to call it a day. End all training sessions on a positive note. Go out and have fun together.

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- **If your dog doesn't seem to be paying attention to your firm and repeated commands, try whispering.** Your lower tone and distorted voice will tend to make your Husky look up, pay attention, and try to decipher what you're saying.
- **Keep a logbook of your training sessions, and write down what your goal is for each session.** Then record how it went. If you do this faithfully, you'll have a valuable record that will be useful to you in the future. It will also help focus your mind and attention on the specific aims of each training session. Don't try for too much at any one session.

Agreeing on Commands

Keep your communication with your Husky simple. You'll never need to discuss Shakespeare with your Siberian. So make your commands short, clear, and consistent. For example, decide what the Come command will be. Don't say "come" one time and "here, boy" the next. Commands don't have to be one word each. Siberians are perfectly able to understand phrases and even to pick out important words within them. Just remember that, from your Husky's point of view, important words are more likely to be *ride* and *pizza* than *stay*.

REMEMBER

After your Husky understands what the command means, don't say the word more than once. This only teaches your dog that he doesn't have to sit or come the first time you give the command, and that's not the message you want him to get. Give the command once, and then wait. If he doesn't respond appropriately, quietly enforce the command the way you did when you were first teaching him. *Never* lose your temper with your dog.

TIP

As part of your own training, write down in your notebook every word you're using in your lessons, and what each word should mean to your dog. Put a star next to every command that your Husky reliably obeys. The point of the notebook is for you to keep track of how you are progressing in your lessons.

The following sections provide some general tips to help your dog become the canine good citizen you've always dreamed of. Training is all about teamwork.

Commanding without words

You can also include whistles or gestures as part of your dog's vocabulary. Many people enjoy having their dogs respond to these cues in addition to verbal commands. You'll notice that your Husky will pick up some words, like *biscuit*, *ride*, or

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bath seemingly on his own, without any help from you, while other words, like *come,* seem to be beyond his capacity to understand.

Paying attention to your tone of voice

Try to cultivate two distinct tones when training your dog. First there's your bright tone: "Good girl!" and "Let's have a walk!" are all said in the bright tone. The dark tone, relying on the lower end of your vocal register, is reserved for "Bad boy!" and "Quit that!" Practice these assiduously. It's amazing how often people get them mixed up.

Using your dog's name

TIP

Never use your dog's name in connection with anything negative, like scolding or hauling him into the bathroom. Otherwise, he may not respond positively when you call him. He may not anyway, but there's no point in decreasing the odds.

Teaching Your Husky the Basics

Some things every dog must learn. So in the following sections, I fill you in on the most critical commands and how to teach them to your dog. Everything else is gravy.

I often add the word *please* to my commands. More for my own benefit than my dog's. Why? Because it reminds me to use a calm, pleasant tone of voice. This in turn calms and pleases the dog. When you're a team, attitudes are contagious. Saying "please" isn't begging; it's only common courtesy.

REMEMBER

You can reward your dog in many ways: a treat, human cuddling, or playtime, perhaps with another dog. Swedish scientists, by performing a rather elegant experiment (although with Beagles, not Huskies), determined that dogs are more interested in their reward if they have to perform a task to achieve it. This suggests that dogs have an innate desire to learn things, and it's a desire you should take advantage of.

Watch Me!

No training can take place unless your dog is trained to look at you when you're uttering a command. To some extent this behavior is natural; on the other hand, Huskies sometimes take gleeful delight in looking anywhere except at you. This

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behavior is easily taught. (Scientists say that these adoring gazes back and forth releases *oxytocin*, also commonly referred to as the love hormone.)

TIP

Draw your Husky's attention to you with treats or a toy, anything you know your dog is particularly fond of. Soon the dog associates paying attention to you with something lovely. In most cases, he can easily learn this behavior; however, a few dogs associate the human gaze with threatening behavior. Patiently and kindly reward your dog when he looks at you on command, and he'll soon recover his courage. Start by holding the reward close to his nose and bring it up until it's between your eyes. As you progress in training, you can start adding distractions.

Come

The most important command for any dog is Come. (Fancy obedience classes and the show world often refer to it as the Recall command.) Unfortunately, it's also the hardest command for any dog to obey. Even the Siberian who will come instantly on command in the obedience ring may not do so outside if he has a decent chance of running fast and far in the other direction. And he doesn't need an excuse. Being free and unfettered is more than many a self-respecting Siberian can take.

WARNING

When you dog comes to your command about half the time, it's not a reliable recall. Very few Huskies will return reliably to you when they're distracted and they know they're in an unfenced area. Huskies are smart, beautiful, charming, and completely untrustworthy. The Come command is at best an aspirational goal.

If your Siberian does take off, it's not his fault. It's yours. Whack yourself on the head with a rolled up newspaper several times, and say, "I was told not to let him off the leash." Then go find your dog. You can still teach the Come command so your Siberian will be inclined to obey you even under trying circumstances. It's such a critical command that it should be the first one you teach. Your Siberian may escape from the house or slip his lead at any moment. You need at least a fighting chance of getting him back safely to you.

WARNING

Many books tell how you can confidently train your dog to come to you every time without fail. These authors usually have Labrador Retrievers. Believe me, it's a rare Husky who will always obey. Don't take a chance on your dog's life. Keep him on a leash.

To increase your chance of success, you should always associate coming with something *positive* for the dog. Reward him with a small treat or praise every time he approaches you. Don't call him to punish him, clip his nails, give him a bath, or anything else that he may regard as punishment, whether you mean it that way or not. Always praise your Siberian when he comes — even if you've been yelling at him to come for 15 minutes.

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When calling your Husky, speak in a happy, cheerful voice, no matter how irritated you secretly are. If you punish your dog when he finally shows up, he thinks either, "Gosh, that must not have been the right response to that command after all," or, "Ha! Next time I'll know better. The next time she calls me, I'll just run away farther. She must think I'm stupid or something."

TIP

Begin training the Come command using a 10- or 12-foot lead attached to the dog. This way your Siberian won't even have the opportunity to disobey. If he moves in the wrong direction, pull gently on the lead to entice him to you. Then praise him.

Keep him on the lead until he responds eagerly every single time. If you have to pull to make him come, he isn't ready for off-lead training. The single most common error people make is to overestimate their dog's obedience and take him off the lead too soon.

When you finally do begin off-lead training, make sure your dog is in a confined area (preferably the house) where you can easily retrieve him if he chooses to ignore your call or whistle. But don't punish him for an error. Reward him for correct behavior. Never praise or reward him until he comes all the way to you, right to your feet. Dogs are clever at knowing precisely how far your reach is.

TIP

You may want to use a whistle, clicker, or some other distinctive noise in addition to the Come command. Dog whistles are useful aids. They have a far-carrying and distinctive sound. Of course, you may not be able to hear it yourself, so you won't know if it's working or not. It's one of those things you have to take on faith.

REMEMBER

Positive reinforcement is a critical training tool, but it works best if you offer treats and effusive praise intermittently, even after the dog has learned the lesson. If you cease praising him after he's learned the behavior, he may revert to disobedient behavior in order to be rewarded, as in the old days.

No!

I never add the word *please* to *no,* because it sends the wrong signal. *No* means, "Immediately desist!" You may combine it with a reference to what he's doing wrong: "No chew!" means, "Stop eating that; it's my dress." Some people think that saying "no" is a severe punishment and should be used sparingly. But this isn't true; "no" is just a guide to correct behavior. Your dog will learn what it means and he won't hold it against you. If your dog is chewing something inappropriate, say, "No chew" and hand him something more acceptable. Then praise him. There's nothing to it, really. You won't confuse your dog or destroy his psyche.

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Many pet owners have more trouble learning the meaning of "no" than their dogs do. When saying "no," don't betray your verbal command by your tone or body language. If you say "No!" but are really thinking, "Oh, that's so cute the way he ate my slippers," he'll know you don't really mean it. Next time he'll eat your hundred-dollar cross-trainers. If you say, "No beg," and then relent a minute later, he's not the one having trouble understanding what you're trying to communicate.

REMEMBER

"No" is a mysterious word to dogs unless it's uttered immediately in conjunction with the forbidden behavior. You can't walk into a room five minutes after the doilies were devoured, shake one in his face, and shriek, "No! No!" He will probably think. "Gee, she's yelling 'No.' She should put that doily down."

Sit

Sit is the easiest of all commands to teach. Just push the Husky's rump to the ground while you say, "Sit, Icicle," in a firm encouraging way. If you want to use a treat, hold it up slightly above his eye level; doing so encourages him to sit down. Praise him lavishly when he succeeds. Be careful to praise him as he sits *down,* and not as he starts to get up. When you want your Siberian to get up, give him a release command. I use the word *break.* Some trainers use *okay,* but because people use that word constantly in regular conversation, I think it's too easy for a dog to misunderstand it. You can even make up a secret word that will amaze all your friends.

But here's the problem with the Sit command: It's not a particularly useful command, unless you plan to do obedience, or for some reason you want the dog to take up less room. Most of the time, a quietly standing dog is just as good as a sitting one. People like to teach the Sit command because it's easy, and they feel they have more control over a sitting dog than they do over a standing one.

WARNING

Don't use the Sit command to stop negative behavior, because that's not teaching a dog to halt the behavior. It's only reinforcing the Sit command. Next time, he'll go right back to jumping up, charging the door, or whatever, until you tell him to sit again. You can spend the rest of your dog's life doing that. When you say, "Sit," it should just mean "sit" (for whatever reason) and not "quit it." When you want a dog to cease a behavior, teach him to cease that specific behavior. If you want him to stop doing something one time, say, "No."

Stay

Some trainers use a separate Stay command, and others prefer to use the Sit command for both actions. The philosophy behind the Stay command is that the dog

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will anticipate a longer wait period and not be so stressed. The theory behind using one command is that it's simpler for the dog and teaches patience. I've seen both ideas put successfully into practice. You can also use the Stay command with a standing dog. In any case, start small. It's unreasonable to expect your dog to stay for more than a few seconds at first.

TIP

Begin training the Stay command by having your Husky stay in a corner. It reduces the number of major escape routes. Gradually, you can increase the stay time. If he starts to get up, say "Stay!" and shake the lead. Then put him back in position. Praise him as he responds correctly.

Down

The Down command can be difficult for your Husky, because it's placing him in a vulnerable position. In order to use this command and for it to be successful, you need to have a lot of trust between you and your Siberian. (In most cases it's not actually necessary for the dog to learn this. The Sit command is usually quite sufficient.)

Begin with the dog in a Sit. Say, "Down," and press against your Husky's withers. Or you can lure him down with a treat. If he tries to get up, lean against his shoulder until he resumes the down. Teaching the Down command is a little easier when your dog is well exercised and perhaps even a little tired. Praise him quietly afterward. (Don't get too excited, or he'll get up.) Don't attempt to force or bully your dog into a Down. It's not worth it.

Leave or Get Out

I use the Leave or Get Out command to remove my dogs from the kitchen, especially when I'm cooking or dining. To teach this command take your dog's collar and remove him to the desired room. Then praise him. When he comes back, patiently say "Please leave," and repeat. Do this until he gets the message. You may use treats to explain what you mean.

Your Husky is perfectly capable of understanding the function of doorways. Soon he'll leave any room when requested. My own dogs enjoy asserting their independence in this regard. They lie as close to the threshold as possible, usually placing one paw in the forbidden room and gazing in with a stricken look. But they stay out.

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Off

Saying "off" means, "get the heck off the couch, Blizzard!" You can also use "no" to make him get down, but "off" is more specific. It tells the dog exactly what you want him to do now. *Off* is a positive rather than a negative reinforcer. Besides, you can use the Off command for other things, such as a command for him to jump out of the back of the van and so forth.

Give It and Drop It

These commands mean what they say, and they aren't identical. A well-trained dog knows both of them. After all, you may want him to give you the stick he has so unexpectedly retrieved for you, but you'd rather he would just drop the mouse he found. It's good practice for you to be able to remove anything your Siberian has in his mouth without a protest from him. Inculcating both these behaviors in your dog involves using a lot of high-value treats.

Heel

A correctly heeling dog is a pleasure to walk. The trouble involved in training him to move quietly at your side will be more than made up for later, when you're walking your Siberian with one hand and holding the baby/groceries/dog show trophy in the other. If you have a puppy, take heart. A puppy is much easier to teach to heel than an older dog is. A puppy naturally wants to come with you and has no bad habits to break — so far.

TIP

Use your 6-foot nylon or leather lead for training exercises. Nylon has a big advantage over leather; your Husky isn't quite so apt to chew it to pieces. On the other hand, if the Husky starts pulling on a nylon leash, you can get a serious rope burn. But then, your Siberian will never strain at the leash, because you'll train him not do so.

WARNING

Don't use a chain leash. They are too heavy and noisy.

If your dog works well on a regular collar, use that. The less control you need, the more pleasurable the exercise will be for both of you, and the better behaved you dog will ultimately be. You should be able to slip two fingers comfortably under the collar. If you must use a choke collar, adjust it correctly. Don't use a harness for training a dog to walk with you.

WARNING

Don't wrap the leash around your hand. It's a less effective instrument that way. Besides, you could hurt your hand if the Siberian suddenly lunges at something.

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Dogs traditionally are trained to heel at the left side of their owners, but there's no law about that. If you want your Husky to heel on the right side, be my guest. Some left-handed people prefer walking their dogs on the right side. However, if you're planning on showing your dog in conformation or obedience, it's best to go with the flow and use the customary left side.

Begin by reaching out and touching your Husky. He'll probably look up at you expectantly, which is what you want. You must get him to pay attention to you and keep his eye on you. Say, "Tundra, heel," and begin walking. Keep his chest in line with your knee. Don't allow him to lead with his nose. (Some people train their dogs to heel by keeping a treat in their pocket. The dog know it's there and moves along quite amicably, his nose at treat level. I leave it to you to decide if this is cheating or not.)

REMEMBER

The heeling exercise isn't a potty break. Don't allow your Siberian to stop, lag, lunge ahead, or smell the roses while training. Every once in a while, after a successful Heel, you can take a mini-break from training. Signify the break clearly by loosening the leash, while saying, "Relax" or something similar. At these times, you can allow your dog to sniff about, but he should never be permitted to pull.

TIP

During a heeling exercise, stop at every curb. This is good practice for both of you. You don't want your Husky to get the idea that it's all right to run across the street. When you're finished with the heeling exercise, loosen the lead completely, and say, "Break." This is the signal that your Husky may now sniff around and be dog-like.

Correcting forging in your Husky

Pulling at the lead is known as *forging,* and it's a common trait among Siberians. The independent-minded Siberian is born to pull, and without your encouragement, he may not understand the difference between you and a sled.

Forging begins long before you have attached the lead to the collar. It begins when your Husky sees the lead. If you can't control him at this point, don't expect that the upcoming foray will be a walk in the park, even if it *is* a walk in the park. Have your Siberian sit or stand quietly while you attach the lead. Don't put the lead on while he's dancing around. Insist he remain calm. If he starts jumping around when the leash is on, take it off. Start again calmly. He'll soon learn that the only way he's getting out the door is quietly. Otherwise, you'll have a struggle on your hands before the walk even begins.

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Training your dog not to forge

When your Husky starts to pull, you can try these few suggestions to get him to stop:

- **Turn the other way.** Keep doing this. Don't use any pattern. This will focus his attention on you. Because no one likes to be pulled, he'll start paying attention to you and trying to anticipate your moves. Say, "Heel," in a quiet firm voice as you turn.
- **Don't go around aimlessly turning, however, just in order to confuse the dog.** Use those turns only in response to his pulling against you. Most of the time, Huskies can see the path and will walk along it of their own accord. This is true of sled dogs as well. They follow the trail they see.
- **Walk backward.** Doing this will only make him stop to look at you. Don't allow your dog to pull you, ever. If you have to use an anti-pulling harness, do so, at least at first. The point is to break him from the habit of forging. (The opposite of forging is *lagging.* You will soon find that Huskies seldom lag.)
- **Gradually loosen the lead.** As your Husky's walking behavior improves, you can gradually loosen the lead so that you and he can take a pleasant stroll together without a struggle for leadership. When he's well-trained to heel, you can allow him to wander a bit on the lead, sniff about and so on. But when you say, "Heel, Snowbird," he should immediately resume correct heeling.

REMEMBER

The leash is an extension of you. Never praise or treat your dog when the leash is taut. A taut lead indicates that your dog is resisting you and you don't want to reward that kind of behavior.

Using devices to stop forging

Sometimes, you may need a little mechanical help when you start training your dog to walk with you. This is especially true if you're working with an adult dog who has had no previous heel training, and you aren't very strong.

The traditional choke collar may not work at all, because some dogs automatically throw themselves against it. This is called an *opposition reflex*, and yanking back has the opposite effect from what you want. Huskies are born to pull and their natural response is to pull back. Huskies are also amazingly adroit at snapping a choke chain.

A Siberian Husky can generate hundreds of pounds of force. If your Husky is a puller and you can't handle him, try one of the following as a supplementary training device:

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- **No-pull harness:** Although many varieties of "no pull" harnesses are available on the market, my favorite is the simple front loop harness. This harness has you leading the dog with triggering a pull reflex, as in the case with a regular harness. That's especially useful for Huskies. Use a traditional sledding harness when you want him to pull a sled, and a front loop harness when you want a quiet walk. No training required, really.
- **Halter:** Halters like Halti-collar, Gentle Leader, or Snoot Loop work well, attaching to the head of the dog. They work by steering the dog's head, and are both gentle and effective. They may be safely used in place of a regular collar. Many people prefer them, and they are especially useful when a child is walking the dog. Although it may take some time for your dog to get used to them, they're very effective and kind devices. Be careful to never yank on the leash when your dog is wearing a head halter; it can sprain the neck and cause injury.
- **Self-correcting collar:** Another kind of collar, variously known as a *pinch, self-correcting, prong, spike,* or *German collar,* looks frightening, but really it isn't. Its action imitates the nipping a mother dog does to her puppies. ***Remember:*** The use of these collars is a signal that your dog is untrained and out of control. If you use one for more than a few days, you're doing something wrong.

Taking Advantage of Formal Obedience Training

You may decide that your Siberian is a little too much for you to handle by yourself, or perhaps you'd just like some more guidance. (This is fine — classes can motivate you to do the homework needed to train your dog.) Maybe you're thinking of doing more advanced work someday, and you want to get off on the right paw. All these reasons are good ones for working with a professional trainer.

TIP

Know what your goals are. Are you looking for a better pet, or do you plan to show your dog in obedience competitions? Find a trainer to suit your needs. (Remember that a good trainer spends a lot of time training *you.*)

Finding a qualified trainer isn't always easy. Unfortunately, no state requires licensing for dog trainers. Anyone who claims to be a dog trainer can be one, so far as the law is concerned. This means you have to do an extra thorough job of checking qualifications, experience, and recommendations. Ask whether your prospective trainer belongs to any trainers' organizations, and if so, which ones. Membership in one of these organizations is no guarantee, but it lets you know that your trainer is keeping up with the latest research.

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Even the best general trainer may not be the perfect choice for your Siberian. Find a qualified trainer who is used to working with breeds other than obedience naturals like Border Collies and Labrador Retrievers. Your Siberian Husky needs special attention and responds to special training techniques (like treats) which are not used with standard obedience breeds.

TIP

Look for an instructor who will listen to you, and who uses positive rather than negative reinforcement techniques. Choose one who seems to like your dog, and vice versa. Training can be difficult enough without a personality conflict. Check with your veterinarian, breed club, or trusted friends who work with a trainer they like. Interview your trainer before committing to anything.

REMEMBER

A good trainer will give you a price list and reasonable goals. She'll give you and your dog homework to do. And she'll help you get results.

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Figuring out how to cure your dog of some common behavioral problems
- Considering the possibility of medications, when all other options fail
- Understanding dominance and aggression
- Avoiding dog bites

Chapter 9
Solving Bad Behavior

Many of the canine activities that we human beings term *behavior problems* are either normal canine activities that we find inconvenient, a result of a dog being left alone too long with insufficient natural stimulation, or an organic disorder. In no case are they forms of revenge exercised by your dog to get back at you.

If your Siberian is doing something wrong, you need to discover why. Only when you know the cause can you properly address the problem and channel your dog into more socially acceptable behavior.

Correct training can help you redirect negative behaviors into harmless or even beneficial activities. But it takes work, and serious cases may require a professional dog behaviorist.

Chewing, running, howling, and digging are natural dog activities. They stem from the ancient, ancestral urge to get food and shelter. But in the lonely, bored, or overstressed Siberian, these habits, natural as they may be, can become intolerable for you or your neighbors. You can respond to an unwanted behavior pattern in one of six ways:

- Change your behavior.
- Change your dog's behavior.

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- Change the environment: Build a higher fence, get earplugs, confine the dog, and so on.
- Medicate the dog.
- Medicate yourself.
- Get used to it.

Stress causes many dog problems. Most stress results from fear, confusion, or separation from humans. So, if you can identify and reduce these stressors in your dog, a lot of problems will magically disappear. Of course, doing so isn't always easy. For instance, every couple of years, the Blue Angels decide to fly 14 feet (it seems) over my house and perform aerial maneuvers. It's an impressive display — but my dog objects and spends the time squeezed under my bed.

REMEMBER

One size doesn't fit all. The cure you choose depends on the target behavior, its cause, and your patience.

According to one recent survey (and you can find different surveys providing different results), Siberian Huskies rank fourth among dog breeds in destructive behavior. This of course doesn't make them bad dogs; it just means they are energetic and easily bored, combined with a strong chewing impulse. Much of their destructive behavior stems from perfectly reasonable causes. They don't chew or destroy furniture to get back at you. Dogs simply don't think that way. They aren't vengeful. The message they're sending is, "I'm sad and lonely." Or, "I'm bored out of my skull." Or, "I'm ill." It's not, "I hate you." In some cases of destructive behavior, the message is often simply: "I want your attention."

In this chapter, I guide you through some of the more common behavior problems in Siberian Huskies (and dogs in general), and let you know your options for responding. Only you (with the help of your vet) can ultimately decide what is best for your dog. But with the information in this chapter, you'll be armed with the knowledge you need to make an informed decision.

Coping with Separation Anxiety

Fear and loneliness combine to create many destructive behavior patterns. Dogs are pack animals by nature, and among dogs, no breed is more pack-oriented than the Siberian. Huskies simply detest being alone.

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Additional causes of separation anxiety include change of ownership or moving from a shelter to a new house. In some dogs the behavior can suddenly appear after a family member dies or goes to college. In fact, any change in routine can be responsible. Dogs are creatures of habit.

Signs of separation anxiety include

- Attempting to escape
- Drooling excessively
- Exhibiting destructive behavior, such as chewing — or in some cases even eating — the furniture
- Howling when you're gone (if you don't have a security system to track this behavior, just ask the neighbors)
- Pacing
- Whining and crying when you're about to leave

If you think your dog suffers from separation anxiety, you're not alone. Experts think that approximately 20 to 40 percent of dog behavior problems can be directly linked to separation anxiety. A dog with severe separation anxiety may begin to salivate in terror the minute he thinks you're leaving; he may cringe and whimper. I knew one who would slink along the wall in a crouched position, whining the entire time. Separation anxiety is especially common in dogs who have been rescued from shelters or who have been moved from home to home. Dogs who have noise phobias (thunder, vacuum cleaners, and the like) also seem disposed toward separation anxiety.

TIP

I don't recommend forcibly crating a dog with separation anxiety; doing so can bring about a condition called *barrier anxiety*, which can make the whole situation even worse.

Here I provide some insight into how you can sensitize yourself and the dog to make separation anxiety a little less stressful for both parties.

Sensitize yourself

In his native land, the Siberian spent every day, all day, working alongside his human companions, which is what he was bred for. Don't blame your dog if you couldn't get a job as a sled driver. Be more sensitive to his needs. The best thing you can do to help a dog suffering from separation anxiety is to provide him with more of what he likes best — your company, or failing that, the company of other dogs.

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Get up a little earlier than you have to and spend some time with him. Play with him, run with him, brush his teeth. He deserves more than a "Nice boy, here's breakfast, see ya in ten hours."

TIP

Here are my suggestions:

- **Let your dog sleep in your bedroom with you if you can.** He'll enjoy your company even while you're asleep.
- **Try bringing your dog into work with you once in a while.** I did this for years, under the pretext that the animal was having medical problems and needed frequent medical attention. Well, it was sort of true.

  The American Animal Hospital Association conducted a survey and found that 24 percent of dog owners take their canines to work with them, at least once in a while. A well-behaved dog relieves stress on the job and reduces blood pressure all around. Of course, if the dog eats the contract for your next big deal or pees on the office palm tree, you may be out of a job.
- **Hire a dog walker or enroll your dog into doggy daycare.** Of course, these suggestions require finances, but if you can afford them, they can be a perfect solution.

Desensitize the dog

Start desensitizing your dog to being left alone. You can't take your dog with you to the opera, but being able to leave him alone for a few hours without returning to a war zone isn't an unreasonable expectation; the following suggestions can help.

- **Don't make a big fuss about either departing or returning.** Pay no attention to your dog for about 15 minutes or so before you leave. Avoid even looking at your dog, strange as that may sound.
- **Prepare to leave, but don't actually do so.** Do this several times a day, and soon your Husky won't necessarily associate you getting out your purse with being left alone.
- **Gradually lengthen the time that he's left home alone.** Get him used to the idea of you being away. At first, leave and come back within a minute or two. Give him a toy as you depart, and collect it upon your return. Soon, he'll understand that you'll always return, and he won't become destructive.

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TIP

Most people make the mistake of not being gradual enough in their separation training. If your dog behaves well for one hour alone, don't assume he can be safely left for eight hours. Increase his periods alone by only 15 minutes a time.

Medicate the dog when necessary

If nothing else works, medications are available, although they shouldn't be your first choice. The following drugs are commonly used to treat separation anxiety in dogs.

- **Alprazolam (Xanax):** Especially great for dogs afraid of thunder.
- **Amitriptyline (Elavil):** Used for separation anxiety as well as more general types of anxiety.
- **Buspirone (Buspar):** Used for general anxiety.
- **Clomipramine (Clomicalm):** My favorite for separation anxiety, it's the first FDA-approved treatment for separation anxiety in dogs. It can also be prescribed for other types of anxiety.

  Clomipramine is designed to be used along with good training; it's not a replacement. Owners who have used clomipramine have noticed an improvement in their dogs in about a month. Although a few dogs will have to remain on clomipramine permanently, most can be weaned off the drug in 3 to 6 months.
- **Dexmedetomidine (Sileo):** Used for general anxiety and especially anxiety caused by noise.
- **Diazepam (Valium):** Used for situational anxiety, not good for regular anxiety.
- **Fluoxetine (Reconcile or Prozac):** Used for separation anxiety.
- **Lorazepam (Ativan):** Used for situational anxiety.
- **Paroxetine (Paxil):** Used for general anxiety.
- **Sertraline (Zoloft):** Used for general anxiety.

Discuss all these options with your veterinarian.

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Coping with the Thunder Phobia

Fear of thunderstorms is a distressingly common phobia in dogs. (Even adult human beings can be unnerved by loud, crashing bangs of thunder). Thunder is inevitably accompanied by lightning, and lightning is extremely dangerous, especially considering your Husky's ancestral open-air living environment. There's no question that genetics play a strong role (it appears that breeds whose primary use involves open-air living are more prone to this condition, although fear of thunder is highly variable among different individuals of the same breed — or even litter). Treating it isn't easy because treatment involves physiological, emotional, and behavioral aspects. (And if you're afraid of thunderstorms, you're in danger of passing the fear along to your dog.)

Signs of thunder phobia are easy to spot and may begin before the storm hits (dogs can sense them coming): Panting, pacing, peeing on the floor, drooling, hiding, shaking, and whining are typical signs. These signs indicate real, physiological distress and shouldn't be ignored.

WARNING

Attempts at desensitizing the dog by playing tapes of thunderstorms and the like are seldom successful.

Eliminating a fear of thunder is difficult but not impossible. Here are my suggestions:

- **Comfort your dog.** This is the best approach. You can hug your dog tightly, speak gently to him, and create a calm, relaxed environment.
- **Use a dog-anxiety vest.** Many commercial thunder shirts or wraps are readily available.
- **Spray comforting dog pheromones.** You can purchase them online or at your local pet store.
- **Give him calming supplements.** Different ones are available.
- **Have your vet prescribe anxiety medication.** Many of the same meds in the "Medicate the dog when necessary" section earlier in this chapter work. Just talk to your vet.

Addressing the Vocalist

Huskies are extremely vocal (but tuneful) dogs. They bark, chortle, howl, and produce a surprising variety of other sounds that range from unworldly to annoying. Vocalization is normal for dogs; tolerate or even enjoy it in moderate amounts.

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TECHNICAL STUFF

One canine researcher, Kathryn Lord, hypothesizes that the origin of barking is associated with an evolved behavior called *mobbing*, a cooperative anti-predator response to a perceived intruder.

Chapter 6 helps you understand what your Husky is trying to tell you when he vocalizes. The solution to the problem lies in understanding what specifically is triggering your dog. Take notes (mentally or otherwise) to pinpoint the circumstances that seem to initiate the problem and refer to the following:

- If you suspect a medical cause, consult your vet for advice.
- Reward your dog with attention for quiet behavior.
- If your dog isn't neutered, schedule the surgery.
- Give him an alternative activity such as plenty of exercise. However, include exercise as part of his general routine, not as a direct response to barking. Otherwise, he'll be constantly vocalizing for a walk. A tired dog is a quiet dog.
- Supplying plenty of chews and interactive toys may also tempt him to a quieter lifestyle.
- If he is mostly barking outside, bring him indoors when he starts. He'll soon learn that his noisiness can lead to confinement in the house. If possible, adding a solid fence or bushy hedge to the yard will make him less responsive to whatever is out there.

WARNING

Never scream at your barking dog. Doing so just makes him bark more. Dogs respond to loud noise with even louder noise.

Dealing With Holes: The Digger

Siberians are born diggers. Their arctic heritage tells them that digging a hole in the snow is a fine way to keep warm and that digging in the moist ground is a good way to keep cool. They have also apparently found out that digging in the sofa is a great way to be comfortable.

REMEMBER

Digging often begins in puppies as young as 3 months, but the digging window remains open until your Husky is about 3 years old. If he hasn't started digging by then, then he probably won't.

In the following sections, I examine how to watch for clues from your digging Husky and ways you may be able to curb the behavior.

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Stay observant

Sometimes your Husky's digging is his way to let you know about something. Pay attention to why he's digging. He may be digging just because he's a dog or he may be trying to tell you something.

TIP

If your Husky is pawing at the floorboards, he may be trying to get your attention that you have a rodent problem. Call an exterminator.

If your Siberian is digging outside, observe the digging pattern. It's possible, of course, that your Husky is just burying a bone, but probably not. These holes can mean a wide array of things:

- Holes dug all around the yard indicate your Husky isn't getting enough exercise.
- Holes dug in the vicinity of a fence could indicate his desire to escape.
- Holes dug in moist garden soil suggest that your dog is too hot; he's merely looking for a place to cool off. He may also be hunting for moles or mice. In their enthusiasm for this sport, more than one Siberian has dug up a yellow jacket nest.

Indoor digging probably indicates that your dog is bored. Or that he's lonely and wants to be with you. In elderly dogs, digging in the carpet can be a sign that they are too hot or cold. Older dogs may try to use the carpet to help regulate their body temperature for this reason.

Discourage digging

To discourage your dog from re-digging an outdoor hole, consider doing the following:

- **Put a few pieces of carefully selected dog feces in the hole.** Siberians know that dog feces should remain covered.
- **If your Siberian digs near the fence line, take the hint and bury the wire a few inches underground.** Keep checking it to make sure he can't escape.
- **Confine your Husky to a safe area, but let him dig, and give in to his desire to mine dirt.** For example, get a sandbox, and put it in an area that gets lots of afternoon shade.

  Make sure you supervise your dog; if you see him digging elsewhere, redirect him to the sandbox. This probably won't eradicate his desire to dig, but at least he'll know you don't approve and won't be doing it in front of you.

TIP

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» **Interact with your dog in positive ways.** Groom him, play Frisbee, go for a hike — any activity to work off his excess energy. Interactive toys help too. If you need help, rent or borrow a neighborhood child. They're always eager to play with dogs!

WARNING

Some people recommend filling a hole with water and shoving the dog's head in it to make him stop. This cruel practice won't work; in fact, it will only terrify him or make him defiant.

Chomping on Everything: The Chewer

Siberians are chewers, especially when they're young. All puppies are oral, using their mouths to investigate new things. Your dog may go right to the new pillow you've just brought home and chew it to pieces, even though he's never bothered the old ones. So, let him become well-acquainted with the new item before you leave him alone with it.

REMEMBER

Don't punish your dog for having chewed something inappropriate. It's a temptation to hit the roof when you come home to find your living room in shreds, but doing so will only make your Husky associate your return with something awful. He has no idea why you're angry with him. Dogs must be caught in the act to make the connection between inappropriate behavior and your displeasure. Sometimes you need to manufacture a situation where you can correct your Husky immediately.

These sections explain why dogs chew and what you can do to curb the behavior.

Understanding why dogs chew

Unfortunately, many dogs regard any attention as better than no attention. Not responding to negative behavior with negative attention will take some self-control on your part. But you must resist the urge. Remove the target item (or the dog) with the minimum amount of fuss. Give him plenty of loving attention when he is behaving himself, not when he's being a nuisance.

TIP

Your Siberian may be also be teething, and chewing helps relieve his discomfort. A few ice cubes are a good chew toy at teething time. In addition to giving the pup something to crunch, ice has a numbing effect on his sore gums. You can even freeze or chill any of your pup's regular toys or use a cold, rolled-up washcloth. Siberians like the cold anyway; it may remind them of their roots.

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If your older Husky suddenly begins chewing, he may have dental or upper gastrointestinal difficulties. This problem is definitely one that needs to be addressed, because the chewing can become habitual, even after the initial problem goes away.

If your dog isn't on a regular feeding schedule, his instincts tell him to hunt for food wherever it may be. He may be eating the sofa because he's hungry. If your work prevents you from getting home at the same time every day and you have a couch-cruncher, consider getting a pet-sitter or using a self-feeder.

On the other hand, if your Husky starts devouring a large number of items that are not food, he may have a condition called *pica.* If you suspect this condition, check with your veterinarian.

REMEMBER

Maybe your dog is plagued with existential angst or ennui. More so than almost any other breed, Siberians crave companionship, human and canine. A bored Siberian is a destructive Siberian.

I once got a letter from a dog who had this tale to tell: "I was forced to chew up three remote controls, two pairs of gloves, a valuable textbook, and a watch before my slovenly owner learned to put her things away properly. She was a slow learner, but eventually, with positive reinforcement (I would lick her face as she stooped to pick up the chewed articles), she got the message."

Curing chewing

Remember, it's normal and natural for dogs to chew. If you see your dog chewing something inappropriate, substitute something better, without fussing about it. When your puppy begins to chew the chair leg, offer him another favorite toy, and praise him when he accepts it. Young dogs are particularly prone to digging and chewing; a chewing frenzy often develops between the ages of 6 and 10 months. It may subside and then peak again at about 18 months. As dogs grow older, most become less apt to chew things.

TIP

Try to exercise your Husky before leaving him alone. If he's pleasantly tired, he'll be less likely to chew or dig.

I heard of one Siberian who destroyed all the linoleum in the laundry room when he was left alone for ten minutes. Locking dogs in small areas is almost bound to result in destructive behavior if your Husky isn't crate-trained.

REMEMBER

Confining your dog in a windowless area also increases his destructive propensities. Dogs should be able to look out the window; they get endless amusement spying on the neighbors, just like humans do. Provide toys in his confinement area as well.

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You probably have to be away from your dog for at least a few hours every day. To keep your Siberian company, try leaving the television or radio on. As far as music choice goes, it's up to you, but my experience has shown that elevator music has a stupefying effect on dogs — not a bad idea in the case of Huskies.

Preventing chair chomping

A variety of bitter-tasting sprays and foams (including the widely used Bitter Apple) are available to stop a dog's destructive chewing. Tabasco sauce also works nicely — so do deodorant, mouthwash, and cheap perfume (finally, a use for that cologne Cousin Mildred sent you last Christmas). A product called Protex keeps dogs from chewing fabric — or their own fur.

However, preventive products like Bitter Apple are at best temporary remedies. You can't expect to go around for the rest of your days spraying Bitter Apple on all your possessions. The only surefire cure to chewing is steady, consistent training, or separation of dog and valuables.

Some anxiety-reducing drugs, like clomipramine, can help immensely in reducing your dog's anxious tension and the destructive behavior that accompanies it. I recommend these only as a last resort, but they have produced some excellent results. Like Bitter Apple, they should supplement, and not replace, training.

Stealing Set-Out Food: The Counter-Cruiser

In the dog trade, stealing food off the kitchen counters is referred to as *counter-cruising.* It's a habit that gets worse in the winter — probably a holdover from the Siberian's arctic past. The bitter weather triggers a food-now-at-any-price response.

REMEMBER

Although some people have good success battling this behavior by placing noisy mousetraps and other anti-nosing-around items on the counter, most people rely on good old management techniques. Never leave anything juicy on the counter when you're not there to watch it.

Some Huskies can learn to open refrigerators. I know two people who have had to put chains and padlocks on their refrigerators to keep the contents inside.

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NO FOOD IS SAFE

Leslie Anderson of Oklahoma City reports that she and her husband discovered a perfectly good, frozen turkey, still wrapped, on the interstate. Never one to pass up a free meal, Leslie's husband snatched up the turkey and brought it home. The turkey was promptly dubbed "Skidmark" and left in the sink to defrost. Shadow, Leslie's heretofore completely well-behaved Siberian, somehow managed to amputate a leg, thigh, and breast from Skidmark, hoping no one would notice. Shadow was scolded and put out in disgrace. On her return, she devoured a pecan pie and a quiche left on the table. Skidmark was discarded. "Poor Skidmark," sighs Leslie. "Even in death it was a tough life."

Dumping Trash: The Trashman

Because dogs are scavengers, a loaded trash can is hard for them to resist. If your dog is considering a career in Solid Waste Dispersal, get a trash container with a lid and foot pedal, or keep the trash can somewhere where he can't get to it. You can hide the trash basket under the sink, behind the cellar door, in the pantry, or in some other Husky-proof place.

REMEMBER

If you feed your Siberian from the table or allow him to beg during meals, you're essentially inviting him to help himself. Don't blame him if he grabs something while you're not looking. You have taught him everything he knows.

TAKE IT FROM A VETERAN

Lois Leonard, who describes herself as owner, trainer, handler, and friend of a Siberian named Lojan's Very Special Sula told me an interesting tale. Sula was more than the average Obedience champion. In fact, in her nine years of competition, she earned 248 qualifying scores in AKC obedience. She won 18 area Specialty High in Trials, 2 National Specialty High in Trials, and 3 all-breed High in Trials. This achievement earned her the title of OTCH (Obedience Trials Champion), an honor won by only two Siberians in history.

Guess what? Obedience Trial Champion Lojan's Very Special Sula, Canadian C.D.X, Schutzhund A.D., took off from Lois when the dog was 15 years old and stone deaf. She darted across the road after another dog, while Lois screamed uselessly after her (after all the dog was deaf). Sula wasn't struck by a car, but she easily could have been. As Lois says, "You will never be able to trust a Siberian, *any* Siberian, off lead in an unfenced area. *Never*." It's as simple as that.

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TIP

If you actually catch your Siberian in the act of stealing food or trash dumping, you can try squirting him with a mixture of water and lemon juice or vinegar. Say, "No!" firmly at the same time, so he doesn't think you're just playing with him.

Running Off: The Escape Artist

Siberians are tremendous escape artists, and they're genetically programmed to run off. They can slip collars, break chains, and dissolve into the mist. And once they escape, they tend to stay gone.

REMEMBER

The *flight-instinct period* is officially between 4 and 6 months of age. If your dog gets loose during this period and has a fun time, it's game over. More than likely, he'll do everything in his power to repeat the experience. On the other hand, I wouldn't trust a Husky to stay in the yard at any age or condition. Even if he becomes blind and three legged, he'll try to hobble off in search of adventure.

Siberian Huskies are also runners by nature. Running is bred into every bone in their bodies. They were born to run long and hard (and pull a sled while doing so). Siberians run in a very fast, straight line in the opposite direction from you. This doesn't mean he's running away. He's just running off.

A Siberian Husky can run so fast that he may be 20 miles away before he wonders what happened to his owner. By then it's too late. Although Siberians are truly excellent at running off, they aren't nearly so good at finding their way home again.

TIP

To keep your Husky in, you must build a secure fence, preferably one 6 feet high. A few Siberians have been known to scale fences as high as 8 feet. You may have to deter a serious climber with a hot wire placed low to the ground.

The best fences are made of wood and wire. If you have a digger, bury the fence in the ground deeper than the Siberian can dig. Unfortunately, some of them can dig pretty deep. Most Siberians seem to dig more for the joy of digging than as an escape plan.

Having a yard, however, is no guarantee that your Husky will actually use it to exercise in. More than likely, he'll spend quite a bit of time sitting at the back door waiting to be let in. Regular walks or supervised play are very important for all dogs, and the exercise will make your Siberian less bored and more tired — hence less eager to escape.

You can't train a Siberian to stay at home. He isn't a guard dog or a Retriever. Nor can you train a Siberian to stay reliably by your side as you walk along; you must keep your Husky on a leash at all times.

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Hunting Other Animals: The Big (or Small) Game Hunter

Siberians have a strong hunting instinct (which is called the *prey drive*). Given a chance, they may kill chickens, strange cats, rabbits, and groundhogs. Some have even been known to kill lambs or calves.

REMEMBER

Because hunting is instinctive in Siberians, it can't be trained out of them, at least not completely. Although some Huskies are totally uninterested in hunting anything, many more are passionate about it. It's your responsibility to keep your Siberian away from livestock and neighbors' pets. Don't expect your neighbors to take extraordinary precautions to keep your dog away from their pets and livestock. That's your job.

Heading for the Door: The Charger

You're just ready for work. You're loaded down with your laptop and phone, lunch bag, and a plant for one of your coworkers. You struggle cautiously with the door, fearing the worst. And then *pow!* Before you know it, your Siberian has crashed by, knocking the plant, the pricey laptop, and the egg salad sandwich to the floor in a smashed mess. He's also ripped your skirt and slammed your face against the wall on his way out.

REMEMBER

Obviously, you must put a stop to this behavior. But if charging the door is an already established pattern, it may take some time to correct. You'll also need to enlist the help of everyone in the family, especially the children. Children are the most likely culprits in the behavior getting started in the first place. They're also the chief victims of it.

Some people claim that a door-charging dog is just a bully and trying to dominate you. No. He's just eager to get outside and has no manners. It has nothing to do with dominant behavior.

TIP

Never attempt to open a door or gate while your dog is crowding you. Stop short, and whirl around, facing your Siberian. Speak in your firmest voice, and hold your hand right in front of his face, nose-level. Use your leg or whole body if necessary to prevent his getting by you. Say, "Wait!" or "Stay!" Begin to open the door, *very* slowly. If your Siberian makes a move toward the door, slam the door shut, shake the dog's collar firmly, and repeat your command. You and your family need to practice this routine several times a day at every door in the house to put a halt to this undesirable and dangerous behavior.

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TIP

Never allow your Siberian to go out the door before you do. Alphas go first. And *you* are the alpha.

Being Playful: The Nipper

Puppies frequently engage in play biting. Playing rough with one another is one of the ways they learn their limits. One of the things they figure out is how hard they can bite without getting someone really angry at them. This schooling period usually occurs between the age of 5 and 8 weeks, which is one of the reasons it's important for a puppy to remain with his littermates that long.

This behavior isn't true aggression; you'll see young dogs wagging their tails and bowing to one another. In a natural extension, puppies usually attempt to carry play biting over to their human friends. And sometimes they nip hard. It never occurs to them that's it's not all right, so it's up to you to discourage the behavior. Puppy teeth are much sharper than adult teeth, although their jaws are weaker, which is a good thing.

Even though your puppy is only playing, you must not allow unrestricted play biting to continue, because it can escalate over time to more serious biting. And even if the puppy isn't hurting you, a small child may perceive it differently.

A young puppy will often take your hand in his mouth, which is fine as long as he doesn't clamp down on you with his wicked little teeth. As long as the pressure is light, all is well. He's merely telling you he loves you, and you're telling him you trust him. But when you feel the teeth get uncomfortable, squeal "Ow!" in a hurt tone. He should withdraw his mouth. If he doesn't, snarl and give him a sharp tap on the nose until he does. It's important that he pull his mouth away from your hand, not vice versa. You must emerge as the victor, even in this silly game.

This annoying behavior should cease by the time your dog is 6 months old or thereabouts. However, dogs, like children, reach milestones at different points.

Getting Your Attention: The Jumper

The Siberian's friendliness may evidence itself in a great, not always appreciated, Siberian hug. He is leaping up on you. And why? For one reason: to get your attention.

To cure this behavior, you need to enlist the help of friends and family alike. Never allow your friends to say, "Oh, it's okay, I don't mind if he jumps." They may not

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mind, but your 87-year-old great-aunt may be less appreciative. A strong dog like a Husky can seriously injure an older person or a child just by expressing his love too exuberantly.

The following methods can curb this behavior:

- **Ignore your dog.** Fold your arms, look away, and say, "No."
- **Greet your dog only when he is quiet and sits down.** The theory is that, because your dog is trying to get attention, he'll cease the unwanted behavior when attention is withdrawn.

  Don't greet your Husky until he's sitting or standing quietly either on his own volition or by command. Keep your greetings low-key, and he'll imitate your behavior.

TIP

- **Get down and let your Husky see your face without his having to jump up to reach it.** It's natural for him to want to lick your face; it's the way his mother taught him when he was a puppy. Some people bend down to let the dog muzzle, but it's really better for the dog to learn to stay away from people's faces. Be friendly, but keep standing tall.

Don't allow your Husky to jump up on you when you have old clothes on and then expect him to stay down when you're dressed up. A dog can't tell the difference between your around-the-house clothes and your Sunday best.

WARNING

Under any circumstances, don't knee your dog in the chest or hold his paws up to discourage him. It won't work and can hurt your dog or make him afraid of you. Of course, if he's terrified of you, he won't want to jump up on you because he doesn't like you anymore. Is that what you want?

Whatever technique you use, save your praise until all four of the dog's feet are on the ground. This takes some critical timing, but it's essential.

Many dogs also like to jump on furniture to get attention. If your Husky likes to do so, consider these options to keep him off:

- Cover the furniture with soda cans partially filled with marbles or coins.
- Use a product called Snappy Trainer, which has the effect of mousetraps without the potential danger.
- Buy no-jump plastic strips that make a noise when your dog steps on them. A product called Scat creates static pulses (at various levels) to make your pet uncomfortable when he gets on the couch.
- Keep the Husky out of the room.

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Being the alpha
- Knowing what to do when your dog is aggressive
- Calling a pro
- Preventing dog bites

Chapter 10
Dealing with Aggression

Even though Huskies are typically gentle dogs, sometimes your Husky can show signs of aggression. This chapter spells out how you can figure out what's causing it and what you can do about it.

Establishing Your Leadership

Your Husky's ancestors lived in a hierarchical society, wherein one mated pair were the *alphas* (top dogs). However, dogs live with people, and their environment is more like a family than a pack. Dogs naturally look to humans as leaders.

TIP

Here are some general tips to establish your leadership:

- Never let your puppy nip or bite at you, even while playing.
- If you feel challenged, stare coolly at your Husky. Don't look away before he does. It's the alpha's prerogative to initiate staring.
- Decide when games begin and end. Make sure you end up with the toys.
- Don't play tug-of-war. If it happens by accident, make sure you win.
- Keep the dog off the sofa and bed. Dogs equate being high up with being boss.

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- Practice giving and taking food away from your Husky. He should accept your right to do so without complaint.
- Initiate petting on your own. Don't let yourself be nudged into it.
- Have your Husky obey a command like Sit before you feed, pet, or play with him. To establish yourself as alpha, make sure he works for everything he gets.
- Reserve your praise for something done really well on command. Don't lavish him with praise, however, because you want him to keep trying.
- Neuter your male dog. Unneutered male dogs are three times as apt to bite as altered ones. (Refer to Chapter 13 for more discussion about neutering your Husky.)

Handling Aggression

Aggression is a normal canine behavior. It's how dogs solve (or eliminate) conflicts. After all, dogs aren't masters of witty repartee. Subtle revenge is beyond them. They have only a few ways of responding when someone asks them to do something they don't want to do. They can growl, snap, bite, run away, balk, or submit.

However, in a civilized world, dog aggression is usually unwelcome, except in the case of highly trained police dogs. Your Husky is not a highly trained police dog. You don't want your dog attacking other dogs, the family cat, or least of all — you. Nightmare visions of trips to the emergency room (or, even worse, to the courtroom) may haunt you.

As a human in the human-dog partnership, your job is to encourage nonaggressive behavior in your dogs. Teach your Husky to respond even to unwelcome attentions in an appropriate way — for you. Your beloved dogs have to conform to human expectations, which means never biting, snapping, or running away. Make sure you always model nonaggressive behavior for your dog. If you're nonviolent, you dog will have less reason to be so himself.

If your dog exhibits symptoms of aggressive behavior but has not bitten anyone, you can attempt to correct the situation yourself. However, if you're at all doubtful about your abilities to handle the situation, find a good animal behaviorist to work with your dog. (If your dog has bitten anyone aggressively, you absolutely must get professional help for him.)

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REMEMBER

But the truth is that any dog may bite, given the wrong kind of stimulus, such as cruel or abusive treatment, pain, or even relentless teasing. If you never allow your dog to be subjected to this kind of treatment, he'll have no incentive to resort to an extreme response.

But what about the dog who is never teased yet still seems headed for a life of aggression? Many aggressive dogs have never had a sharp word spoken to them in their lives, which may be the very source of the problem.

REMEMBER

Aggression always escalates if not controlled, because the dog's bite threshold is lowered with each uncontrolled bite.

REMEMBER

A dog isn't a doll or an automaton; he is a complex living being. A single inappropriate behavior, like snapping, may have many different causes. Each cause needs to be carefully analyzed in order to figure out how to deal with it.

In the following sections, I guide you through some of the main types of aggression, so you can identify them in your own Husky and respond appropriately.

Relative dominance among dogs

All dogs aren't born equal. And as much it may appall your egalitarian principles, one dog may become the alpha in your home if you own more than one. The alpha dog is the one who demands to be greeted first, eat first, go out the door first, and so on. However, not all groups of dogs arrange themselves around an alpha dog, and sometimes the dominant dog is only dominant over one aspect of life, perhaps food or his bed, but submissive in other aspects.

This relative dominance first develops in littermates at the age of about 4 weeks and seems to be genetic. Usually dominance is a self-limiting behavior. In other words, when you bring a new dog home, there may be squabbling among the housemates to discover who will be top dog. Usually the first dog in the home ends up becoming the alpha, but sometimes, if the new dog is used to being dominant and has a strong personality, you may have to prepare for a longer battle. Dominance squabbling most often occurs between dogs of the same sex.

Establishing relative dominance: Let your Huskies do it

Allow your Huskies to set up their own dominance order. You may find that older females will turn out to be the dominant dogs. Reinforce whatever hierarchy the dogs select (as long as you and all other human beings are first). Feed, greet, and pet the dominant dog first, which may seem unfair, but you'll be surprised how well it works. When a new dog joins the pack, everything will have to be sorted out all over again.

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Dogs instinctively seek to know their place in the pack. If you upset the apple cart by trying to bring democracy to your household, you'll only confuse your dogs and promote continual infighting. The more submissive dog may think he now has a chance at dominance and try to assert himself. The dominant dog will merely try that much harder to remain the boss and attack the submissive dog. Let the dogs sort things out amongst themselves.

TIP

To help reduce canine household stress, make sure all dogs have equal access to food. (They'll usually share water with no problem.) As a result, keep separate food dishes for each dog.

Rarely, relative dominance escalates into peer aggression, where one dog will continually attack other dogs. This type of aggression is fairly rare in Huskies, and when it does occur, it's usually limited to chasing or attacking smaller dogs (see the "Predatory aggression" section later in this chapter). *Peer aggression* is usually confined to intra-gender conflict — males attacking males or females attacking females. You can intervene in peer aggression if a fight hasn't actually broken out. A dog fight is usually preceded by scuffling, noise, and even boxing behavior. If you can distract the dogs at this point by offering a walk or a treat, you may avert an actual fight. Don't yell; that serves to excite the potential combatants.

Handling a dog fight

If a dog fight breaks out, don't step in between the dogs, even if you think you won't be bitten. Dogs aren't in a normal state of mind when they're fighting. In most cases, no serious damage is being done, despite the shrieks and howls.

TIP

Throwing cold water on the fighting pair works with many breeds, but fighting Siberians respond better to a chair or some solid object thrust between them. You can also throw something at them or smack the instigator on the backside, just to get his attention. Speak loudly and sharply to the dogs, calling them by name, so they may recognize their master talking and they had better quit fighting. As a last resort, squirting the combatants in the eyes with vinegar or lemon juice works well.

Don't separate the dogs after the fight, especially if they're housemates. They must learn to get along, and crating one or both dogs will accomplish nothing. Instead, work with them together. Of course, when you have to leave them home alone, you must separate feuding dogs until you know they can get along.

REMEMBER

You'll have the best luck working with spayed or neutered dogs, especially in the case of males. Neutered males not only have a lower level of fighting hormones to make them more aggressive, but they also smell less male; hence they're less threatening to other males.

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Sometimes neighboring dogs fight across a chain-link fence. If possible, conceal the dogs from each other by erecting a solid barrier. Better, introduce them to each other (unleashed) in a large area. Eventually they'll probably become friends.

TIP

If you're walking your dog and come across another dog, the two dogs may exchange some threatening eye contact. Just keep your dog looking in a different direction and move along. If this behavior becomes a habit with your Husky, or if he's difficult to distract, use a head halter to keep him looking where you want him to. (Chapter 4 discusses head halters in greater detail.)

Predatory aggression

Predatory aggression, evidenced by stalking behavior, is directed at prey animals, including chickens, cats, and smaller dogs. Predatory aggression is very common in Huskies, which is one reason why a Siberian must never be allowed to run loose. If your Husky happens to catch something, don't allow him to keep it. That only reinforces his hunting instinct. Remove the prey without comment (if you can, pry it out of his jaws).

If you have both a cat and a Siberian, you must take strong precautions. Some Siberians are wonderful with cats, but most are not. At first, keep a short leash on the Husky so that you can restrain him if anything bad happens. The prey drive is a deep-seated instinctual behavior, which can't reliably be trained out of Huskies, no matter what you do. Keep a Husky and a cat apart, unless they're under your direct supervision. Even Siberians who get along fine with the family cats will probably chase and try to kill strange cats.

If your Husky begins to show a little too much interest in the cat's movements, toss a small pillow, slipper, or some light, nearby object at him. Try to actually hit him, but not too hard, of course. Say, "No kill!" in a displeased voice, and give him something else to do. You may want to take the cat on your lap and pet him. Let your dog see that the cat is part of the family.

Closely related to predatory aggression is the chase response. In a simple *chase response,* pursuit isn't carried out to its logical conclusion, which is to capture and kill the prey animal. The dog may only mouth or play with the captured prey. Cats and other small animals instinctively run when being chased, thus exciting the Husky further and encouraging his chase-response instinct.

Aggression toward people

Without doubt, aggression toward human beings is the most serious problem a dog owner can face. It's also a really serious and frightening event for the target of the aggression.

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WARNING

Animal aggression against humans is a growing problem all over the country. Every day about 1,000 Americans are bitten severely enough to require emergency care, and more than 14,000 people a year are hospitalized. In adults, most victims of dog bites are men (often mail carriers or deliverymen), and most biting dogs are owned by men as well.

Siberians aren't usually aggressive to people. On the contrary, they're renowned for their friendliness. However, horrible things can happen. A very sad statistic is that between 2005 and 2017, 13 people were actually killed by Huskies, making them the seventh most lethal breed after Pit Bulls, Rottweilers, German Shepherds, mixed breeds, American Bulldogs, and Mastiffs/Bullmastiffs. The number accounts for only 3 percent of the total victims, but that number is still troubling. Most of the victims were infants under 11 months old; the rest were under the age of 5. (The single adult victim was involved in a multi-dog attack, one of which was a Husky.) Although Huskies are frequently misidentified, the point is that all dogs need to be supervised around children. Babies don't look or smell like human beings to dogs, and toddlers often run away screaming, activating the prey drive in some dogs.

Siberians are generally an extremely friendly breed. Alleged attacks are usually more the fault of the people involved than the dog. The following discusses why an attack may happen:

- **Misidentification:** Many of these biting dogs were probably Malamutes, German Shepherds, or crossbreed dogs (including wolf-Husky hybrids), and not Siberians at all. Most people are notoriously bad at telling one breed from another, and Huskies sometimes get blamed for bites they had nothing to do with.
- **The phenomenal rise of popularity of the Siberian Husky:** From only a handful of registered Siberians in the 1940s and 1950s, the Siberian Husky now ranks 14th in number of AKC registrations. Naturally, there is a direct relationship between number of dogs and number of bites.

  The increased demand for Siberians makes it more likely that many will be coming from unscrupulous breeders who don't consider temperament when choosing breeding stock. It's also likely that the growing popularity of the breed has induced unsuitable people to acquire the Siberian as a pet. Dogs tend to behave like their owners. Aggressive, mean people tend to have aggressive, mean dogs. Because the Siberian looks like a wolf, some ignorant people think he should behave that way. If they abuse the dog, he can become mean.

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» **Lack of socialization:** Many dog bites come from dogs who are tied up, left outside, and ignored by their owners. They get so little human contact that, when they do get it, they don't know how to respond. Siberian Huskies crave human companionship. When they have it, they are among the most loving of all breeds. When they don't, they tend to revert to more primitive behavior patterns.

  Not all bites against human beings come from aggression, however. Factors like fear, pain, and overstimulated play-nipping may also play a part. Indeed, a combination of forces may be at work. Understanding why your dog is acting in a particular way is critical. Then you can attempt to cure the problem. In some cases, your dog may need professional help.

WARNING

One major insurance company won't issue homeowner's policies to Siberian owners. (It also won't insure owners of Alaskan Malamutes, Staffordshire Bull Terriers, Bullmastiffs, Chow Chows, Doberman Pinschers, German Shepherds, or Rottweilers.) Many companies won't insure your home if your dog has a bite record.

Understanding Types of Aggressive Behavior

All aggression is not equal! Dogs become aggressive for a variety of reasons, and before you can treat the problem, you need to know why your dog is acting the way he is. As with people, dog behavior is motivated by physical, emotional, and environmental factors. Consider each one.

Fear-induced aggression

As the name suggests, *fear-induced aggression* occurs when the animal is afraid — usually of something new. Most fear-biters have experienced abuse at some time in their past; fear-induced aggression is common in rescue dogs. Fearful dogs often have a critical area, which, if intruded upon, may elicit a bite response.

A human head or hand close to the dog's face is especially threatening to a fearful dog. You can often cure fearful aggression by slowly desensitizing the dog to the frightening situation. Fearfulness dissipates with time in a loving and understanding home. Overprotection isn't the answer, however. Your Husky must learn to cope.

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TIP

Never corner a fear-biting dog. Allow him to come to you, praise him, or even better, treat him when he does so. If he refuses to come to you, allow him to walk away. Don't move, however. After a while, approach him with a treat. Don't make a big deal of it. This is part of the desensitizing process; he needs to learn he has nothing to fear from you.

Some dogs fear certain kinds of people: males, people in uniform, people of a race different from their owner's. (In the latter case, dogs are more likely picking up clues from their owners. So examine your own attitudes and change them, for your own sake, and for your dog's.) The cure for this behavior is to have these people feed and pet the dog, so the dog learns there is nothing to fear.

REMEMBER

Fear-biting hurts as much as any other kind of biting, and unfortunately, dogs who begin as fear-biters and go uncorrected can progress to biting every time they are unnerved by something.

Territorial aggression

Territorial aggression arises from a dog's natural tendency to protect his area. Interestingly, many dogs who aren't territorial in an open area become so when a fence is erected around their property. Along the same lines, the bigger the dog's area, the less aggression you're likely to see. This kind of aggression is very rare in Siberians, but it may develop, especially if the dog senses you are proud of him for his guarding behavior.

Food or toy guarding

In some ways, *guarding* is a form of territorial aggression, but it's keyed to objects rather than to area. Guarding is more common in Siberians than territorial aggression is. Guarding of food or toys can be dangerous behavior. Your dog should surrender any toy or even his food to you if you ask him. He may not want to do this and may play keep-away with his toy, but any growling must not be tolerated.

TIP

If your dog starts to display this kind of behavior, you must reinforce your alpha position. Make your dog watch you while you pour the food into his dish. If he has shown dominant behavior, pretend to eat some yourself first. Have him sit or stand away from the bowl, and don't allow him to approach it until you give him the signal that it's okay.

TIP

Another tip to deal with guarding: Give your dog an empty bowl and add food to it while he is eating. This shows that you aren't a threat to take his bowl away. Yes, you should be able to take something from your dog but with a resource-guarding dog, it's better to give him more food than to remove it even if only for a few seconds. While working on his resource guarding behavior, do this first.

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With both toys and food, you can also try trading with him. Take away his toy or food, but offer him a preferred treat instead. When he learns to accept the fact that he'll get something in return, he'll be more likely to give up what he has. After a time, you can time the rewards to be more sporadic. Don't reward him every time, but only every third or fifth time. Take your time about this. When you begin this swap-training, start with taking away objects in which he has little interest. Only gradually work up to the food bowl or favorite toy.

WARNING

Food and toy guarding, if left uncorrected, can worsen over time, as the dog acquires a larger and larger conception of what constitutes food or toys. Sometimes a dog will allow the person he views as his master to take away toys, but no other member of the family. This attitude must be corrected. All human beings should be alpha over all family dogs.

Pain-induced aggression

An injured dog suffering from *pain-induced aggression* may think that he can eliminate the pain by attacking what he believes is the source of his discomfort. A bite in this situation is really done in self-defense.

I was bitten rather badly by a dog who had been struck by a car. It was necessary for me to remove him at once from the site of the accident, and in the process, the poor creature bit me. One could hardly blame him.

When dealing with an accident victim with an injury, tie a leash around the dog's muzzle while you're moving him. This keeps the dog from lashing out at the pain and injuring you instead.

In a few instances, it appears that aggression can originate from tumors, painful skeletal misalignments, or other serious conditions.

TIP

A family dog who snaps suddenly while he's being moved or petted may be suffering an injury. Take him to the vet for a thorough checkup.

TIP

A dog's face, ears, and rectal area are very sensitive to pain. Take particular care around these areas.

Irritable aggression

Irritable aggression is the mark of an old, grouchy, tired, or generally grumpy dog. Sometimes it's related to pain. Children are often the victims of this form of aggression, because they sometimes don't know enough to leave the animal in peace.

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Irritable aggression is usually controlled by leaving the dog alone. However, if you have small children, or if the dog tolerates no interference at all — for example, not allowing children on the couch with her — you have a more serious problem. See your veterinarian for suggestions. Tranquilizers or finding an all-adult home may be an option.

When an older or adult dog who has never exhibited aggression begins to show signs of aggression, seeing the veterinarian is always the first step to addressing the situation. Pain and self-preservation is almost always the reason for this new behavior. Treat the dog physiologically rather than behaviorally to cure the problem.

Maternal protectiveness

Although, strictly speaking, *maternal protectiveness* may be regarded as a kind of aggression, it's a common, hormonally based behavior. You can understand that the mother wishes to protect her young, but she shouldn't be exhibiting serious aggression toward her human family. Similar behavior may be associated with a false pregnancy. If a female dog suddenly begins acting in a protective or aggressive manner, it may be because she thinks she has young to protect.

TIP

Bitches prone to false pregnancies should be spayed. They not only tend to have behavior problems but they're also subject to *pyometra*, a severe uterine infection.

Genetically based aggression

A few dogs are just born aggressive. In Siberians, it could be a genetic anomaly caused by inbreeding. *Genetic aggression* manifests itself at an early age by deep belly growls and an uninhibited bite response — usually by the age of 4 months. This form of aggression can't be trained out of a dog. Aggression is a dominant trait, which makes it common; however, this also means it can easily be bred out of a strain. Breed nonaggressive dogs to nonaggressive dogs, and bingo, the dominant gene disappears.

WARNING

Aggressive tendencies can be passed along in the gene pool. A puppy whose parents have exhibited aggressive behavior is more likely to do so himself. This is another reason why you should know as much as possible about your dog's relatives.

Environmental aggression

Toxins in the environment are suspect in certain cases of aggression, and some dogs have an allergic response to vaccines that can lead to aggression. If you've

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ruled out other possible causes of a dog's aggression, consider environmental aggression as a possibility and discuss it with your vet.

Hiring a Professional

Most dog owners and even most regular obedience trainers aren't equipped to work with an aggressive dog. If your Husky is overly aggressive and you've tried correcting the behavior with no luck, then you need to take your Husky to a specialized behavioral therapist qualified to work with aggressive dogs. And even then, you're taking your chances. A dominant-aggressive dog always wants to be dominant, and he'll continually test his limits. He may regard any easing up of restrictions as an act of concession on your part.

REMEMBER

Certain kinds of aggressive behavior respond well to drug therapy — antidepressants, sedatives and tranquilizers, hormonal therapy, or antianxiety drugs. The most effective psychoactive drugs are the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), such as Prozac and Zoloft, carefully administered in correct canine dosages. SSRIs enhance the serotonin level in the brain, which in turn has a strong anti-aggressive effect on the dog's behavior. Although undoubtedly useful, these drugs should be combined with behavior modification training and plenty of exercise. A well exercised dog is usually too tired to pick a fight.

Avoiding Dog Bites

Prevention is always the best plan. You can never be completely sure any dog won't bite, but you can drastically minimize problems if you approach situations proactively. You can take precautions to avoid biting behavior:

- **Approach a strange dog slowly, even if he appears friendly.** Your hand should be outstretched, your palm facing up, showing you aren't a threat. The open palm is important when meeting and greeting a dog. This approach allows the dog time to sniff the hand and acknowledge you.

  If the dog doesn't appear friendly, keep your hands to your sides and don't approach. Move quietly to the side without turning your back on the animal. Don't attempt to make eye contact with the dog. If attacked by a dog, curl up into a tight ball and remain as still as possible. Don't run away — you'll only excite the dog's chase instinct.

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- **Don't disturb a sleeping dog.** An unexpected embrace can trigger a snap before the dog is even awake. Let sleeping dogs lie.

  The same holds true for dogs who are eating; don't bother them. It's one thing to work with your dog while he's eating; it's another to suddenly race up and snatch away the dog's dish. This kind of behavior is enough to make even a well-behaved dog peevish. Teach your children all these tips as well.

TIP

- **Watch your children's friends with your Husky.** Even if your child is perfect, your neighbor's kids probably aren't.

If your dog does bite a person, for any reason, don't physically punish the dog. Doing so will only add fear to the complex of factors that induced the bite and will increase the odds that the dog will bite again, especially if he has drawn blood. Professional training is required.

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4 Keeping Your Husky Healthy

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IN THIS PART . . .

Know how to take care of your Husky. After all, your Husky is completely dependent upon you for his wellbeing.

Ensure you're feeding your Siberian right so he gets the nutrition he needs to be an active dog.

Discover the basics to grooming your Husky so he looks and feels great.

Get helpful information so you know what to look for when searching for a veterinarian for your Siberian.

Be able to identify any health problems if and when they arise. Illness and accident aren't things anyone likes to think about, but here you can figure out how to help your Siberian make it through even the most dire of situations with quick thinking and the appropriate response.

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Understanding your dog's nutritional needs
- Making sense of the different kinds of dog food available
- Figuring out how to read the labels
- Feeding your dog differently, depending on his individual needs
- Compensating for seasonal changes in temperature

Chapter 11
Feeding Your Husky

More ink has probably flowed over the issue of nutrition than any other single canine topic. Commercial dog foods versus homemade; raw versus cooked; people food versus dog-only food; bones versus no bones; chicken wings versus no chicken wings; supplements versus no supplements — all have stirred dog fanciers to varying degrees of frenzy. The good news is, you can *relax.* Dogs are scavengers by nature and can survive and thrive on a remarkable variety of foods. A good commercial dog food will probably satisfy your Husky's nutritional needs. And just being aware of what's out there and talking with your vet about your options is really all you need to do.

Knowing Your Husky's Nutritional Needs

One big controversy concerning canine nutrition is over whether your Husky should remain on one dog food or whether he should consume a variety of different foods. Some nutritionists claim that the canine system does better when it stays on one complete food and that switching around could be upsetting to the digestive tract. They compare a dog to a tuned car, saying that when you find the right brand of gas with the right octane, there's no point in changing. Some people also maintain that switching dog foods can make a dog finicky.

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Others, citing the fact that dogs are natural scavengers, believe that dogs enjoy variety and even thrive on it. They argue that, because researchers don't yet know everything about canine dietary requirements, changing a dog's diet occasionally is actually safer, because it increases the chances that he's getting what he needs. These proponents of the "variety is the spice of life" school think dogs are a lot closer to humans than they are to cars. And I agree.

My own seven dogs eat a little dry food, a little canned food, and a lot of people food. And I have never had a dog with cancer, bloat, hip dysplasia, or hypothyroidism. Now, this *could* be coincidence. But I believe that dogs like and need a variety of different foods, both for their spiritual and their physical wellbeing.

Original dietary requirements for dogs were developed in the 1940s by the National Research Council of the National Academy of Science. Since then, the responsibility for setting canine dietary requirements has shifted to the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO).

This is what researchers know about canine nutrition: Like human beings, your dog needs the following components in his diet: protein, fat, minerals, water, and carbohydrates. I cover each of these in the following sections.

Protein

Proteins contain the important amino acids that mammals need to grow and keep in good repair. There are 22 amino acids involved with the dog's metabolism; ten of them must be supplied by the diet. Your Husky can manufacture the rest of them in his liver.

Dogs need more protein than people do. That protein should ideally come from meat. Plant-based protein simply isn't high-quality enough to meet a dog's needs. Siberians in particular don' do well on plant-derived protein; it can cause colic and diarrhea. Meat protein is usually considered best; a dog's diet should be about 75 percent meat and the rest vegetables (not grain).

For a while researchers had a theory that too much protein in the diet caused kidney problems. However, this research was based on work with rats. Rat dietary needs aren't dog dietary needs, and no one has shown any link between a high protein diet and kidney damage in dogs. Ideally your active dog will do well on a diet containing 30 percent meat-based protein. Another equally unsubstantiated rumor suggests a high-protein diet makes a dog hyperactive; however, no evidence proves that, nor to my mind any clear understanding of what *hyperactivity* is. Most "hyperactive" dogs just need more exercise, not a poorer diet.

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Fat

Fat has gotten a bad name over the years; however, it's a critical part of the diet for hard-working people and dogs. Fat stores a lot energy that can be used later, an especially valuable feature. In addition to their role as long-term energy suppliers, omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, which are oils, are essential to a healthy coat and may confer other health benefits as well. Once in a while, you'll see omega-9 fatty acid on a label. But this is mostly an attempt to capitalize on the word *omega.*

Omega-9 (or *oleic*) acid is the main ingredient in olive oil and is usually simply referred to as *monounsaturated fat.* Too much fat, however, especially when given all at once (as tends to happen at the holidays, when people feed their dogs fatty leftovers), can result in digestive upset. (Some researchers once believed these fats caused pancreatitis, but that view is beginning to change.) If your dog actually has pancreatitis, however, a low-fat diet may be advisable. Follow your vet's advice.

TECHNICAL STUFF

Wolves, which are near copies of dogs, genetically thrive on a diet of half fat and half protein. Carbohydrates are a negligible part of the diet. Although domestic dogs seem to have more of a weak spot for fats and carbs, evidence indicates that this preference is a result of their upbringing, not their needs.

Most commercial dry dog foods contain between 5 and 10 percent fat, which is sufficient for sedentary dogs. *Working* Siberians require at least twice as much.

WHAT ABOUT FIBER?

Currently, some canine nutrition researchers disagree about whether fiber is necessary in a dog's diet, and if so, how much. Most veterinarians agree that diabetic dogs, especially overweight ones, can benefit from fiber, because it slows the absorption of glucose in the intestine, which in turn helps control blood sugar. On the other hand, fiber may also decrease the absorption of certain critical minerals.

Dog food labels don't adequately reveal how much fiber is contained in the product. The guaranteed analysis may list *crude fiber* as an ingredient, but that term refers to what's left over from the food manufacturing process. The dietary fiber contained in the product can be several times higher.

You don't need to worry about fiber content in your dog's food unless he shows signs of diabetes, diarrhea, constipation, or other health problems. Then consult your vet. It's possible that as your dog ages, he may need more fiber in his diet. A little bit of bran should be enough.

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Racing Siberians, who work the hardest of any working dog, need 50 percent of their calories to come from fat! To achieve this level, mushers supplement their dogs' meals with beef fat. They also often feed their dogs raw meat.

Minerals

Just like humans, dogs need the following minerals in their diets:

- Calcium
- Copper
- Iodine
- Iron
- Magnesium
- Manganese
- Phosphorus
- Potassium
- Salt
- Selenium
- Zinc

Five of these minerals (iron, selenium, zinc, copper, and manganese) are called *trace minerals.* Dogs don't need much of them, but if they aren't present, your dog will suffer.

Zinc is the most critical for Huskies simply because many of them have a genetic condition that doesn't allow them to absorb it properly. Your veterinarian needs to prescribe a supplement — don't just starting grabbing something over the counter. Zinc deficiency leads to problems in fertility, bone and joint trouble, and slow wound healing. Meat and spinach are high in zinc.

Water

Like people, dogs need water to carry nutrients in and out of cells, help in the digestion and absorption of food, lubricate joints, and cool down the body. Providing your Siberian with plenty of fresh, clean water to drink is essential to his health. Dogs need about an ounce of water per pound of dog every day.

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THE "GRAIN-FREE" SCARE

Since 2018, the FDA has investigated more than 500 reports of canine-dilated cardiomyopathy that appears to be linked to dog foods marketed as grain free. But even the experts don't know what's causing the problem. It's clear that dogs don't need grain in their diet; something else is going on. It's also true that so far, *none* of the affected dogs have been Siberians.

A similar problem has occurred with foods stressing more exotic meats like ostrich, alligator, and venison. Because no one is quite sure what's going on, my advice is to buy from major companies with long track records, like Iams (which hasn't reported any problems). Or cook for your dog at home.

REMEMBER

This estimate of the water requirements for dogs includes the water taken in through food. Just keep plenty of fresh water available all the time. Healthy dogs won't drink too much. Excessive water consumption can be a sign of diabetes, so be sure to keep an eye on how much your Siberian drinks, and if his water intake changes drastically, consult your vet.

Carbohydrates

You may wonder why I haven't mentioned carbohydrates in your dog's diet. There's a good reason for that. The carbohydrate requirement for your Siberian Husky is 0. That's right, 0 percent. (Some research indicates that pregnant bitches need carbohydrates, but the evidence is tenuous.) Despite this fact, commercial dog foods usually contain about 40 percent carbohydrates, because they're a cheap source of energy. And dogs can indeed use the energy carbohydrates provide. They just don't need to. Because avoiding carbohydrates in commercial foods is impossible, look for brands that contain rice rather than corn, wheat, or soy. Rice is easier for dogs to digest.

Reading the Labels

Although most dog owners feed their pets commercial foods, few of them know how to read the label. You may be surprised to hear that as far as federal regulations go, very little is required of pet food manufacturers. Companies are required to accurately identify the product, provide the net quantity, give their address, and correctly list ingredients. They are *not* required to list the ingredients in any particular order. Some security is found by looking for the Association of American

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Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) label. The AAFCO provides model regulations that pet foods must follow in order to carry the AAFCO label. Dog food labels must state the minimum levels of protein and fat and the maximum levels of moisture and fiber in the food. (As paltry as this is, it's more than required for baby food.)

AAFCO-labeled foods provide a guaranteed analysis of the food, calorie statements, and a nutritional adequacy statement. The AAFCO label also lists ingredients in order of their weight in the food, starting with the greatest and descending to the smallest. (Inherent water content is included in this calculation.) But the AAFCO label doesn't necessarily guarantee that the product is any good or that it's right for your dog. It just means that the food is properly labeled.

Part of the problem with dog food labeling stems from the fact that most members of AAFCO work for pet food companies. Their primary allegiance may be with their employer rather than for the consumer. Critics claim that the testing that AAFCO performs is not particularly stringent and is in no way tantamount to a controlled scientific study.

However, the good news is that the highly competitive dog food market is improving the quality of commercial foods. Today, you as a dog owner have more choices than ever before; however, you also need to educate yourself on how to know what you're buying.

TIP

Check out the following list for keywords that pop up on dog food packaging. Here you'll find out what those terms really mean:

- **Beef, chicken, fish, or lamb:** If an AAFCO-labeled product has the words *beef, chicken, fish,* or *lamb* in its product name, it must be 95 percent beef, chicken, fish, or lamb, exclusive of the water needed for processing. Even counting the water, the food must be 70 percent beef, chicken, fish, or lamb. These foods are all canned foods, by the way. No dry food is 95 percent beef, chicken, fish, or lamb.
- **Dinner:** If the word *dinner,* or a similar word like *platter* or *entree* is used in the product name, each featured ingredient must comprise between 25 and 94 percent of the total. So, a product with a name like "Diane's Chicken Dinner for Dogs" must contain at least 25 percent chicken.
- **With:** If the word *with* is used, the named ingredient must be at least 3 percent of the total. So "Diane's Chicken Dinner for Dogs with Liver" must contain 3 percent liver, as well as at least 25 percent chicken. "Diane's Chicken Dinner for Dogs with Liver and Sirloin" must contain 3 percent liver and 3 percent sirloin, as well as at least 25 percent chicken.
- **Flavor:** If the label reads *beef flavor,* rather than beef, it need only contain enough beef to be taste-detectable. Because you're probably not going to be

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taking a big bite of the food to see whether you can taste the beef, you'll just have to trust the label at its word. The word *flavor* must appear in letters as large as those of the named ingredient, however, which ensures that you won't mistakenly buy a product you think contains at least 25 percent beef, when really the food contains far less than 25 percent beef and only tastes like beef.

- **Premium, Lite, Gourmet, Natural, Organic, Performance, and so on:** These labels mean nothing. Not even AAFCO has so far devised regulations that products using these terms must meet. Read the content label carefully and compare.

TECHNICAL STUFF

You may see the words *crude fat* or *crude protein* on the label. These terms refer to the method of testing of the product. It doesn't mean that the protein or fat contained is any cruder than any other kind of protein or fat. You may notice that levels of crude protein are lower in canned foods than in dry foods. This is because of the large amount of water in canned food.

Taking a Look at the Main Types of Dog Food

When it comes to dog food, your choice is practically unlimited: dry food, canned food, semi-moist, people food, or any mixture thereof, which I discuss in the following sections. There isn't just one kind of food that's right for you and your dog. Many factors come into play — convenience, expense, nutritional value, taste, availability, and allergies, just to name a few. What's right for one dog is not right for all.

TIP

The most important guideline to keep in mind is that you shouldn't feed your Husky something he dislikes. Mealtimes should be a pleasurable experience for everyone, so why not shop around until you find something nutritious that your dog really *does* enjoy? If he seems to like something for a while, but then gets bored with it, change his food. It's not hard to do, and you'll be improving your dog's overall happiness. Seems like a small price to pay, when you think about it.

Dry food

Dry dog food, sometimes referred to as *kibble*, was introduced to the world during World War II. It was a convenience for feeding military dogs. And that's what it remains — a convenient, nutritionally adequate food for dogs. Dry food helps reduce tartar buildup on the back teeth (but not as much as brushing the teeth does).

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TIP

Don't be seduced by fancy colors and shapes when it comes to dry food. Shape doesn't matter, and the colors come from vegetable dye, not food nutrients.

In comparison with other food choices, dry food is the least expensive, largely because of its high grain content, which is cheaper than meat. Dry food tends to be low in fat, which can be dangerous if your Siberian is a Working Dog.

WARNING

Don't store dry food too long (no more than 2 weeks); it can lose some of its vitamin content over time.

Canned food

Canned food is much more expensive than dry, and it's usually about 75 percent water. In AAFCO-labeled products, the maximum amount of water in canned foods is 78 percent, unless the food is labeled as *gravy, sauce,* or *stew.* In that case, water content can be even higher than 78 percent! Canned foods are also high in fat. They can be useful for mixing with dry food, however, because most dogs find them highly palatable.

Some canned dog food contains grain products, and others have only meat. Whether grain products are good for dogs is controversial. (Foods containing corn, for example, tend to give dogs gas.) Dogs do need a vegetable element in their diet, so if you feed a pure meat dinner, you should supplement it with dog biscuits or fresh vegetables. Fresh meat is sometimes deficient in calcium.

Semi-moist food

Semi-moist food is about 25 percent water and can be just as high in sugar, in the form of corn syrup, beet pulp, sucrose, and caramel. This food promotes obesity and tooth decay, and of the available food options, it's the least desirable. *Don't buy it.*

People food

It's perfectly okay to spice up your dog's diet with some well-chosen people food. Dogs enjoy variety as much as you probably do. Many times, the same things that are good for people are good for them: fresh vegetables and even fruit, lean meat, and yogurt are fine. Avoid sweets, chocolate, high-fat dairy foods, and processed meat. Don't give them to your dog either.

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TIP

I don't recommend giving many dairy products to dogs; after weaning they usually aren't able to digest them well. Yogurt is an exception, however. Most dogs benefit from a teaspoon of plain yogurt in their food, especially if they need extra calcium. Dogs like milk, too, but milk gives most adult dogs diarrhea.

TIP

If you do feed your dog people food, you should serve it at room temperature if possible, not directly from the refrigerator or a hot oven. Very cold food eaten rapidly can make a dog vomit. On the other hand, some food seems more palatable to dogs if slightly warmed. Even the Chukchis fed their dogs at room temperature. Of course, they had rather cold rooms to begin with.

WARNING

Never feed your dog the following foods because doing so may kill them:

- **Raw eggs:** Raw eggs contain *avidin,* a protein which can destroy the B vitamin biotin. That's not a problem most of the time, because dogs get plenty of that vitamin from other sources. More serious is the risk of your Siberian contracting salmonella, a bacterial infection that causes vomiting and diarrhea. Cook any eggs you give your dog. The nutritional benefit is the same.
- **Onions, leeks, chives, and garlic:** These members of the Allium plant family all contain *N-propyl disulfide,* a compound that damages hemoglobin — the substance that carries oxygen in the red blood cells. Consuming these foods can cause a temporary but severe hemolytic anemia. A quarter of a cup can make you husky very ill. It doesn't matters if it fresh, cooked, or frozen. Keep your dog away from these foods.
- **Chocolate:** Chocolate contains a group of chemicals called *methylxanthines,* which include caffeine and theobromine. Humans can easily metabolize these substances, but dogs can't. The darker the chocolate, the more dangerous it is for your dog. Eating chocolate can affect your Husky's muscles and heart. The effects (rapid heartbeat, diarrhea, lethargy, or excitement) can appear a few hours later and last for days. Call your vet.
- **Grapes and raisins:** No one knows exactly why, but it's well documented that grapes and raisins can cause acute kidney failure with lack of urine production (*anuria*). Only some dogs seem to be affected, but among that group, consuming grapes (as few as seven) can be fatal.
- **Macadamia nuts:** Macadamia nuts contain an as-yet unknown canine toxin that causes vomiting, weakness, especially in the hind legs, and joint pain and inflammation. In serious causes, a temporary paralysis can occur.
- **Sugar-free gum and candy:** Although no one would feed their dog gum on purpose, accidental ingestion is common. Sugar-free gum and candy may contain xylitol, which can cause a very serious drop in blood sugar followed by severe liver damage.

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- **Yeast dough:** The yeast in dough can create an increase of gas in a pet's stomach, followed by extreme pain, gastric torsion, and stomach rupture. It's not good for you, either.

Considering Supplements

A high-quality commercial dog food *should* be complete, although there is plenty of controversy about whether any commercial dog food really is. Some people believe that if you're feeding a good commercial dog food, you don't need to supply anything else. Other experts claim that they still don't know enough about nutritional requirements to be sure of anything in this department. My advice is to start with a high-quality dog food and keep a careful watch on your Husky's coat, energy level, weight, and general health. Add or subtract ingredients as you find necessary.

Vitamin A and beta-carotene seem to enhance immune functions and may help to prevent some kinds of cancer. Be careful not to over-supplement, however. Large of amounts of vitamin A, for example, are poisonous. A couple of carrots a day will be just fine.

Although dogs can manufacture their own vitamin C, unlike humans, a vitamin C supplement appears to lower cancer risk, and many holistic veterinarians suggest its use in managing the care of a dog diagnosed with cancer. Vitamin C also seems to reduce the side effects of some anticancer drugs.

WARNING

Never give a Siberian puppy a calcium supplement; it can contribute to hip dysplasia, *osteochondritis dissecans* (a form of arthritis) and enlarged joints. It also binds zinc, resulting in zinc deficiency and a poor coat. And Siberians are prone to zinc deficiency. (Wheat germ is loaded with zinc; it makes a good addition to many dogs' diets.)

Figuring Out How Much to Feed Your Dog

The number of calories a dog needs varies wildly depending on his level of exercise (surprise). Research at the Ralston Purina Pet Care Center indicates that an inactive 50-pound dog requires 1,450 calories a day in the summer. The same dog requires 1,800 calories during moderate work or training and 2,160 during heavy work. Now, get out your calculator! In the winter, for every 10-degree drop in temperature, add 7.5 percent more calories. Other sources come up with lower numbers.

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REMEMBER

These calorie requirements are for dogs in general, not for Siberians in particular. Siberians need fewer calories than other breeds their size (life was tough out there in the tundra), but requirements vary greatly between different breeds and even between individual dogs within any breed. Consequently, predicting accurately how many calories a particular dog will actually require isn't possible. Use these estimates as a general guide and keep an eye on his weight; then adjust his diet as needed.

TIP

For a quick check on your dog's condition, look at him from above. A Working Dog of the proper weight will have an hourglass figure. If your dog looks like a rectangle from an overhead view, he is overweight. You can also view your dog from the side; his belly should tuck up neatly. You should be able to easily feel the outline of his ribs.

Pet Huskies often carry more weight than their working counterparts. How much is too much? Run your thumbs firmly along your Husky's ribcage. If your dog isn't too fat, you'll be able to feel each rib distinctly.

REMEMBER

If your Siberian lives and works outside in the winter, he may need twice as many calories as he does in the summer. You'll also need to feed him more on working days.

Looking at Performance, Maintenance, and Low-Calorie Foods

Most high-quality dog foods come in performance and maintenance levels; however, the standards for these labels aren't set by law or even by the AAFCO model regulations. Read the label carefully to determine how many calories and nutrients the food really provides. The difference largely depends upon how much exercise your Siberian is getting. A dog that just trots around the block or goes for a lazy stroll along the river bank with his owner doesn't need performance-level dog food. Pregnant or nursing bitches, of course, require higher levels of nutrients.

TIP

Performance foods often contain higher levels of protein. Extra protein, however, isn't stored in the body but simply metabolized and excreted in the urine.

If your dog is overweight, he's not alone. Recent studies show that 80 percent of household pets are overweight. In fact, one in seven dog owners claimed they had suffered an injury trying to pick up a fat dog.

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The American Animal Hospital Association rates obesity as the top nutrition-related health problem in dogs. Don't put your overweight Husky on a crash diet, however. You can buy commercial dog food in reduced-calorie varieties. Or you could simply lower his food and fat intake and exercise him more. Your Siberian will love that.

Feeding your puppy

Although a Siberian doesn't reach maturity until about 18 months of age, I don't recommend that he stay on puppy food for that length of time. Some Siberians show adverse reactions to the dairy products often added to puppy food. The most common problem associated with dairy products is loose stools — certainly not a pleasant thing to deal with when you're housetraining your puppy! In addition, research has found a link between hip dysplasia and the higher levels of calcium found in many puppy foods; so gradually switch your dog to an adult food at around 6 months or so.

TIP

If you decide that you need to make a major alteration in your Husky's diet, do so gradually. An abrupt change can cause digestive upset. Replace part of the old diet with part of the new, gradually increasing the amount of new food over a period of about a week. It may take 6 weeks to 3 months to notice an improvement in coat or other conditions you're trying to correct.

Feeding your senior dog

Dogs are old for a lot longer than they are puppies, and proper nutrition is, if anything, even more critical for the older dog than for a pup. Studies show that older dogs need about 80 percent of the calories that 1-year-old dogs do, and recent research indicates that senior dogs need about 50 percent more protein than do young adults. That's right: 50 percent more protein. The experts used to think that lower protein would prevent certain kidney problems common in older dogs, but they have since found this not to be the case. Between 20 and 30 percent of all calories your older dog consumes should come from protein. Lower protein intake slows wound healing and lessens immune function.

TIP

Increasing B-complex vitamins, vitamin E, and ester-C (a form of vitamin C) for older dogs is also a good idea. Add extra zinc, selenium, the omegas, and coenzyme Q10 as well. Always check with your vet before you give your dog any supplements.

WARNING

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has advised pet owners to stop feeding their dogs pig ears because of a drug-resistant salmonella scare. Salmonella can infect both dogs and people. If you have any on hand, dispose of them immediately and wash your hands thoroughly afterward.

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Knowing good brushing and combing techniques
- Bathing your Husky
- Dealing with shedding
- Paying attention to your dog's whole body
- Choosing a professional groomer

Chapter 12
Grooming Your Siberian

Maintaining your Siberian Husky in top condition is essential for his health and happiness; it's not merely a cosmetic makeover. Too many people, however, view grooming as some dreaded chore, like cleaning the oven or defrosting the fridge. But it really isn't. Grooming is your opportunity to spend quality time with your dog. And with today's new grooming technology, it's easier than ever.

In this chapter, you find all the information you need on grooming — everything from brushing and bathing your dog to trimming his nails and brushing his teeth. And I also give you tips for finding a good professional groomer, who can be a great supplement to your own grooming.

Brushing and Combing Your Husky

The Siberian Husky has a double coat of hair. Underneath is a woolly or downy undercoat, protected by a harsh outercoat or guard coat (which actually grows through the undercoat). The rainproof outercoat protects the Siberian from brambles and thorns, and the undercoat serves as insulation. This undercoat is responsible for most of the shedding.

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Very little dirt can penetrate this excellent protective device. This fact, combined with the Husky's meticulous grooming habits, makes the Siberian an essentially self-cleaning machine. It's not the dirt that causes the grooming challenge, however; it's the hair.

REMEMBER

The key to happy grooming is to teach your Siberian to accept being brushed by standing quietly while it's done. Wild dogs perform grooming sessions on each other frequently; it promotes social cohesion and reaffirms the hierarchy. It's a natural activity. When your Husky learns that he's getting a lot of loving attention from you during the grooming session, he'll look forward to it. It's also a good time to check him for parasites, cuts, suspicious lumps, or other anomalies.

I discuss some important brushing and combing reminders and the best way you can brush your Husky in the following sections.

Basic grooming 101: Important points to remember

Welcoming a Husky into your family is a big step, and one of the most important aspects is grooming your new family member. Here are some reminders to help you with brushing and combing:

REMEMBER

- **Groom regularly, at least twice a week.** Doing so helps remove loose hair and allows the dog's skin to breathe. It removes dead, scaly skin and encourages the sebaceous glands to produce healthy oils.

  Just because the weather turns cold doesn't mean you can stop grooming. A well-groomed, unmatted coat is essential for keeping your Siberian snug when he's outside during the colder months. Mats destroy the insulating properties of even the thickest coat.
- **Use a grooming table.** If you don't have one, the kitchen table will work fine. Put a nonslip mat on it for traction. You can also use a different table, perhaps in the basement or on the porch, if you'd rather not have your dog on your kitchen table. You may decide to groom your Siberian outdoors in pleasant weather. Let the neighbors wonder where all those unusual tufts of hair are coming from.
- **Groom all your dog.** Get all parts, including the belly and underneath the tail.
- **Inspect for fleas.** Use a fine-toothed metal flea comb, and be prepared to leap into action if you see one! Keep a glass of hot water nearby and dip the flea-bearing comb in it; the fleas will drown. Refer to Chapter 13 for more on fleas and ticks.

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Combing and brushing: Easy-peasy

Grooming your Husky takes a little practice, but by following these steps, you'll be an expert and your Husky will love spending the time with you:

1. **Use a spray bottle and mist your Husky lightly all over his body.**

   Misting makes grooming easier and helps keep the guard hairs from breaking off.

2. **Use a wide-toothed comb, preferably one with rounded teeth and break up mats.**

   A wide-toothed comb helps break up them up easier, although you can buy a special de-matting tool for this purpose.

3. **Brush the coat vigorously using a wide-toothed comb to break up the mats.**

   (If your Husky has shorter coat, you may be able to get away with using a basic bristle brush, similar to a human hair brush, but I doubt it.) This means you have to begin with the undercoat, where the mats form.

   Follow the natural *hair stream* (the way the hair grows). Do a small section of the coat at a time. For most of the coat, brush vigorously forward, then brush back, especially along the flanks. This back brushing is necessary to de-mat the thick undercoat.

TIP

   If you encounter tangles, start at the outside of the tangle and gradually approach the hair closest to the skin. Don't begin at the root end and start pulling. That's not the best way to teach either of you to enjoy the grooming hour. Besides, you'd end up with a bald Siberian.

4. **Focus on other areas when de-matting.**

   Be especially attentive to the armpits and rump of the dog, where mats often hide. Most of the time, you'll need to brush *with* the direction of the coat at the rear end; it just works better.

5. **Comb again.**

   You'll be surprised at how much hair you rake up.

   When you are through combing, you can finish the job by using a long-bristled brush. The bristles must be quite long; otherwise they won't reach through the dense coat of the Siberian. If mats go unattended, they not only get bigger but tend to tighten up next to the skin, where they cause all kinds of trouble. So don't skip this important step.

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6. **Clean up.**

   Cleaning up is an important part of the entire grooming process. If you're grooming inside, vacuum up the loose Husky hair immediately afterward; otherwise you'll have the stuff all over the house. Use a disinfectant (preferably with bleach) to clean the grooming implements.

WARNING

Don't shave, strip, or clip your Husky close. Doing so isn't necessary and may even be detrimental. The undercoat insulates against the bitter cold, and the topcoat provides protection from harmful UV sunrays. And never clip your dog's whiskers. They're sensory devices that your dog needs. Besides, whiskers add to a dog's character.

TECHNICAL STUFF

Technically, whiskers are known as *vibrissae* because they vibrate as a warning when they come in contact with something solid.

You may trim the extra hair from between the toes if it gets unsightly, a common occurrence with the heavily-furred Siberian.

Some people have good luck removing loose hair by using a pin brush. Be careful, though. Some kinds are too scratchy — rub the brush against your own arm first to test.

REMEMBER

If your dog is tremendously matted, you may decide to take him to a professional groomer. When he's properly de-matted and clean, you can take over further grooming sessions yourself. Be sure you exercise and let your Siberian out before going to the groomer, and don't feed him immediately beforehand. Don't bathe the dog right before he goes to the groomer, either; that will just make his mats worse.

DUMMIES APPROVED

TACKLE YOUR HUSKY'S DOUBLE COAT

One almost indispensable tool for the Husky's double coat is the FURminator. The FURminator isn't a single grooming tool, but an entire collection of brushes, bath products, shedding aids, hair collectors, and more. The company website allows you to select your dog breed (click Husky), and you'll receive the company's product recommendations.

With the Husky, choose the Adjustable Dematter Tool, Undercoat deShedding Tool, the Hair Collection Tool, and the deShedding Ultra Premium Shampoo. I'm not sure what "deshedding" means. It's confusing, but the stuff works. At any rate, when choosing the correct FURminator brush, get the one for *long* hair. The short-hair version can cut the guard hair.

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REMEMBER

A poor coat is often the first sign of illness or other problems. If you know you're doing a good grooming job, your dog's poor coat could be an indication of a nutritional deficiency, heartworm, roundworm, hookworms, underactive thyroid, kidney problems, or even cancer. Check with your veterinarian.

Bathing Your Husky

Siberians are fastidiously clean dogs. Because their coat is non-oily, they don't actually need a bath more than three or four times a year, unless they get into something horrible.

On the other hand, giving your dog a bath doesn't hurt. I use a mild, unmedicated shampoo. Most of the time, I use an inexpensive kind made for people, but some very nice texturizing shampoos are available in the pet market designed particularly for double-coated dogs. These texturizing shampoos keep the coat clean but don't allow it to get too soft.

Some people say that because the pH value of canine and human skin differs (human skin being a little on the acidic side and dog skin on the basic side), you shouldn't use a human shampoo on dogs. But this simply isn't true. For one thing, canine skin has a wide range of pH values; for another, no one has shown that using a human shampoo based on average human pH values does any harm to a dog.

Shampooing improves both the coat and skin and helps keep parasites and hot spots at bay without resorting to chemical treatments. An aloe shampoo is especially soothing. A good shampoo doesn't strip the oils from a dog's coat any more than a good shampoo strips the oils from people's hair. If you're worried about a dry coat, add a conditioner.

There are even no-tear and hypoallergenic shampoos designed especially for dogs. A drop of mineral oil in the eyes and some petroleum jelly around the eyes helps keep soap out, too.

TIP

When you bathe your dog, the most important step is to rinse, rinse, rinse. You should spend at least twice as long rinsing as washing. Soap residue can cause hotspots on the dog's skin.

In a pinch, you can use a dry shampoo for dogs. Dry shampoos are powderlike substances that help remove excess oils from the coat. They don't work as well as the regular kind, but hey, your dog isn't going to tell anybody.

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Most dogs hate getting a bath. Even those who will joyfully run into the iciest pond or stream, cower or go rigid at the very sight of a tub. Still, nearly all dogs can be trained to put up with it. You can bathe your Husky outdoors in the summer if you like, but I use a bathtub during all seasons of the year. You can get special long, flexible attachments to make showering your pet easier. A raised dog-bathing tub is also nice.

Make sure the water is a warm, at a comfortable temperature. When you apply the shampoo, begin in the neck area. This way you're making a natural flea barrier, so the little stinkers don't climb up on the dog's head.

TIP

If your dog refuses to stand up during bathing and you can't get human assistance, various devices are on the market that loop around the dog's body to prevent his sitting down.

REMEMBER

Provide a rubber bathmat for your dog to help prevent his slipping in the tub. Even the feel of a slick tub can make him nervous.

The first thing your Siberian will do upon emerging from the tub is to shake. To save yourself and your house from getting drenched, grab the dog firmly by the head and hang on. A dog shake begins at the front, and if you can stop it there, he'll quit — at least long enough for you to throw a towel over him.

Dry your dog thoroughly, especially if it's cold outside. You can use a handheld dryer (set on low), or a special dog dryer manufactured just for that purpose. All this will take some time. Give yourself an hour to bathe, rinse, and dry your Siberian. If the weather is not cold or wet, you may want to send your dog outdoors to dry.

Dealing with Shedding

"Wait a minute! I thought Huskies didn't shed!" I can hear you saying it. I know, that's what they told me, too. And they don't. At least not in Siberia, which is cold and dry. They merely blow their coats twice a year. But if you don't live in Siberia, you may be in for a little shock. In most of the United States, with its rapid climate changes, the Husky may shed his coat all year long — by the bushel. Just think, all that stuff that looks like a mixture of dandelion seeds and tumbleweed used to be on your Siberian.

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Shedding is a natural phenomenon. Hair growth progresses through a three-phase cycle. During the first phase, the *anagen* phase, the hair grow actively. When it has reached its genetically predetermined length, it stops growing. This is the second, or *catagen,* phase. In the third, or *telegen,* phase, the new hair grows in, and the old hair falls out. Dogs perspire only through their paw pads; so getting rid of that extra hair in the spring is an absolute necessity to prevent heat stress.

If you live in the north and keep your Husky outside most of the time, he'll probably revert to his ancestral pattern and shed only twice a year, in spring and fall. This whole-coat shedding is called *blowing the coat* and may take from three to six weeks, from start to finish. The hair comes out in clumps — sometimes big clumps. And it seems to get worse in periods of dry heat.

Besides the normal seasonal shed, Siberians may lose hair due to other factors, like stress, illness, or whelping. Dogs who have a change in lifestyle may likewise shed. Some people think that central heating and artificial lighting also play a role in shedding. Keep a close watch on your Husky to determine whether the shed is normal or a sign of something possibly more serious.

Even in a climate where the male sheds only once, the female will shed twice, owing to *estrus* (the female's time of heat). The female shed will usually occur in the spring and fall.

Huskies also go through something awful known as the *big shed.* The big shed occurs when your cute little puppy is maturing. Over the period of a few weeks all the fine puppy hair is shed and replaced by the coarser hair of the adult dog. Expect this happy event to occur between 10 and 14 months. And brace yourself.

SHOULD YOU SHAVE YOUR SIBERIAN?

Many people, especially those living in areas with long hot summers, wonder if it's advisable to shave their Siberian. After all, these are arctic dogs who were never meant to live in Fort Lauderdale. What's the scoop? Most experts think shaving is a bad idea, claiming it can lead to heat stroke, sunburn, and even melanoma. Certainly this is true if you're planning on shaving your dog down to the skin, which is a terrible idea.

However, if you carefully groom your dog, removing the thick undercoat, your dog should be fine. The thin outercoat keeps the sun and bugs out, but lets the cooling air through. Keep brushing your Siberian and give him access to cool water, both to drink and to play in.

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Because shedding is natural, you can't do much to stop it. Make sure your pet is receiving sufficient quantities of B vitamins, as well as unsaturated fatty acids. These can reduce shed due to stress or whelping.

A product called Mrs. Allen's Shed-Stop, a natural liquid dietary supplement with sunflower oil, vitamins, antioxidants and all sorts of trendy stuff, may also help.

Paying Attention to Your Husky's Entire Body

One of the reasons that regular grooming is so important is that it gives you the opportunity to check out every aspect of your Husky's body. You can give him a once-over in the following body areas to be sure that everything's in order. And if there *is* a problem, you're more likely to detect it sooner if you groom your dog regularly.

Feet

Check the pads of your dog's feet frequently for mats between the toes, gravel, and sores. For some reason, Siberians don't seem to shed the hair between the toes. It just stays there and collects everything you can imagine that will fit in there. Lawn chemicals and snow-melting chemicals can both cause burns on your Husky's feet. A dog's pads can also be the target of a fungal infection similar to athlete's foot. Weed seeds can penetrate the tender skin between the pads. Any excessive licking of paws could be sign of trouble. Siberians often object to having their feet touched, so be patient.

Nails

Trim your Husky's nails at least once every other week. If you wait too long, the nails and the quick (depicted in Figure 12-1) will both overgrow. You'll have to trim off a little bit of nail each day, and the *quick* (the live part of the nail) will gradually recede.

Overgrown nails can lead to serious foot problems. Yet the nails shouldn't be so short as to be scarcely visible. Dogs need their nails to gain traction on the ground when they run. Nails of the correct length shouldn't quite touch the floor when the dog is standing.

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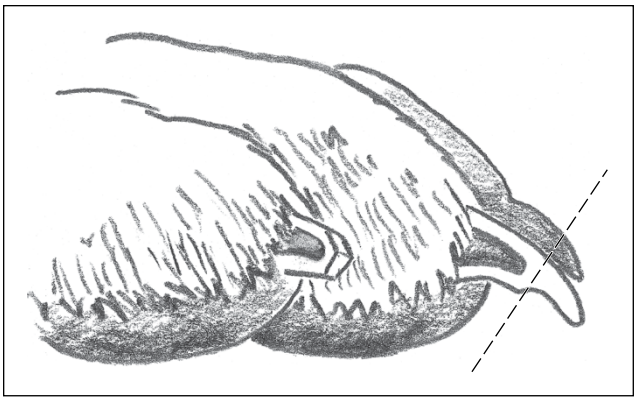

FIGURE 12-1: When you trim your Husky's nails, avoid the quick.

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If your Husky gets lots of exercise on pavement, he may keep his nails short naturally. Otherwise, the task falls upon you. After all, the dog isn't going to volunteer. If you can hear your Husky's nails clicking on the floor, it's time to trim. If you're in doubt about your nail-trimming skills, ask your groomer or veterinarian to show you how to do it correctly.

My favorite tool for nail trimming is not a set of clippers but a variable-speed Dremel tool. When your dog becomes desensitized to the noise, you can do a quicker, cleaner, neater job with almost no chance of getting the quick. All my dogs love it. Even if you happen to hit the quick, the Dremel tool cauterizes it automatically.

REMEMBER

Don't forget to trim the *dewclaws* (an extra and useless toenail higher up on the inside of the front leg), if your Siberian has them. The name comes from the alleged ability of the claw to brush dew away from the grass. Often the breeder removes them.

If you prefer to use hand clippers, get the guillotine kind with replaceable blades. Clip from the back and bottom, at a slight angle, and be careful not to cut the quick. Squeeze the clipper quickly so as not to risk splitting the nail. If you do cut into the quick by mistake, use styptic powder, flour, or cornstarch to stanch the bleeding.

Teeth

Dental care is a must for dogs. Because they have 42 teeth, cleaning them can be an imposing job. Regular cleaning of teeth and gums will help your Husky avoid tartar buildup. Feeding your dog hard kibble and bones specially made for teeth-cleaning is helpful, but these products can't remove plaque from your Husky's teeth by themselves. Plaque buildup in dogs can result in periodontal disease, just as it can in humans. And periodontal disease not only leads to tooth loss but can release dangerous bacteria into the bloodstream. Some of these bacteria can lodge in the heart. The message is clear: Brush your dog's teeth!

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TIP

Use a toothpaste designed for canines, preferably every day, but at least once a week. Dog toothpaste comes in a variety of flavors, commonly beef and chicken.

Even though young puppies are usually problem-free tooth-wise, puppyhood is a good time to get them used to the procedure. For a toothbrush, you may use:

- A baby's toothbrush (with nylon bristles)
- A specially designed canine toothbrush that fits over your finger
- A regular looking toothbrush from the grooming supply store (see Figure 12-2)
- A washcloth
- A piece of cotton gauze wrapped around the finger
- Your bare finger

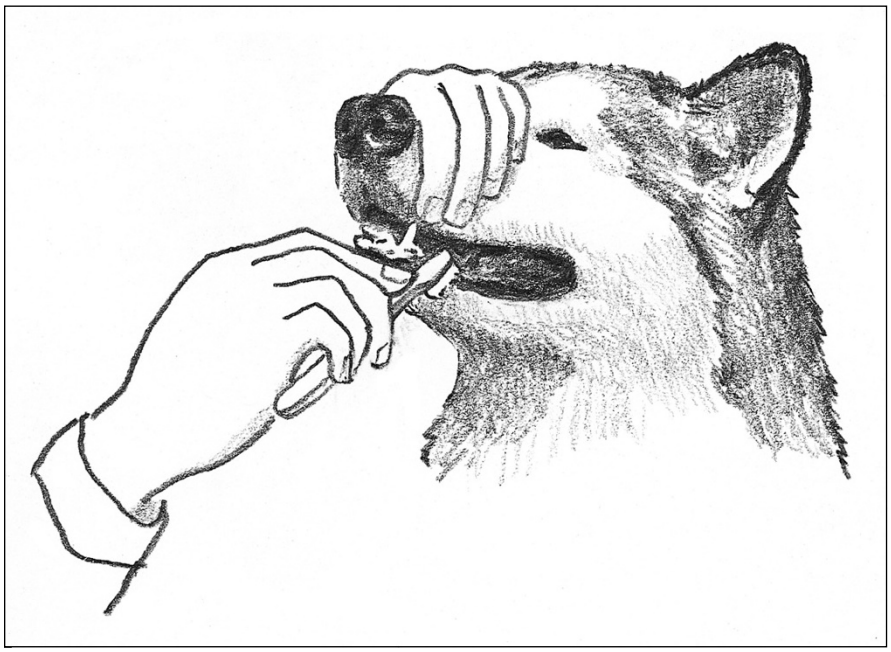

FIGURE 12-2: Make brushing your Husky's teeth part of your daily routine.

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TIP

Start with your finger, because your dog will probably accept it fairly readily. When he gets used to the idea, you can advance to a toothbrush, the bristles of which will get into the groove along the gum line where plaque can build up.

Aim the toothbrush at about a 45 degree angle, and brush in a circular motion. Scrub the tooth from crown to gum. Most of the plaque buildup occurs on the

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outside of the tooth, which is a good thing, because the insides are a lot harder to reach. Brush both the upper and lower teeth, especially the big canines and *carnassials* (shearing teeth) toward the back of the mouth.

TIP

To help reduce the tartar buildup, feed your dog some dry dog food every day, and give him lots of hard chew toys. Be careful, though. Some toys are actually too hard and can result in broken teeth.

WARNING

Halitosis (bad breath) can be a sign of dental trouble. So are receding or red, inflamed gums. Halitosis can be caused by stomach disorders, as well as decayed or abscessed teeth.

Even with the greatest brushing care, you'll still need to take your Husky to the veterinarian for a thorough tooth-cleaning job every year, especially after the dog reaches the age of 6 years or so. Your vet will clean and scale the teeth using ultrasound. This treatment removes plaque below the gum line, which you can't reach through brushing alone.

Eyes

Clean any ocular discharge every day with a clean, damp cloth. Don't use cotton balls; they contain fibers that can get in your dog's eyes and irritate them. If your Siberian has particularly sensitive eyes, you can get a cream to use in them while bathing your dog.

Ears

Because Siberians have erect ears, they are less prone to ear problems than lop-eared dogs. No Siberian should have foul-smelling ears, red ears, or ears that exude junk. Normal ear wax is clear or very pale yellow. Black or brown discharge probably means your dog has ear mites or a yeast infestation. A yellow, pussy discharge indicates an infection. Any time you notice a lot of ear scratching or head shaking from your pet, suspect mites or an infection. A mite infestation requires a special preparation, which you can obtain from your veterinarian.

TIP

For routine ear cleaning, swab the ear gently with a cotton ball or wipe using a liquid ear-cleaning product, or with an alcohol-vinegar solution. Don't cram anything in the dog's ears; you can rupture one of his eardrums.

Anal sacs

Emptying your dog's anal sacs is one of the worst chores involved in dog ownership. Most of the time, the dog handles this job himself, but every once in a while,

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you may need to help a little. If you notice your dog scooting along the ground, it's probably because those sacs need to be *expressed,* or emptied. Gently press your thumb and forefinger on the outside of each sac, at the 10 and 2 o'clock positions under the tail. Use a tissue and stand to one side (the stuff really smells).

If you don't like doing this yourself, your vet or groomer can do it for you.

Don't fix what's not broken! There is evidence that routine expression of the anal sacs contributes to future impaction. Only do it if it's needed.

WARNING

In some cases, the anal sacs can become impacted and even may need to be surgically removed. Because Siberians don't really need them, it's no big deal.

Finding a Professional Groomer

For various reasons, you may decide to take your Husky to a professional groomer — at least once in a while. You can ask your veterinarian for recommendations, or check with breeders, boarding kennels, or friends with Siberians who are pleased with their groomers.

TIP

Call the prospective groomer, and check on prices, products, and procedures. You don't want a nasty surprise. Ask whether the groomer requires proof of *bordetella* (kennel cough) vaccination; even if she doesn't, make sure that your dog is vaccinated against it, because there may be other dogs there who have it.

REMEMBER

Although a professional groomer can make your Siberian look slick, only you can do the regular ear, eye, foot, and tooth care that's necessary. Your groomer should be an enhancement to your total dog care, not a replacement of it.

Take time to watch the groomer with your dog. Any groomer who is rough shouldn't have the care of your precious Siberian. Siberians can be particularly trying for groomers; they often simply won't do what is asked of them. So find a groomer experienced with the breed. In very rare cases, your Husky may require a mild tranquilizer before grooming; your veterinarian (not the groomer) should provide it. If you do use a tranquilizer, make certain the groomer knows how to administer the medication — or do it yourself.

WARNING

Inform the groomer if your Husky is fearful of being groomed, or if he doesn't like being left. If he has ever growled or snapped during the grooming process, the groomer needs to know this as well. Likewise, inform the groomer if the dog has arthritis, a heart problem, epilepsy, or any other condition that could be aggravated by the grooming procedure.

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Looking at the pros and cons to neutering and spaying
- Eyeing vaccinations
- Recognizing some common canine illnesses
- Tackling fleas and ticks
- Helping an older dog age gracefully

Chapter 13

Focusing on Your Husky's Health and Wellbeing

Siberians are among the healthiest and longest-lived of all breeds, many remaining spunky right into their teen years. I have known Siberians to reach the age of 20. Still, everyone feels under the weather sometimes, and it's necessary to keep a watchful eye on your best friend to make sure you can help him when he does.

Because your Husky could theoretically have a medical disaster five minutes or less after you bring him home, the wise dog owner already has a veterinarian. The last thing you want is to be searching in a panic to find a practice. Choose your vet now, before your new family member comes home (refer to Chapter 5 to help you choose one).

In this chapter, I guide you through your first visit to the vet's office. I also provide some information on common ailments that affect dogs in general and Huskies in particular. And I let you know how to prevent them from affecting your dog as well as how to respond to them if they already have.

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Knowing What to Expect on the First Vet Checkup

Your dog's first checkup should include the following:

- Heart and respiration
- Tooth condition
- Ears
- Eyes
- Overall condition

Choose your vet early, because you'll want to bring your new friend in for a checkup within two or three days after you get him. Write down any questions you may have; that way you won't forget them.

- A truly complete exam should include the following lab tests:
  - A complete blood count (CBC) to check for infections or anemia
  - A complete blood chemistry panel including electrolytes and SDMA, which indicates the state of your Husky's liver, kidneys, pancreas, blood sugar, and hydration
  - A urinalysis to look for infection or inflammation in your pet's urinary tract
  - A fecal test to check for worms in the intestines
  - A thyroid function test to see if the thyroid gland is functioning well

Neutering and Spaying: The Biggest Decision

Neutering is a general term that refers to rendering a dog unable to reproduce. For female dogs, the more specific term is *spaying* and means removing the uterus and ovaries. For the male dogs, the more specific term is *castration* and refers to removing the testicles.

Today it's estimated that 80 percent of U.S. dogs are neutered. In fact, most states require that dogs adopted out of shelters have this surgery before moving to their

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adoptive homes. Dogs can be neutered as early as 8 weeks old, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association. This guidance is helpful to shelters that rely on early neutering to help reduce the pet overpopulation problems. However, even though neutering is still the norm for most people, a new body of evidence is showing that it's not necessarily the best option for everyone.

REMEMBER

Early studies were done on Golden Retrievers, a breed particularly prone to certain kinds of cancer. Later studies included more breeds, where a complicated picture emerges. Breeds under 45 pounds or giant breeds showed no increase in cancer. Unfortunately, Siberians are right at the 45-pound mark, so the decision becomes even harder. Talk to your vet to find the best spay-neuter option for your dog especially because research in this area continues to evolve. The decision if and when to neuter your dog is entirely up to you. These sections examine the pros and cons to spaying and neutering your Husky.

Eyeing why you'd want to spay your Husky

Here are some reasons why you may want to spay your female Siberian:

- **Spaying eliminates heat cycles and "accidental" litters.** Unspayed female dogs go into a messy heat cycles every six months, dropping blood and other unsavory fluids on rugs, bare floors, and quite possibly your bed. Unspayed females are extremely attractive to unneutered dogs in the neighborhood, and you may have unwanted visitors. Or, she may escape for a "date" with the Akita next door. Sixty-three days later, you'll have a lovely litter of mixed breed puppies. This single fact is the main reason people get their female dogs spayed.
- **Unspayed dogs often aren't welcome at dog parks.** Policy enforcement varies.
- **Dogs spayed before their first heat cycle have almost no chance of developing mammary cancer.** This is a common disease, usually less serious than in people.
- **Spaying prevents *pyometra,* a potentially lethal infection of the uterus.**
- **Spaying prevents ovarian cancer.**

Considering why not to spay your Husky

You may not want to spay your Husky for the following reasons:

- **You want to breed the dog.** Well, obviously.
- **You plan to show your dog in conformation.** Dog shows are designed to demonstrate the best breeding stock. Spayed females can't have progeny.

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SPAYING TOO EARLY MAY CAUSE ISSUES

If you elect to spay your Siberian, dangers can arise from spaying her too early (before the first heat cycle). Early spaying

- Can cause uneven growth in the leg bones, leading to possibly hip dysplasia or torn ligaments
- Can increase the risk of bone cancer
- Can cause urinary incontinence in as much as 20 percent of dogs
- Can deform your dog's vulva (making it not only look odd, but leave her subject to infections)

- **Spaying doubles the risk of obesity, a very serious health problem that brings others in its wake, including diabetes.** It seems to be spaying itself that causes the problem, not some lack of exercise as previously thought. However, this problem is more likely in males.
- **Spaying increases the risk of a *hemangiosarcoma,* a rapidly growing deadly cancer arising from the lining of the blood vessels.** Death is usually caused when the tumors burst and the dog bleeds to death.
- **Spaying may alter the texture of your dog's coat.**
- **Spaying triples the risk of *hypothyroidism,* a condition in which the thyroid gland produces insufficient hormones.**
- **Spayed dogs may be in more danger of suffering cognitive decline in later years than their intact counterparts.**
- **Spaying is a major surgery, with all the attendant risks involved, up to and including death.**

Eyeing why you'd want to neuter your Husky

For male Siberians, you may want to neuter your dog for the following reasons:

- **Neutered dogs have a lower rate of testicular cancer (like 0 percent).** On the other hand, this kind of cancer is easy to treat in dogs.
- **Neutered dogs have a lower rate of fistulas and perianal tumors.**

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- **Neutered males tend to be less aggressive.**
- **Neutered males are less apt to stray.** Although to be honest, any Husky will run off if offered half a chance.
- **Unneutered dogs often aren't permitted in dog parks.**

Choosing not to neuter your Husky

Here are reasons you may decide neutering your dog isn't the best option.

- **Recent research shows prostate cancer is more common in neutered males.** This contradicts earlier research that showed the opposite.
- **As with females, neutering is correlated with hemangiosarcoma.** Refer to the section, "Considering why not to spay your Husky," earlier in this chapter.
- **Neutering is associated with lymphosarcoma in males.** Normally testosterone will provide some protection from this disease. Neutered dogs don't have testosterone.
- **As with females, neutering raises the risk of hypothyroidism.** Apparently when reproductive hormone levels drop, the endocrine system gets out of whack.
- **Intact dogs seem less likely to suffer cognitive decline in their later years.**

WARNING

Any male who has only one testicle that has dropped should be neutered. The retained testicle is at a high risk for cancer.

Examining Vaccines in Plain English

Along with antibiotics, antiseptics, and anesthesia, vaccines are probably the most important advances in medicine the human race has ever produced. But many people are pretty foggy on what they actually are. (The rapid development of new kinds of vaccines has made it even murkier.) Generally, however, a *vaccine* is a suspension of killed, weakened, or fragmented pathogens that prevent disease. Generally, each vaccine works against only one specific disease and confers immunity to that disease. The vaccine stimulates the immune system to attack the disease-causing agent. After it's stimulated, antibody producing cells stay remain sensitized for a period of time, ready to respond to the agent if it attacks. This period varies widely. For human diseases, for example, like measles, immunity lasts a lifetime. Others, like that for tetanus, need a booster every few years.

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In his native Siberia, the Husky was exposed to few diseases and could do without vaccinations. (This is a good thing, because the Chukchis didn't have any vaccines to give them.) Today, however, an army of infections lurk nearby, ready to pounce on any unprotected dog, especially unvaccinated puppies.

Distemper, canine parvovirus, hepatitis, and rabies are just a few of the dangerous diseases your dog, or any dog, is susceptible to. Because your dog will inevitably come into contact with at least some of these diseases, most vets believe that your best defense against illness is a well-planned vaccination program begun when your puppy is just a few weeks old. Don't listen to anyone who tries to talk you out of vaccinating your dog. The reason smallpox has been eradicated in the world is because of vaccinations. Rabies is likewise extraordinarily rare among dogs in the United States and Canada today. People have cleared it from the canine stock via vaccination. You owe it to your dog and to other dogs to behave responsibly.

The following sections takes a closer look at what vaccines are made of and other general considerations when vaccinating your Husky.

Looking closer at vaccines

Each disease requires its own vaccine, although sometimes several vaccines can be mixed and administered at the same time. (This is called a *multivalent vaccine*.) In some cases, more than one vaccine is available for a single disease. Several types of vaccines are available on the market, each classified according to how the vaccine is made:

- **Killed (inactivated) virus vaccines:** As the name implies, these highly stable vaccines are prepared from a dead virus. The immune response results from exposure to the viral protein in the vaccine. Killed virus vaccines are safe and easy to handle, and they won't cause suppression of the immune system, although some dogs develop reactions to them. They do, however, require more frequent vaccinations, and they're somewhat less effective than the other types. They may be more likely to produced adverse reactions in some dogs. Unlike the modified live-virus vaccines, they're safe for pregnant bitches. All rabies vaccinations (for safety reasons) are of this type. So are the vaccines for leptospirosis, some Lyme disease vaccines, some Bordetella vaccines, and all canine influenza vaccines.
- **Modified live virus vaccines (attenuated):** These are made from a weakened, but still living, form of the virus, or sometimes from a related organism that causes the same reaction in the immune system. Because they are so similar to the original disease, modified live virus vaccines provide better and longer-lasting immunity than killed virus vaccines (at least if having had the disease itself provides that same immunity). It's possible, however, for the

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organism in this kind of vaccine to revert to disease-causing form, especially in dogs with weakened immune systems. Autoimmune problems also crop up occasionally. Puppies, with their immature immune systems, are more susceptible to the dangers of this type of vaccine. Vaccines against parvovirus, adenovirus-2, and distemper are of this type. Any vaccine your dog gets through the nose, by the way, is of this kind.

- **Recombinant (subunit) vaccines:** These vaccines don't use live or killed virus or bacteria in any form. Unlike the killed virus and modified live virus vaccines, the whole virus is never introduced into the body so there's no possibility of getting sick. The vaccines are made from bits of DNA coding for the protein that actually causes the immune response. Currently, there are recombinant vaccines for canine distemper and Lyme disease.
- **Toxoid vaccines:** Toxoid vaccines are developed from special toxins (proteins) that have been rendered harmless but can still produce an immune response. There is currently only one toxoid vaccine in use for dogs: one against Western Diamondback rattlesnake envenomation. This produces only a short period of immunity and needs multiple boosters in a single year. It's obviously not for general use.
- **Therapeutic biologics:** These come in several types. Currently, one type, a nonreplicating recombinant antigen (a substance that provokes an immune response) is available to prevent canine oral melanoma. Another kind, a monoclonal antibody (*monoclonal* means they use only the really effective antibody) can be used for atopic dermatitis.

Considering key points about vaccines

Vaccines for a particular disease may be available in more than one of these forms. Some of the vaccines are administered combined with *adjuvants*, substances added to make the vaccine work better.

Because your Husky pup will need to be vaccinated, bring his previous shot record when you go to the vet for his first visit. Controversy rages about when and how often to vaccinate, so don't be surprised if your vet wants to change the scheduling a bit or use a different type of vaccine.

TIP

Talk to your vet about getting a Bordetella (kennel cough) vaccination for your pet. This respiratory disease is extremely contagious, and many kennels, dog parks, groomers, and obedience classes require your pup to be vaccinated before they allow other dogs to come into contact with him. The vaccine can be given nasally, injected under the skin, or even given orally, according to your veterinarian's preference and the age of the pup. Some schedules call for more than one dose, but the vaccine itself is generally very affordable. The vaccine should be

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administered every six months to a year. It may take a couple of weeks for your dog to start developing immunity after the vaccination. Refer to the section, "Kennel cough," later in this chapter for more info about this condition.

REMEMBER

All dogs are required to be vaccinated against rabies. The rabies shot is usually given at 16 weeks, the booster shot a year later. Rabies shots are good for three years, although some places require yearly vaccinations. Check with your vet to see what the laws are in your area.

REMEMBER

Mild fever or lethargy isn't uncommon for a day or two following a vaccination. A small bump and hair loss may develop at the vaccination site, although this reaction is unlikely with Siberians. These effects usually resolve without further treatment. More serious, and fortunately rare, is *anaphylaxis,* a severe allergic reaction to the foreign protein in the vaccine. (This is the same kind of reaction seen in people and dogs allergic to bee stings.) Wait in the vet's office for ten minutes after your dog is vaccinated in case vomiting and collapse (indications of anaphylaxis) should unexpectedly occur. Follow your vet's recommendations about which vaccines are needed in your area.

Focusing on the Different Viruses That Can Afflict Your Husky

All dog owners need to beware of viral diseases; no breed is immune or even has any special resistance to them. Some of the worst diseases known to dogs are viral: rabies, distemper, parainfluenza, infectious hepatitis, parvovirus, and coronavirus. To make more of their evil kind, viruses must invade the living cells of their hosts.

One class of drugs (the *antivirals*) can stop viruses from reproducing. Unfortunately, the prohibitively high cost of such medications currently makes their widespread use for canines off limits. In addition, most of these drugs are pretty toxic to the dog.

Until your puppy is fully immunized against the following diseases, he is in danger of contracting them. Here I discuss the different vaccines that your vet may give your Husky.

Canine parvovirus

Canine parvovirus (CPV), commonly called *parvo,* is a highly contagious disease first reported worldwide in 1978. It's apparently a mutation of a parvovirus previously affecting only cats, which somehow changed its genetic structure slightly

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and leaked across the species barrier. CPV usually affects the stomach and intestines of dogs, although a variant goes after the heart muscles of very young puppies. It's transmitted by dog feces or direct contact with an infected dog.

From there, it can be carried on dog hair and humans' shoes. It's resistant to most disinfectants other than concentrated bleach. Parvo causes a bloody diarrhea (sometimes accompanied by bloody vomiting) so severe that a dog can literally waste away from it. It's most common in puppies between the ages of 6 weeks to 6 months. Susceptibility is increased by keeping puppies outdoors, where parvo can stay in the soil for up to two years. Puppies should be completely immunized against CPV between 16 and 18 weeks of age. Human beings are immune to CPV.

REMEMBER

Parvovirus is treatable, but not curable. Survival rate is about 70 percent when treated properly.

Canine distemper

Distemper is still the main killer of dogs worldwide; it's airborne and extremely contagious, killing 50 percent of unvaccinated adult dogs infected with it. In puppies, the percentage is even higher — almost 80 percent. Canine distemper, or *hardpad,* affects the dog's nervous system. In the early stages, it's accompanied by a dry cough, fever, and yellowish discharge from the eyes. Even dogs who survive distemper can be permanently affected. Human beings are immune to canine distemper, although the disease is similar to human measles. Puppies should be completely immunized between 12 and 14 weeks of age.

Infectious canine hepatitis

Canine hepatitis affects the liver. It looks a lot like distemper and is passed through the urine of infected dogs. It's especially dangerous, because even after a dog recovers from the disease, he can pass it along to other animals for a period up to six months. Human beings are immune to canine hepatitis. Puppies should be immunized at 12 weeks.

Rabies

Rabies affects the central nervous system, and it's 100 percent fatal to both dogs and people. It's transmitted via the saliva, usually through bites. A person or animal bitten by a rabid animal has about a 75 percent chance of contracting the illness. If a dog develops rabies symptoms, he'll die. Puppies should be immunized against this disease between 16 and 24 weeks of age. Most states require your dog to be revaccinated every three years, although the protection the vaccine offers undoubtedly lasts longer than that.

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Kennel cough

Kennel cough is an acute respiratory disorder, often found where dogs share close quarters, like kennels, shelters, boarding facilities, and veterinary hospitals. Kennel cough is a complex of symptoms, rather than a specific disease. It can be caused by a host of agents, including viruses and bacteria, so it shouldn't be considered a single disease. In adult dogs, kennel cough is sort of like a bad cold; the dog often shows no symptoms of ill health other than a runny nose and a cough. Some have fever or lack of appetite. For puppies, the condition can be more serious. You can immunize your dog against *Bordetella bronchiseptica,* the most common agent for kennel cough. Puppies should be immunized at 16 weeks.

Canine coronavirus

The word *coronavirus* may strike a justified fear in many people. There are many forms of coronavirus, and the one commonly affecting dogs isn't Covid-19, the novel coronavirus that produced a pandemic. This disease, related to the human cold, was first identified in 1971. It's passed through food that has been contaminated by the feces of an infected dog. It's very contagious and produces vomiting, diarrhea, and depression. It's most serious in puppies.

A vaccine is available, but many vets regard the vaccine as more dangerous than the disease and recommend against its use. A new modified live vaccine that has rapid antibody development, cell-mediated immunity, mucosal immunity, and minimal risk or allergic or adjuvant reactions has been developed.

HUSKIES AND COVID-19

Dogs, including Huskies, can get Covid-19 (as can other pets like cats and ferrets), although it's not very common. This virus isn't very fussy. It hijacks cells by interacting with a cell surface protein, the ACE2. In most cases, the dog seems to have gotten the disease from its owner, but it likely can move both ways. (Early studies indicate that cats are more likely to catch it from their owner than dogs, but this is a rapidly expanding field of knowledge, and researchers don't know much yet.)

In any case, while the pandemic is raging, it's best to play it safe and not allow contact between your dog and strangers' dogs. Handwashing after handling your pet is also good. One thing to avoid: Wear your own mask, but don't put one on Fido, which can be highly stressful for him. Just practice social distancing.

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Avoiding Heartworm

Heartworm disease is a parasitic infection caused by a mosquito-transmitted worm larvae (*Dirofilaria immitis*) that can infect your dog's heart and lungs. Mosquitos transfer worm larvae from an infected dog to your dog; larvae develop into threadlike worms that live in your dog's heart and its vessels. If heartworms are allowed to reach the adult stage without medical attention, they eventually develop into heart failure, lung disease, and sudden death. The course of the disease is extremely complex and almost always fatal.

Many heartworm medications are combined with flea and tick treatments, which is called a *broad-spectrum approach.* Specific heartworm medications target heartworm. Heartworm medications are generally administered once a month and are often sold as chewable tablets or easy-to-apply topical solutions. Your vet may choose one type of prescribed medication over another, so discuss with you vet about which medication is best for your dog. Treatment for an infected dog is long, uncertain, and difficult. However, it's 99 percent preventable by regular, year-round medication.

Other common parasites of dogs such as hookworms and whipworms are also preventable, often with the same medication that controls heartworm.

Knowing How to Prevent Leptospirosis

Leptospirosis is a bacterial infection that affects the liver, kidneys, central nervous system, and even the eyes. Recently, the disease has returned in a new and virulent strain, one that was previously seen in horses and cows. Dogs usually contract it through direct contact with the urine of infected animals, but it can also be present in contaminated soil, water, or reproductive secretions. It's most common is warm, marshy areas. Dogs drinking water in such places or coming into contact with an infected dog's urine are most at risk.

Not all dogs who encounter it will be become sick. They may turn into carriers themselves, shedding the virus in their urine and infecting other animals in turn.

In its most dangerous form, leptospirosis can affect and shut down the kidneys and be fatal. It can also be transmitted to people, especially children. Treatment includes fluid therapy, antibiotics, and, in cases of kidney failure, dialysis. A vaccine is available for some forms of leptospirosis (there are more than 200 subtypes). Talk to your vet if this vaccine is right for your dog, based on your location and his lifestyle. A few dogs have had a bad reaction to the vaccine.

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Being Aware of Canine Hip Dysplasia

Canine hip dysplasia (CHD) is an abnormality that occurs when the head of the femur (thighbone) doesn't fit correctly into the pelvic socket (see Figure 13-1 for an illustration). Eventually the joint becomes malformed, sometimes to the extent that it's unusable. A dog may have dysplasia in one or both hips. The earlier the disease manifests itself, the more serious it is. Unfortunately, even though the disease is painful, your stoic Husky may give little indication that he's hurting.

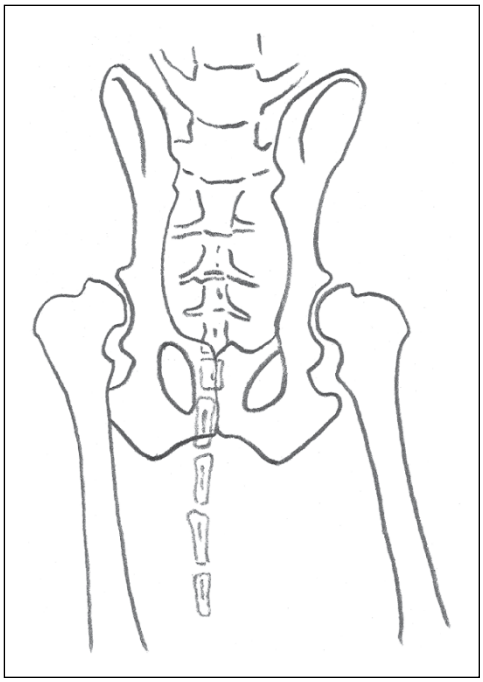

FIGURE 13-1: Canine hip dysplasia is a painful abnormality.

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The origin of CHD is at least partially genetic. Geneticists consider it to be a *polygenic condition*, meaning that several genes play a part in passing it on. No one has yet identified all the genes responsible. And not all dogs who have a genetic predisposition to get hip dysplasia actually develop it.

REMEMBER

The Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA), a nonprofit organization affiliated with the School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Missouri, will, for a small fee, inspect the radiographs of dogs 2 years or older desired for breeding purposes. The organization will then issue a report to the dog's owner, good for the lifetime of the dog, evaluating the dog's hip joint conformation. A reputable Siberian Husky breeder won't breed an animal without a favorable rating from the

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OFA, and prospective buyers should ask to see the OFA report on both parents before committing to buy a puppy.

Although hip dysplasia isn't noticeable at birth, the condition is progressive and causes pain, inflammation, and eventually arthritis, which can be severe. Rigorous exercise makes the problem worse. Dogs with only slight hip dysplasia are frequently overlooked or misdiagnosed. The only way to know for sure if a dog has dysplasia is to have him X-rayed by a competent veterinarian. The diagnosis should be confirmed by a veterinary radiologist. This condition is sometimes extremely difficult to detect, and unless the dog is properly positioned for the X-ray, a misdiagnosis could result.

WARNING

The most important factor for developing hip dysplasia is probably rapid growth rate. The more rapidly your puppy grows, the more at risk he is for developing hip dysplasia and other orthopedic problems. Carefully monitor your young dog's diet, especially between the ages of 3 and 8 months, the peak growth period. If your puppy seems to be growing faster than other Huskies in his age group (ask your vet to be sure), you must be especially vigilant and lower his caloric intake.

You can ask your veterinarian to perform an OFA or Penn Hip style X-ray when your dog is being spayed or neutered. (***Note:*** Hip X-rays aren't completely accurate, unless they're done after the age of 2 years, but an earlier X-ray can still provide useful information.) It will give you a baseline reading, and if your Husky develops hip problems later, you and your vet will be able to check the new X-rays against the early ones. Treatment for dysplasia includes diet therapy (usually involving weight loss), enforced rest, exercise, and stretching exercises (swimming is good), drug therapy, acupuncture, and surgery.

In addition to genetic predisposition, breeders recognize that environmental factors may also play a significant role in the disease. Rapid weight gain, improper nutrition (including too much calcium), too-rapid growth rate, and other factors can all contribute.

Being Aware of Degenerative Myelopathy (DM)

This chronic condition is a disease that affects the white matter of the spinal cord, resulting in a gradual, progressive weakness and paralysis of the hind limbs. The major risk factor is a genetic mutation known as SOD-1. Siberian Huskies are one of the breeds most commonly affected. It occurs primarily in middle-aged and older dogs. The OFA can identify if your dog is at risk. Unfortunately, no effective treatment is available at the present time.

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Tackling Arthritis

Dogs suffer from arthritis as frequently as human beings do. Arthritic dogs may limp or have problems getting up or climbing stairs. They may cry when touched. Symptoms are usually worse in the morning, because the joints are likely to be stiff from lack of movement during the night. There are two basic types of arthritis:

- **Degenerative arthritis:** Also called *osteoarthritis,* the cartilage that protects bones around the joint is damaged, usually by stress. Active, sporty dogs are particularly susceptible. This kind of arthritis can be acquired from too much jumping, or it can result from a tear. Sometimes, years will go by before the disease actually manifests itself. *Hip dysplasia,* a malformation of the hip socket, is a common form of degenerative arthritis.

  Older dogs, overweight dogs, and genetically predisposed dogs are particularly at risk for degenerative arthritis.

- **Inflammatory arthritis:** A joint disease, inflammatory arthritis is result of an illness or infection. Tick-borne diseases like Rocky Mountain spotted fever are common sources. It can also be hereditary.

Eyeing Eye Problems

Serious eye problems should be treated by a veterinary ophthalmologist, preferably one certified by the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists (ACVO). In addition, the Siberian Husky Club of America has encouraged its local member clubs to sponsor annual eye clinics at a reasonable cost. The procedure is painless.

Only dogs who are free from genetic eye defects should be used for breeding purposes. The Siberian Husky Ophthalmologic Registry (SHOR) can screen Siberians. If a dog of 1 year or older has been found to be free of eye defects by a diplomate of ACVO, SHOR will issue a certificate (good for one year) to the animal. A reputable breeder should offer proof to any purchaser that the sire and dam of the litter in question have been registered by SHOR.

Recognizing common eye problems

Siberian Huskies are susceptible to three genetically passed eye defects:

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- Progressive retinal atrophy (PRA)
- Bilateral cataracts (and other corneal disorders such as crystalline corneal opacities)
- Glaucoma

These disorders can affect animals of either sex or of any eye color. All can cause blindness. In the following sections, I cover these three eye defects, in addition to some other common eye problems your Husky may encounter.

Progressive retinal atrophy

In *progressive retinal atrophy (PRA)*, the retina, which forms the light image, loses first its night vision capacity, then its day vision capacity. The disease develops if the light-sensitive cells in the retina receive an inadequate supply of blood; if this happens, they wither away. Both eyes are always affected, but the disease progresses slowly; its presence can be detected by ophthalmoscopic examination. PRA is caused by a recessive gene, so parents should be screened. There is no cure or treatment for the disease.

A disease related to PRA is central progressive retinal atrophy (CPRA). In CPRA the dog has better night vision than day vision, and although he may bump into stationary objects, he can usually see moving objects with varying degrees of acuity.

Cataracts

Cataracts are a major source of blindness, usually seen in older dogs. They can result from diabetes, poor nutrition, inflammation, or trauma. In this condition, the lens of the eye becomes cloudy or opaque. Cataracts are classified by the dog's age at onset, physical appearance, state of development, and cause. Cataracts usually begin as tiny dots, then progress to a haze, pearly sheen, streakiness, or a totally white lens. Not all cataracts will progress to the point of causing blindness, however.

WARNING

According to some estimates, the incidence of cataracts in Huskies may be as high as 18 percent. Bilateral, developmental, or juvenile cataracts is, as one of its names suggests, characteristic of young dogs. The primary cause is genetic transmission. Only five breeds of dogs inherit this condition; unfortunately, the Siberian Husky is one of them.

The disease shows up as a cloudiness in the lens and develops rather slowly, usually first in one eye and then in the other. Inherited canine cataracts in Huskies are caused by an autosomal recessive trait that appears between 4 and 18 months of age. Some cases don't show themselves until the dog is between 4 and

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6 years old; this is particularly unfortunate because most dogs are bred before that age. Severe cases of juvenile cataracts cause blindness; in some cases, there is considerable discomfort as well.

TECHNICAL STUFF

There is no treatment that will prevent or slow the development of cataracts. Surgery to remove the opacity is the only treatment. One treatment is called *phacoemulsification,* an ultrasound technique that actually shatters the bad lens, and removes the pieces.

The AKC Canine Health Foundation, a nonprofit organization, is funding research to identify the DNA marker that causes juvenile cataracts in purebred dogs, specifically in Siberian Huskies, Alaskan Malamutes, and Samoyeds.

Glaucoma

In *glaucoma,* the internal pressure of the eye's aqueous fluid increases to the point where it damages the retina or optic nerve. Glaucoma usually has a genetic component (primary glaucoma), but can also be acquired from trauma or an infection (secondary glaucoma). Glaucoma is prevalent in certain lines of Siberians, particularly in some racing lines.

REMEMBER

Although blue eyes are regarded as defective in many breeds, there seems to be no evidence that blue eyes are related to increased incidence of cataracts or other eye problems in Siberians.

Early stages of glaucoma are characterized by pupil dilation and a slightly enlarged eye, symptoms that are very easy to miss. Later, the eye will be red, swollen, streamy, and obviously painful. There may be a green or yellow discharge. This is an extremely dangerous condition, requiring emergency, aggressive medical treatment from your veterinarian. Laser surgery is used to relieve pressure within the eye by decreasing the eye's ability to produce fluid. Permanent blindness can occur within hours.

To test for glaucoma, your vet will use a *tonometer,* an instrument that calculates how far the cornea of the eye is indented when pressure is applied to the surface of the eye.

Drug therapy, laser surgery, and a freezing procedure called *cyclocryothermy* are partially successful if the glaucoma is caught very early, but the ultimate prognosis is poor. Most dogs with this condition eventually lose their sight.

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Nuclear or lenticular sclerosis

Nuclear or *lenticular sclerosis* is a common condition in older dogs, starting at around 8 or 9 years of age.

You may notice a greenish or bluish haze on the eye, which is caused by a hardening of the lens. It's part of the natural aging process, and although it may impair your dog's close-up vision, it's not a serious disability. Note the difference between this condition and cataracts; in cataracts, the haze is white. Despite its weird look and daunting name, nuclear sclerosis is not a serious condition (it doesn't cause blindness). No specific treatment is available.

Crystalline corneal opacities

Crystalline corneal opacities (CCO) affects the cornea of the eye. The *cornea* is the outer, transparent portion of the eye's outer coat. The lens is farther inside the eye and focuses light rays so they form an image on the retina, which is the light-sensitive inner layer of the eye. With this condition, the cornea sometimes takes on a hazy appearance; at other times, it looks as if crystal needles have invaded the eye.

Both eyes are affected, but not always to the same extent. Research, using the Siberian as a test model, is currently being done on this problem.

Conjunctivitis

Conjunctivitis is an inflammation of the membrane that lines the eyelid. The white (or *sclera*) of the eye looks red. A variety of things, such as infection, inadequate lubrication, and injury, cause this condition. It can also be a by-product of another disease.

Canine uveodermatologic syndrome

This autoimmune condition causes the dog's immune system to attack its own pigment cells. It can affect the skin, hair, and eyes. Although Siberian Huskies are one of the primary breeds affected, this disease is rare. Signs include whitening of the fur and red or cloudy eyes. The disease appears between the ages of 6 months and 6 years. Treatments usually consist of administering prednisone to tamp down the immune system. Eye drops with corticosteroids are also given. Unfortunately, in cases when the disease isn't treated early enough, your dog may be in danger of going blind.

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KNOWING WHAT TO DO IF YOUR HUSKY GOES BLIND

Blindness isn't the tragedy to dogs like it is to human beings. And because humans can lead a rich and interesting life although blind, think how little blindness may affect your Siberian, who has his keen ears, sensitive nose, and loyal heart to guide him through life. Besides, Siberians have little interest in reading books, going to the movies, or even admiring a glorious sunset.

The biggest problem for a blind dog is his owner, who is convinced that his dog's life has been irretrievably ruined. The dog may notice his owner's change toward him, and become worried and fretful, which can bother a Husky more than sight loss does.

Testing your Husky's vision

Sometimes it's not easy to tell if your dog is going blind. Blindness usually happens very slowly, and your dog is so good at using his other senses to maneuver around the house that you may not even notice until it is too late. Here are a few safe, simple tests you can perform at home to check your dog's vision. These aren't recommended as alternatives to regular veterinary checkups, of course, but they're useful for between visits:

- **Wave your hand or another object quickly before your dog's eyes.** He should blink.
- **Move an object slowly in front of your dog's eyes.** He should follow the object visually.
- **Shine a flashlight in one eye.** Both eyes should blink in response. The pupils of both eyes should contract.
- **Pick up your Siberian (if you can) and carry him to a table.** If he sees it, he'll stretch out his forelegs in an attempt to reach it.
- **Throw a ball.** He should see where it goes.
- **Design an obstacle course between you and your dog.** See if he can negotiate his way through it.

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Identifying Cushing's Disease

Cushing's disease is a fairly common malfunction of the dog's endocrine system. Dogs with Cushing's produce too much of the hormone *cortisol*. It generally appears in middle-aged or older dogs. Signs include a pot-bellied abdomen, hair loss, low energy, thin or darkened skin, muscle weakness, and scaly patches on the elbows, although the signs are quite variable. About 85 percent of cases are caused by a noncancerous tumor of the pituitary gland. The other 15 percent are caused by tumors in the adrenal glands. A few cases are caused by long-term administration of cortisone as a medication.

If an adrenal tumor causes it, the tumor may be able to be removed. Although surgery isn't usually possible for pituitary-dependent Cushing's, a medication called trilostane (Vetoryl) may be prescribed. This drug isn't cheap, has serious side effects, and must be continued for the life of your pet.

Concentrating on Epilepsy

Epilepsy is a frighteningly common inherited disorder among Siberian Huskies, usually manifesting itself when the dog is about 2 to 4 years or older. Epilepsy is an uncontrolled electrical activity in the brain. It results in seizures that can last from a few seconds to over half an hour. The dog may go stiff and jerk, his eyes may roll back in his head, he may blink or pace.

Treatment includes use of anticonvulsant drugs like phenytoin, phenobarbital, primidone, and diazepam.

REMEMBER

An epileptic dog can live a happy life, and if his family members can get over their fear of the seizures, the disease can be fairly easily managed.

Attending to Diabetes

Like human beings, dogs can get diabetes. Diabetes is caused by a deficiency of *insulin*, a hormone produced in the pancreas, but no one is sure how this happens. There are two types of diabetes: type I (insulin dependent) and type II (non–insulin dependent). The first type is common in older dogs; the second is associated with obesity.

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The body needs insulin to absorb blood sugar. If not enough insulin is produced, the sugar stays in the bloodstream and eventually passes into the urine. Overweight animals, older dogs (between 7 and 9 years), and females are most at risk. In fact, females are twice as likely to contract diabetes as males. Your vet can check for diabetes using a blood test.

Most experts think that type II diabetes can be prevented by keeping your Husky lean. Some studies have also suggested that the addition of chromium to a canine diet may help prevent the onset of the disease. (Chromium can be found in brewer's yeast.)

WARNING

Danger signs include increased hunger, thirst, and urination.

The medical treatment for diabetes is usually dietary changes and administration of insulin, often by injection once or twice a day. If your dog is diabetic, you also have to discover how to monitor his blood glucose level. Regular exercise and a special diet are also important. Dog food companies have developed special commercial feeds for diabetic dogs.

Although experts aren't sure yet whether healthy dogs need fiber, you can help manage your dog's diabetes by including fiber supplements in his diet. Feeding high-fiber foods reduces the amount of insulin your diabetic Husky requires. As an additional benefit, researchers know that high-fiber foods help in weight reduction, a common problem accompanying diabetes.

REMEMBER

Dogs with diabetes should have about 40 percent of their calories come from complex carbohydrates, 20 percent from fat, and the rest from high-quality protein.

Watching Out for Fleas and Ticks

Not only do people become attached to their dogs, dogs sometimes become attached themselves. And what's attached to them can make you shudder, itch, and get sick. But knowledge is power, and armed with the right arsenal, you can rid both your dog and your home of the pests that plague them. These sections examine two pesky pests: fleas and ticks.

Fighting fleas

Among the canine set, flea season lasts from April through November. The high flea season is from June through September. Wet summers make for even more fleas. They prefer to lay their eggs in temperatures of 70 to 85 degrees, with

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humidity around 70 percent. If you own a carpet, however, or even a bed, it's always flea season. Cedar chips and pine needles repel fleas, but not all people want to cover their floor with cedar chips. It's good for pet bedding, though. Frequent vacuuming helps, too.

After it's on your dog, the flea bites down and gets a good long drink of blood. She then lays her eggs, preferably on your dog. The eggs are smooth, however, and often fall to the carpet, sofa, or grass.

WARNING

In the worst-case scenarios, fleas carry deadly typhus and bubonic plague. They carry tularemia, too, and have been implicated in the spread of Lyme disease. Fleas are also intermediate hosts for tapeworm. They feed voraciously, and dogs can lose a substantial amount of blood from a severe infestation. Puppies have actually been known to die from fleas.

If your Husky has fleas, he'll probably do the obvious: scratch. The itch from a flea bite lasts from 3 to 7 days. If you see your dog scratching, investigate further. Fleas like to stay very close to the skin (they abhor sunlight), so you may need to take a fine-tooth flea comb to your Siberian. Fleas tend to be worse on the head and neck, which are areas hard for the dog to tend himself.

You also know your pet has fleas when you see those hideous black and white specks in his fur. These are flea feces, I'm sorry to say. Flea feces are composed of partially digested blood. You can test this yourself by dropping a bit of water on them. If they're flea feces, they'll turn red. (You can turn this into a science fair project for your child, if you'd like.)

Lots of dogs are allergic to flea bites. It's the protein in the flea saliva that is the culprit. A flea bite can turn into a so-called *hot spot*, a raw, perhaps oozing area on the dog's skin.

Preventing fleas

Disgusting as they may be, fleas *are* a curable problem. But you have to rid both your home and your dog of them at the same time. Otherwise, you'll get a reinfestation. To completely rid your dog and your home of fleas, follow these suggestions:

- **Keep your dog on flea medication.** For a minor outbreak of fleas inside your home, you can use any of the many products available. Some prevent not only fleas, but also mosquitos, ticks, and even lice. Some are oral tablets, whereas others are applied topically (although topical creams don't work as well for heavy coated breeds like Huskies).

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If fleas have already completely invaded your house, have your entire home thoroughly and professionally cleaned by a specialist. After the fleas are gone, make sure you vacuum frequently, especially if you have carpeting where fleas love to hide and lay their eggs. It's best if you can get rid of the carpeting altogether.

- **Go natural.** If you're opposed to chemicals, you can always consciously groom your dog with a fine-tooth flea comb, but you probably won't get the results that you want. You can also use cedar chip bedding to repel fleas. However, repelling them isn't the same thing as getting rid of them. Sprinkle some diatomaceous earth (available in hardware stores and pool-supply places) in dark, flea-friendly crevices. This stuff is really a collection of fossilized sea shells and similar microscopic creatures. It's all natural and kills fleas by piercing their body parts and drying them to death.

  Some people swear by natural flea inhibitors like brewer's yeast, which may contain vitamin B1 and garlic as additives. They're supposed to make the pet's blood taste bad to the fleas. The verdict is still out on this, but it certainly won't hurt to try.

  To help rid your yard of fleas the safe organic way, buy *nematodes* (creatures that feed on flea larvae) at your garden center. A beer-size can of them contains about 100 million microscopic nematodes, enough for any lawn.

- **Try insect repellents.** The most effective ones contain DEET (benzyl benzoate, diethyltoluamide). There are some safety concerns about these products, but they unquestionably do repel fleas. Natural flea repellents like pennyroyal, rosemary, wormwood, eucalyptus, and citronella *may* work also.

TIP

- **Vacuum frequently with a flea powder/carpet freshener combination.** Use mothballs inside the vacuum bag to kill the fleas. Be sure to hit all those little cracks and crevices where fleas love to hide. Wash your dog's bedding the same day that you vacuum, and while you're at it, vacuum the drapes.

As with any medication, you want to make sure the product you choose is safe and effective. Some very safe products really aren't fully effective against fleas whereas other very effective medications may have adverse effects on some dogs. That's especially true when it comes to puppies, who aren't able to tolerate some otherwise effective products. Your vet will help you decide. As for gimmicky electronic devices, including ultrasonic flea collars, that are supposed to rid your house of fleas, don't waste your money.

Tackling ticks

During tick season (primarily in early spring to mid-summer), check your dog for ticks daily, especially if he has been playing in the woods or tall grass. The ears, toes, neck, and head are the major tick sites. Ticks are slow feeders, so it takes about 24 hours for actual disease transmission to start.

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TECHNICAL STUFF

Although hundreds of tick species exist, dog owners need to watch for just a few. Among these are the Brown Dog Tick, the American Dog Tick, the Northern Deer Tick, the Rocky Mountain Tick, the Black-Legged Tick, and the Lone Star Tick. That seems to be plenty for starters.

REMEMBER

Ticks become active any time the temperature rises into the 40s — even if it's January. Keep the grass in your yard short to reduce the number of ticks.

Taking action when you see a tick

If you find a tick on your dog, remove it as soon as possible, using tweezers and wearing gloves to protect your hands. Lint rollers will help remove unattached ticks. Never touch a tick with your bare hands! The dangerous Lyme disease spirochete can penetrate directly into your skin. Grasp the tick as close to its head as possible and pull. The sooner you remove the tick, the more likely it is that no disease has been transmitted.

Make sure you grab the tick by its head. If you squeeze the body while it's still attached to your dog, you may eject the tick's disgusting contents (including all disease-carrying material) right into your dog.

Don't worry about losing the head of the tick in the dog's skin. You won't. After you pull it out, throw the tick in the toilet and flush. Wash both the affected spot and your hands thoroughly. The area where the tick was attached may look nasty, but it's probably not infected, even though it may scab over or swell for a week or so.

WARNING

Never use lighters, gasoline, or matches to burn the tick. It's too dangerous. Smothering the tick with petroleum jelly or nail polish is also a bad idea, because it takes too long to kill the tick. The longer the tick is attached, the more likely it is to transmit a disease.

Watching for two tick diseases: Lyme and Ehrlichia

Lyme disease and Ehrlichia are both transmitted by bacteria found in various species of ticks. Signs of both diseases may include fever, fatigue, and enlarged lymph nodes. However, many dogs, perhaps as many as 90 percent, show no signs at all.

The main culprits for Lyme disease are Deer and Black-Legged Ticks. Ehrlichia is transmitted mainly by the Lone Star Tick and the Brown Dog Tick.

A new study shows that dogs who have been exposed to Lyme disease are at a 43 percent higher risk of developing chronic kidney disease. (The nasty agent is *Borrelia burgdorferi*.) Even worse is *Ehrlichia canis*. Dogs bitten by ticks with this

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vector are 300 percent more likely to have damaged kidneys. The specific problem is glomerulonephritis — inflammation and dysfunction of the kidney's glomeruli, which filter the blood.

REMEMBER

Dogs inhabiting tick-infested areas should be vaccinated against Lyme disease. (No vaccine is available for Ehrlichia.) However, because the vaccine can cause reactions, it may not be advisable to administer it unless your dog spends a great deal of time in wooded areas. Talk to your vet about the best course of prevention for your dog.

The most commonly prescribed medication for both Lyme disease and Ehrlichia is doxycycline, but other antibiotics can also be used. You should see improvement in three to five days.

Getting the Lowdown on Hypothyroidism

The thyroid gland consists of two lobes, located in your dog's neck. This gland produces hormones that regulate your Siberian's metabolism. If the thyroid fails to function at its proper level, the condition is called *hypothyroidism* (an underactive thyroid). Many dogs seem to lose thyroid function as they grow older.

Hypothyroidism is a serious, inheritable disorder that's becoming increasingly common in dogs. More females than males are affected, and it usually doesn't show up until the dog is at least 2 years old. Some people believe hypothyroidism is reaching epidemic proportions among many medium to large breeds, including the Siberian Husky.

Hypothyroidism has a multitude of symptoms, including lethargy, lack of coordination, increased weight, inability to tolerate cold or exercise, seizures, aggression, compulsive- or anxiety-related disorders, diarrhea or constipation, loss of hair, a rat tail (a tail without hair), skin problems, and eye problems. Many of these symptoms develop very gradually.

A simple blood test can detect an underactive thyroid. Treatment consists of an inexpensive hormone supplement (Soloxine or Synthroid) in pill form administered twice a day for the rest of the dog's life. In a very few weeks, your Siberian should show signs of improvement.

TECHNICAL STUFF

Some controversy is stirring about whether or not to medicate dogs whose thyroid reading is low but not yet abnormal. One problem is that veterinarians don't yet know if every breed should have the same level of thyroid activity to be considered normal. They do know that the normal level changes throughout the life of the dog. Explore this issue carefully with your veterinarian, keeping in mind that the

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target organ of the disease may not always be the easily noticed skin and hair, but the liver. Many dogs have lost their lives to undiagnosed hypothyroidism. Your vet may advise you to use a hormone supplement if you have concerns over your Husky's test results.

The OFA offers a new registry to identify dogs who have normal thyroid function. A dog must be 1 year old to be eligible for the test and should be retested every year or so. Hypothyroidism usually manifests itself between ages 2 and 5. Properly screened parent dogs must pass three tests, the Free T4 by dialysis test (FT4D), the Canine Thyroid Stimulating Hormone test (cTSH), and the Thyroglobulin Autoantibodies test (TgAA). Dogs who pass these tests can be issued an OFA certification number.

The OFA program is a useful addition to breeding programs; eventually, it may help to drastically reduce the number of dogs born with a propensity toward hypothyroidism. When purchasing a Siberian puppy, ask the breeder if she has submitted the parents of the litter for a thyroid test.

Keeping an Eye Out for Cancer

Cancer is one of the most common dog ailments, especially for the aging canine. The most common type is skin cancer (of which there are many varieties). Most skin tumors found in dogs are benign, but for cancerous ones, early detection is critical. Owners find most cancerous growths themselves, so during your grooming routine, look for any unusual lumps. Fast-growing lumps and hard lumps that seem to be attached to bone or muscle are especially suspicious.

Other common types of cancer include lymphoma, brain tumors, *osteosarcomas* (bone tumors), testicular tumors, and oral tumors. Treatment options include surgery, diet therapy, chemotherapy, and radiation. Treatment isn't always successful.

Dealing with Zinc Malabsorption Disorder

Zinc malabsorption disorder is a genetic condition that Huskies share with Samoyeds and Alaskan Malamutes. In this disease, the intestine doesn't absorb zinc properly. A dog with zinc deficiency will develop noninflammatory lesions on the skin and may lose his hair. He'll need a zinc supplement. Follow the dosage recommended by your veterinarian. You can't use an over-the-counter medication designed for humans for this condition. Your vet will perform a skin biopsy to properly diagnose it and then prescribe a veterinary formulation of zinc methionine.

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Nasal dermatitis is a common skin problem for Huskies and may be related to zinc deficiency. The major signs include pigment loss, hair loss on the nose, redness, and nasal lesions. Of course, other things such as cancer or infection can also be at fault. Talk to your vet. Nasal dermatitis isn't the same thing as Husky snow nose. *Snow nose* is a common phenomenon in Huskies and isn't associated with any disease.

Achoo! Controlling Your Husky's Allergies

Like people, dogs can be allergic to any number of things, the most common being fleas, foods, and inhalants. I knew one dog that was allergic to fescue grass, pine, and maple. I knew another one that was allergic to the family cat. It's also possible for dogs to be allergic to human beings.

Where humans react to many allergies by sneezing, dogs tend to react by exhibiting various skin disorders. These include redness, itchiness, and rawness around the feet, ears, armpits, face, or groin area. In very serious cases, maggots can infest the oozing sores of allergic dogs. Most allergies, especially food allergies, tend to show up when the dog is about 2 years old.

These sections discuss how possible treatments and delve a bit deeper into the kinds of allergies your Husky may have.

Treating allergies

Allergies unfortunately can't be cured; they can only be controlled. Here are some treatments you and your vet can consider:

- **A bath:** For temporary relief from allergies, bathe your dog frequently, using a gentle shampoo. If possible, avoid using tap water, which may contain chemicals that irritate your dog's skin further. Rinse thoroughly with cool water, to which you may add something soothing like witch hazel or peppermint tea. Then apply an herbal deterrent or antibiotic or cortisone spray to help heal the sore spot to prevent your Husky from licking it.
- **Corticosteroids:** They relieve itching but have innumerable side effects. Usually, your vet will prescribe high dosages for a few days, with the amount gradually being reduced over time.
- **Immunotherapy:** It relies on a series of injections to identify allergens and then desensitize the dog to them, but it's slow-acting and can be expensive. Neither is it always successful.

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REMEMBER

The best way to control the allergy is to remove the allergic agent from the dog, but doing so isn't always possible. Fleas can be hunted down and destroyed, but if your dog is allergic to grass, mold, or pollen, you're in for a difficult time.

TIP

Because allergies can be inherited, an allergic dog isn't a good choice to be a parent. Make sure when you get your puppy that the dog's parents have no allergies.

Food allergies

Food allergies account for between 5 and 10 percent of canine allergies. Like other allergies in dogs, they usually manifest themselves as itchy skin, although they have also been implicated in canine inflammatory bowel disease. Head-shaking is another possible symptom of food allergies.

Just because your dog has been on the same diet all his life doesn't mean he hasn't suddenly developed an allergy to one of the ingredients. These things happen. Eliminate the suspect foods from your dog's diet for as long as 16 weeks. Substitute some kind of meat that your dog hasn't eaten before.

Food allergies are notoriously difficult to pin down. Lamb used to be the meat of choice for this purpose, but unfortunately lamb is now a common component of dog foods, so it can no longer be used to test for allergies. People are now using rabbit or venison. If you have a puppy, don't feed him any product containing lamb; that way if he does end up with an allergy later on, you can still use lamb as a high-protein elimination diet.

Many of the fillers commonly found in commercial foods are allergens. The key is to find an elimination diet that contains none of the common foods your dog has been consuming. This includes treats like dog biscuits and rawhide bones. Because food allergies are both fairly uncommon and hard to detect, other sources of allergies should be eliminated first.

There is no cure for food allergies; your dog must simply avoid the suspect foods. Always talk with your vet if you suspect your dog may be allergic to certain foods.

Inhalant allergies

In a dog who is allergic to inhalants, the culprits are often the same ones that affect human beings — dust, mold, and pollen. An allergic Husky will react by scratching, chewing, and licking. He may develop an ear infection, and his skin may become greasy with an uncharacteristically strong odor. These allergies can be identified the same way they are in human beings — by injecting a small amount of the suspect stuff in a shaved patch on the dog.

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Flea allergies

The flea itself probably isn't causing an allergy in your dog, but the proteins present in flea saliva are. If your dog has fleas, the usual scratching symptoms are present. The best cure is prevention — keep the fleas off your dog by using an effective flea-repellant product.

Biting into Dental Problems

A dog's mouth is a perfect quagmire of microbial lifeforms. In fact, over 450 species of bacteria have been found there. Lots of them can cause dental disease, one of the most common afflictions of older dogs. Left unattended, bad teeth can abscess and lead to *septicemia* (blood poisoning) and even serious heart problems. Brush your dog's teeth regularly (see Chapter 12), and make sure he gets regular dental checkups.

Many veterinarians use broad-based antibiotics, in addition to professionally cleaning the teeth, to treat periodontal problems. To save a sick tooth, veterinarians can apply an enamel matrix that actually helps regenerate jaw and gum attachments.

Addressing Bloat

Bloat is a disease that's most common in large breeds with deep chests, but it can and does occur in Huskies. When it hits, it can be deadly, killing a dog within two hours. Its cause is unknown, but predisposing factors seem to include gulping food and air and drinking a lot of water or exercising right after eating. There is a hereditary link also.

In bloat, the dog's stomach becomes distended with gas or fluid (or both). The stomach can then twist, trapping the gas. Not only is the stomach affected, but pressure is put on the large blood vessels of the abdomen, leading to organ failure. Dogs with bloat will vomit (or try to), whine, groan, pace, and salivate. Their stomach may become visibly swollen and sound hollow when tapped.

Treatment for bloat is both expensive and of uncertain success. Often surgery is the only option; it must begin as soon as possible if the stomach has started to twist. Sometimes the veterinarian will perform a procedure called *gastropexy,* in which the stomach is attached to the body cavity in an effort to prevent twisting in the future.

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TIP

The best treatment for bloat is prevention. Feed smaller meals at more frequent intervals, and encourage your dog to eat more slowly by scattering the food over a larger area. Don't exercise your Husky immediately before or after eating.

Understanding Aging Issues in Your Husky

When does a Siberian reach retirement age? Well, if the human retirement age is 67.5 years, your 10-year-old Husky meets the criterion.

REMEMBER

Dogs reach retirement age at various rates. Although it's true that giant breeds like Great Danes and Saint Bernards age more quickly than smaller ones, a great variation exists. Shih Tzus, for instance, age more quickly than Old English Sheepdogs.

In the United States, 14 percent of all canine companions are 11 years old or older. This is a tribute to better veterinary care and to keeping dogs in fenced yards. But aging brings its own difficulties. As dogs grow older, you can expect certain medical problems to occur with more frequency. Among the more common are eye problems, dental disease, hearing loss, Cushing's disease, cancer, arthritis, obesity, and kidney and liver problems.

TIP

Take your older Husky for regular veterinary maintenance checkups, so he can be monitored for the development of any of these diseases. When your Siberian reaches the age of 8 or 9, you should begin geriatric screening.

Older dogs benefit from a good deal of pampering; a bed raised a little off the floor, for example, is easier for him to get in and out of.

REMEMBER

Regular exercise is as important for the old dog as for the young one, even though the exercise won't be as vigorous. An 11-year-old may be past his sled-pulling days, but he won't object to frolicking with you or his canine pals in the backyard.

As far as diet goes, recent research has indicated (somewhat surprisingly) that the older dog requires about 50 percent more protein than a young adult dog! The greater amount of dietary protein is needed to make up for a decreased ability to synthesize protein.

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USING CBD OIL FOR YOUR HUSKY: YES OR NO?

Although more and more people are using CBD, there is currently no formal study on how it affects dogs. CBD (or *cannabidiol,* one of the many chemical compounds found in marijuana and hemp) works by interacting with the receptors of the central and peripheral nervous system. (CBD does not contain THC, the compound that makes marijuana psychoactive. Most CBD products are derived from hemp and not from marijuana itself.)

Some anecdotal evidence indicates it may be helpful in lowering pain, controlling seizures, stimulating the appetite, reducing nausea, and alleviating anxiety. In addition, it possibly may have anti-cancer properties. Currently, researchers at Colorado State University's College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences are studying veterinary use of CBD against seizures. The study is supported by the AKC's Canine Health Foundation.

Canine cognitive dysfunction syndrome (CDS) is a form of senility just recently recognized as a specific disease. If your older dog (10 years or older) suddenly seems confused, withdrawn, sleepless at night, or begins to regress in the housetraining department, suspect CDS. The drug Anipryl (L-deprenyl) has been approved for use in treating CDS. Its active ingredient is selegiline, the same medication used for Parkinson's disease in humans. Dogs with CDS need to take Anipryl for the rest of their lives, but 69 percent of afflicted dogs improve dramatically with treatment. The medication costs between $1.50 and $2 a day.

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Understanding your dog's vital signs
- Assembling a first-aid kit
- Knowing when to call the vet
- Dealing with life-threatening situations calmly and wisely

Chapter 14
Responding to Emergencies

Recognizing an emergency is a necessary skill in dog ownership. Quite simply, it can make the difference between life and death. Dog sicknesses can be serious precisely because dogs are stoic creatures; by the time the dog is actually showing distress, the illness may be far along. Besides, dogs can't tell you when they are sick — they can only show it through their symptoms.

This is why you need to pay attention to small signs, such as lack of appetite, increased thirst, or lethargy. These are often the first symptoms of something seriously wrong. I'm conservative with my dogs; at the first sign of something unusual, I rush them to the vet.

Sometimes, however, you may need to undertake certain measures to help your dog before you can get him to the vet. This chapter is designed to recognize emergency situations and give you a first-line defense.

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Staying on Top of Your Dog's Vital Signs

Having a firm grasp of what a healthy Husky looks like is important so you know when he needs veterinarian help. Here are the important vital signs to keep an eye on:

- **Rectal temperature:** It should be between 100 and 102.5 degrees Fahrenheit. If your dog has a temperature that dips below 99 or goes higher than 104 degrees Fahrenheit, contact your veterinarian right away.
- **Gum color:** This color indicates blood perfusion and oxygenation. Gums should normally be pink. If your dog has dark gums, lower the eyelid and check that, which should also be pink. Pale, blue, or yellow gums is an indication of a serious problem.
- **Capillary refill time:** This is rough indicator of your dog's circulatory health. Press your dog's gums and release. The gums should whiten but return to the normal pink color in a second or two. Slower or faster can indicate a serious problem.
- **Heart rate:** This is widely variable, but a Husky should have a heart rate of about 60 beats per minute. (The bigger the dog, the slower the heart.) You may be able to detect the heartbeat on the left side of the chest. If you can't, you may be able to check the pulse rate, most easily found in the femoral artery, on the inside of the dog's thigh.
- **Respiratory rate:** A normal dog breathes 10 to 30 times a minute, but heavily panting dogs can breathe 200 pants per minute. Observe your dog while he's relaxing at your feet to see his breathing rate. Call your vet if you notice any irregularities with his breathing.

TIP

If you notice any of the following symptoms, call the vet because they can indicate serious issues:

- Blood in feces, urine, or vomit
- Pale gums
- Persistent coughing
- Seizure or shaking
- Prolonged lethargy
- Unexplained weight loss
- Refusal to eat (for 48 hours) or drink (for 12 hours)

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GET A DOGWATCH CAMERA

Spotting a problem is easy when you're right next to your dog and he has a seizure. But what if you're away from home? Consider getting a security camera designed to watch your furry friend. Some cameras are designed to alert you even if your dog barks, and some actually dispense treats to an upset dog. A few have two-way speakers, so you can chat up your Husky while at work, but I don't really advise this; it can be too confusing for him.

Assembling the Complete Pet First-Aid Kit for Your Husky

Be prepared for any emergency by assembling a first-aid kit for your Husky. You can use an old fishing tackle box or lightweight tool box for this purpose. On the inside of the box, write down the correct dosage for medication for each of your pets. And remember to keep your first-aid medications current. Include a copy of vet records and tape emergency numbers to the lid (and a copy of same for your refrigerator door), including the ER vet, your own vet, and poison control.

REMEMBER

You can buy a ready-made kit or make one up yourself. In either case, here's what should go into every Husky first-aid kit:

- Ace bandage
- Activated charcoal
- Adhesive tape and gauze
- Alcohol prep pads
- Antibiotic ointment
- Benadryl antihistamine (1 to 2 milligrams per pound, every 8 hours)
- Cold pack
- Cotton balls
- Disposable gloves
- Ear and oral syringe
- Electrolyte tablets to rehydrate
- Epsom salts

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- Eye wash or lubricant (the kind made for people is fine)
- Gauze sponges
- Hydrogen peroxide (1 to 3 teaspoons every 10 minutes until the dog vomits)
- Imodium A-D (1 milligram per 15 pounds, once or twice daily)
- Kaopectate (1 milliliter per 1 pound every 2 hours)
- Magnifying glass
- Milk of magnesia, antacid and laxative
- Mineral oil, laxative (5 to 30 milliliters per day)
- Pepto-Bismol, anti-diarrheal (1 teaspoon per 5 pounds, every six hours) or tablets
- Petroleum jelly
- Providone-iodine solution
- Rectal thermometer (specifically made for canine use)
- Rubbing alcohol
- Safety pins
- Soft cloth muzzle
- Scissors (small blunt-end type)
- Splints
- Tweezers or hemostat

Administering Meds

Throughout your Husky's life, you'll need to give him medicine for ailments, injuries, and prevention. If you've ever had a dog, then you know how giving meds can be a challenge. You may also need to check his pulse or temperature. The following tips can help make it easier:

- **Giving him pills:** The easiest way to administer pills to your Husky is to stick the pill in some peanut butter or a slice of hot dog. If the dog refuses to go along with this ploy, you may have to adminster it yourself. You can place it on the back of his mouth, close his mouth, and breathe gently in his nose, which usually makes him swallow.

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» **Giving liquid medications:** The best way to give a dog liquid medication is to sneak it into his food. Dogs are so greedy that this ploy usually works. If not, use a syringe. Just pull your dog's lower lip away from their teeth and create a pouch, inserting the medicine that way.

Handling Accidents

In case of an accident, you may need to restrain your dog either by muzzling him or binding his feet. If you have no muzzle handy, you can make one from a strip of cloth or nylons crossed over his nose and tied behind his neck (see Figure 14-1). Loosen the muzzle periodically to allow him to pant or vomit. In severe cases, you may need to throw a blanket over him.

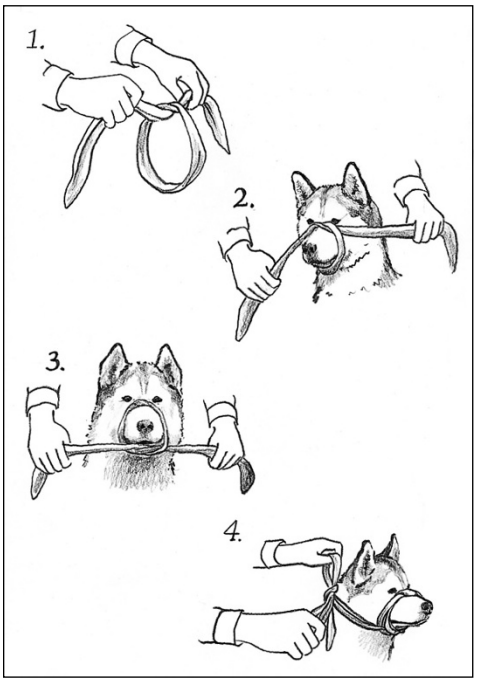

FIGURE 14-1: How to make an emergency muzzle.

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WARNING

Avoid moving an injured dog unless you have to do so.

If your dog has been struck by a car, assume the worst. Even if he trots away apparently unaffected, he may have internal injuries. Take him to a vet just to be safe.

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Serious symptoms include bleeding from the nose, mouth, and ears, although some internal injuries are slower in making themselves noticed. More subtle warning signs include pale gums, weakness, or general listlessness. By the time you notice these symptoms, it may be too late.

Dealing with Bites

The curious Siberian is forever poking his nose where it doesn't belong. Many times he'll be rewarded with a sharp and sometime poisonous reprisal. The following sections touch on what you can do when your Siberian is bit by a snake or spider.

Snakebite

Dogs are curious by nature, and a number of them get popped in the nose or leg every year by snakes. Most snakebites are nonvenomous, but even a nonvenomous bite can lead to infection.

Snake venom is a complicated mess of enzymes, peptides, and proteins. It can affect the nervous, muscular, and urinary systems. To make things worse, snakebites hurt. Treatment includes intravenous fluids, antivenin, steroids, and antibiotics. The good news is dogs usually survive even bites from venomous snakes. Because snakes can control the amount of venom they release, many bites are just a warning to an intrusive dog.

If your dog should happen to become a victim, do the following:

1. **Identify the snake that bit your dog.**

   Take a photo of the offending serpent if you can do so safely, but don't spend much time trying to do so. Your dog needs your attention.

2. **Check your dog for bite/fang marks.**

   Nonvenomous snakes usually leave only teeth marks. Deep fang wounds indicate a viper attack. (The exception is the coral snake, which doesn't have large fangs,)

3. **If you see marks, wrap a constricting band just about the bite.**

   You can actually purchase one for your first-aid kit. One of the best known is the appropriately named BOA constrictor band. If your Husky tries to remove the constricting band, muzzle him, but more than likely he won't.

4. **Drive your dog to the vet.**

   Try to keep both of you calm.

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WARNING

Don't try to cut the wound and suck the poison out! It's probably too late for that anyway, and you'll only end up making yourself sick.

Spider bites

There may be 100,000 different species of spiders in the world, and sooner or later, one of them will probably bite your dog, purely as a defensive move. Almost every species of spider is venomous, but the venom of most is very weak — good enough to paralyze a fly, but just a minor irritation to people and dogs. The United States has three kinds of dangerously venomous spiders:

- **Brown recluse:** The bite of the brown recluse is especially nasty, because it not only makes a dog sick, but it also results in ulcerated flesh around the bite. Often the skin necroses and falls away from the wound.
- **Black widow:** The venom of a black widow is a neurotoxin, but although nasty and dangerous, it doesn't cause ulcerating wounds.
- **Hobo spider:** The hobo spider is usually found outdoors. The bite usually isn't particularly toxic to humans, although pain, redness, and twitching can occur in your Husky.

TIP

If possible, capture the offending spider and bring it with you to the veterinarian. Unfortunately, of course, you'll unlikely be present when your dog is bitten or notice the bite. If you just suspect a spider bite, take your Husky to the vet as soon as possible.

Stopping External (Wound) Bleeding

Apply direct pressure with a clean cloth. Minor bleeding should stop in five minutes. For major wounds, keep applying pressure until you get your Husky to a vet. Use an ice pack if necessary. Rectal bleeding can be a symptom of parvovirus, whereas bleeding from the vulva can indicate *pyometra* (a serious disease of unspayed females) or other internal infections.

Keeping a Lookout for Bloat

A hard, swollen abdomen is a sign of bloat. The swelling is caused by an accumulation of gas, although veterinarians still aren't sure why it sometimes happens. The bloated stomach then twists, and your dog will die without treatment. Get to

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the vet immediately; there is no time to lose. Dogs can die within minutes or hours if the condition is untreated. Refer to Chapter 13 for more discussion about knowing what to do when you see your dog is bloated. Luckily Huskies aren't high on the list of breeds prone to this condition.

Addressing Breathing Difficulties

If your Husky is having trouble breathing, it's a major emergency. Labored respiration, gasping, and a blue tongue are danger signals.

Stabilizing Broken Bones

If your Husky has an injured leg, tie the leg to a temporary splint made of a board or something similar. Place the leg in as natural a position as possible, but don't try to set it yourself. If the back, pelvis, or ribs seem broken, stabilize the dog as quickly as possible without repositioning him, and get him to a vet.

Paying Attention to Coughing

Coughing can be a symptom of anything from heartworm to secondhand smoke. Pay attention to the elements of the cough. Is it hacking or wheezing? Gagging? How often does your dog cough? This information is important for your vet to know.

Tackling Digestive Issues

Your Husky can face any number of digestive issues, including diarrhea, constipation, or vomiting. I discuss them at greater length in the following sections.

Diarrhea

Diarrhea may result from a simple digestive upset, although it can also be a sign of something more serious, including allergies for food intolerance, a dietary change, stress, or parasites. If the diarrhea doesn't last more than a day or so, it probably isn't anything to worry about. However, if you notice a continued or

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frequently recurring digestive upset, have a vet check him out. Diarrhea is also more serious in very young or elderly dogs.

TIP

The most common cause of ordinary diarrhea in dogs is what professionals in the field call *dietary indiscretion,* which in plain English means your dog has been eating trash, or something similar. So, if your dog has a bout of diarrhea, try to discover what he ate in the past 6 to 12 hours. If your Husky ate something like trash, the diarrhea will probably go away after it works through his system.

TIP

Simple diarrhea (without vomiting or other serious symptoms) can often be alleviated by added a bit of canned pumpkin to his food. If the condition doesn't clear up in a day or so, check with your vet. Just make sure you don't use pumpkin pie filling because that's full of sugar. You're just interested in the fiber.

REMEMBER

Bloody feces, bloody urine, or straining are all indications of trouble. If you notice one of those conditions, take your Husky to the vet as soon as possible.

Constipation

Constipation is the opposite problem to diarrhea. Most canine constipation results from your dog swallowing stuff that he can't digest very well, like part of chew toys, grass, or hair. Kidney disease or an enlarged prostate can also cause constipation. Take your dog's temperature. If it's high, get him to vet.

If you actually see grass or hair in the anus, you can (wearing gloves, of course) gently try to ease it out. Snipping away excess hair and gently washing the area in warm water is important.

Vomiting

Dogs have the ability to throw up with ease, and almost anything can cause it: trash eating, diet change, poison, allergy, infection, and so on. Most vomiting in dogs is pretty benign, but it can also indicate a serious condition, such as kidney, pancreatic, or liver disease or diabetes. If it continues, talk to your vet.

If you have the stomach for it (pardon the pun), you can discover a lot by investigating your dog's vomit. You actually find the offending item in there. If you find blood or something that looks like coffee grounds, it may indicate your dog is bleeding into his intestinal tract. Green vomit? I'd suspect rat poison.

DUMMIES APPROVED

To help your dog over a round of vomiting (or diarrhea), a little Pepto-Bismol works wonders. Fifty-pound dogs require a little over a tablespoon. The liquid kind seems to work better than the pills but is harder to administer. Have your dog skip a meal or two afterward, and follow with a bland, low-fat diet.

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TIP

The best way to get the liquid in your dog is with a syringe (minus the needle, of course), available from your vet or drugstore. In a pinch, you'd be surprised how well a turkey baster works.

If the vomiting (or diarrhea) continues, take your dog to the vet, and bring a stool sample with you. The more you can tell your vet about the digestive episodes (timing, frequency, severity, and so on), the more help you can be in making the diagnosis.

Attending to Choking

Choking can occur when a foreign object gets stuck in the airway. It can also happen if the throat is severely swollen (usually an allergic reaction) or the neck is constricted by an overtight collar or rope.

If your Husky is choking due to the presence of a foreign body, do one of the following to dislodge the item:

- **Reach gently inside the mouth and remove any visible foreign object.** (Don't go by just feel. People unfamiliar with canine anatomy have accidentally yanked on the delicate bones at the base of the tongue.)
- **Lift up your Husky's rear legs with his head pointed downward, which may dislodge it.** (If your Husky is small and you're tall, picking him up with this technique is even better.)
- **Sharply strike the dog with the palm of your hand between his shoulder blades.** Do it once or twice. If it doesn't dislodge the item, do the Heimlich maneuver.
- **Perform the Heimlich maneuver for dogs.** Clutch your dog around the waist from behind. Place your fist right behind her ribs. Compress the abdomen three to five times quickly.

Cooling Down Heat Stress

Huskies are extremely susceptible to heat stress. Signs include staggering, loud panting, vomiting, bright red gums, and a red, bleary look in the eyes. The body temperature may rise above 104 degrees. If your Siberian exhibits these symptoms, quickly provide water, submerse the dog in a tub of cool water, or apply cold wet towels. Then call your veterinarian.

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Heat can also increase the chances of your dog getting a fungal infection.

REMEMBER

There's an old saying that a cold, wet nose means a healthy nose. This isn't necessarily true. However, a hot, dry nose *may* indicate the first stages of dehydration; see if your dog would like some water. If his nose stays hot and dry, and if there are other symptoms, consult your veterinarian.

Treating Poisonings

For most poisonings, other than caustics like Drano, making the dog vomit is a good first step.

TIP

To induce vomiting, force down a solution of one of the following:

- Half water and half peroxide (1 to 3 teaspoons of each)
- Lukewarm saltwater (2 or 3 tablespoons of salt per cup)
- 1 tablespoon of dry mustard in 1 cup of water

If the dog doesn't vomit soon afterward, repeat the dosage while waiting for veterinary care.

TIP

After the dog has vomited (or if you can't get him to vomit), give him 4 tablespoons of activated charcoal to absorb the remaining poison.

The following sections address a few specific types of poisoning that your Husky may encounter.

Antifreeze poisoning

Antifreeze depresses the central nervous system and enters the cerebrospinal fluid. Symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, and a staggering gait, which may lead you to wonder if the animal is drunk. Unfortunately, these symptoms may not appear for 8 to 12 hours, after irreparable damage has been done to your pet.

If you suspect your dog has ingested antifreeze, get him to your emergency veterinarian immediately. Don't wait to see if the dog appears sick. Treatment is most effective if given within four hours after your dog drinks the fluid. The best antidote for dogs now on the market is 4-methylpyrazole, sold under the brand name Antizol.

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Chocolate poisoning

Dogs love chocolate, but it contains a substance called *theobromine,* which is toxic to canines. Theobromine is also present in tea and cola. The darker the chocolate, the more theobromine there is in the chocolate. Milk chocolate isn't as toxic, especially to a larger dog. To be sure, check with your vet.

Symptoms of chocolate poisoning include vomiting, diarrhea, frantic running around (even worse than usual), and frequent urination. If you're able to take your dog's pulse, you'll also notice a faster, more irregular heartbeat. Hydrogen peroxide can be used to make the dog vomit, if the dog has eaten the chocolate within the previous two hours. In any case, call your veterinarian immediately.

Onion and garlic poisoning

Onions can destroy canine red blood cells by oxidizing the hemoglobin inside them, reducing their ability to transport oxygen to the rest of the body. An onion-poisoned dog may become anemic. A quarter cup of onions can do a job on a medium-sized dog. It makes no difference whether the onions are cooked or not. The condition isn't permanent, but dogs poisoned with onions have been known to need a blood transfusion.

Large amounts of garlic can have the same effect as onions.

Rat poison

Keep rat poison away from pets. But mistakes do happen. Rat poison is extremely palatable to dogs, as well as to rats, cats, and kids, so it's vital to keep it locked up.

The dog next door, Buddy, was poisoned in just such a way; he managed to jump against a not so very securely latched door and eat two cakes of poison.

The poison is an anticoagulant, so the symptoms may not show up for three to five days before you notice anything is wrong. By the time you notice the symptoms, your dog may bleed to death internally right before your eyes.

If you even suspect your Husky has been exposed to rat poison, induce vomiting immediately, and get him to the veterinarian. The vet will probably begin vitamin K injections three times a day for a couple of days to be followed by vitamin K pills for one to three weeks afterward. This regimen saved the life of Buddy, who never showed a symptom from his unorthodox eating habits.

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Taking Care of Porcupine Quills

The insatiably curious Siberian, if left to his own devices, may run afoul of a porcupine, a slow-moving denizen of the northern woods. Get to a veterinarian if possible. If you can't get to a vet, you can try to extract the quills with pliers. It's important to get out *all* the quills, so you don't risk infection in your dog. (This is another reason never to let your Siberian off lead.)

Managing Seizures

Seizures are frequently a sign of epilepsy, although there may be other causes as well, such as sleep deprivation, food allergies, overused supplements, toxins like heavy metal and flea dips, hypoglycemia, and dehydration. Signs include staggering, head tilting, sudden blindness, snapping, jerking, or unaccountable aggressiveness. Seizures are frightening, but rarely life-threatening. After the seizure is over, the dog will usually come to you for reassurance and love.

TIP

During a seizure, the dog isn't aware of himself or his surroundings. Remove dangerous objects, but try not to touch the dog. If a seizure continues for more than 30 minutes, it's an emergency. Immediately take the dog to the veterinarian. Devise a makeshift stretcher with a blanket. Keep a record of the length, frequency, and symptoms of all seizures.

Aiding Wounds

Major wounds may require stitches; you can handle minor ones yourself. Penetrating wounds in the abdomen or chest areas should be considered major emergencies.

TIP

Clean the wound carefully, removing any hair or debris in it. Hydrogen peroxide is no longer recommended to clean wounds, because it can damage tissues. Use commercial wound cleaner like Nolvasan or even soap and water. Wash the wound thoroughly, for at least 10 minutes (most people do not wash the wound thoroughly enough).

TIP

If the wound is a puncture-type wound or an abscess, contact your veterinarian.

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5 Bringing Out the Sled Dog in Your Siberian

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IN THIS PART . . .

Discover what your Husky can do if you hitch him to a sled. In fact, Siberian Huskies were made for sledding, so if you enjoy the colder weather, then take your dog out to have some fun.

See what your Husky's ancestors did and how Huskies today race in the world-famous Iditarod race in Alaska.

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IN THIS CHAPTER

» Understanding the sport of sledding

» Getting a sled dog

Chapter 15
Sledding with Your Siberian

Most people associate the Siberian Husky with sled dog racing, a practice that developed during the Alaskan Gold Rush of 1896. It didn't become a formal institution, however, until 1908, the year of the first All Alaska Sweepstakes Race.

Pulling a sled is what Siberian Huskies were bred for. It comes more naturally to them than any other canine sport. So, if you want to make the most of your Husky's noble heritage, you can't go wrong in hooking him up to a sled or cart. This chapter gives you the lowdown on all thing sledding with your Husky.

Sledding 101: The Basics of the Sport

Sledding and Huskies go hand in hand. In fact, the proud owner and sledding Huskies are in seventh heaven (as Figure 15-1 shows). The following sections delve a bit deeper and give you what you need to know to better understand sledding, including what teams consist of, what happens during races, some important terms to know so you don't sound like a sledding newbie, and essential equipment every musher needs.

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FIGURE 15-1: Sled dog racing is a great way for Husky owners to have fun with their dogs.

Photo by Dave and Bonnie Lundberg

Identifying a sledding team's makeup

In sled dog racing, the dogs are paired up on either side of a *gangline.* The line that connects the dog to the gangline is called the *tugline.* The *neckline,* a thin line attached to the dog's collar, keeps the dog close to the gangline. You'll often see sled dogs leaping from one side of the gangline to the other as they try to avoid curves.

Professional teams have up to 20 dogs. The lead dogs are selected for their intelligence and willingness to lead (some nice dogs just prefer to follow along). *Mushers* (the sled's drivers) are equal opportunity employers. Both male and female dogs are used as lead dogs.

If two lead dogs are used, they're called *co-leaders.* Most dogs appear to prefer having a co-leader than to run alone. Following the leader are the point dogs. Most mushers put their fastest dogs in this position, although sleds must obviously go at the speed of the slowest dog.

The *swing dogs,* who follow the point dogs, are responsible for turning the sled and other dogs in the direction of the lead dogs. Swing dogs must be strong and determined. They are responsible for making sure the turning sled doesn't veer off course and crash into a tree. Point and swing dogs are often leader dogs in training.

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The following pairs of dogs (if any) are called the *team dogs* and keep the entire group moving. Closest to the sled are the *wheel dogs*, who are the largest and most powerful dogs on the sled, pulling the most weight.

Keep in mind that the team I describe here is a deluxe team! You can mush with just one dog. And when you're first learning the ropes, that's by far the best plan.

When it comes to sled dog racing, probably the most difficult aspect is finding a place to train. You can't train on concrete or in a dense forest, so your options may be pretty limited. The best thing is to join a sled dog club that sponsors meets and has access to training areas.

REMEMBER

Unless a dog team is properly socialized and taught to respect its human leader, the team can become a pack with its own leader and its own rules. As the human, you must remain in control at all times. A team of Huskies is much stronger than any one person, so you need to use common sense and fair treatment to keep your natural position as leader.

REMEMBER

Siberian Huskies actually run best when the temperature is 15 or 20 degrees below zero, so get out your mukluks! In the warm, snowless off-season, dogs are conditioned on three- or four-wheeled training rigs.

Examining today's racing world

In today's sled dog world, dogs generally compete in one of the following races:

- Three dogs and three miles
- Six dogs and six miles
- Eight dogs and nine miles
- The unlimited class — up to 20 dogs at 14 miles or more. Recently, a team of 210 dogs was harnessed to a flatbed truck (with a sled in front). The dogs pulled it with no difficulty.

A few of the more notable international races include the following:

- **Iditarod:** The premier event of sled dog racing is, of course, the Iditarod. It runs over 1,000 miles and is the longest sled dog race in the world. It was organized to honor the memory of Leonhard Seppala, who organized the 1925 run to Nome with diphtheria serum, saving the inhabitants from almost certain death. It's worth well more than $50,000 to the winning driver. See Chapter 16 for more on the Iditarod.

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- **Yukon Quest:** Another Alaskan and Canadian event, the Yukon Quest is a 1,000-mile run across rough terrain.
- **Fairbanks North American Championship:** This race covers 70 miles in three days.
- **Fur Rendezvous Sled Dog Race:** Commonly known as the *Rondy,* this 70-mile race is held every year in Anchorage.

"GOSH, THEY LOOK THIN!"

Like human long-distance runners and thoroughbred horses, a well-conditioned racing dog is lean (but not mean). It's not that the dogs are poorly fed; in fact, most of them consume more calories per day than the average person. It's just that they burn off the calories they consume.

Using commercial dog food as a complete diet is out of the question for serious drivers. These foods may be adequate for a house dog, but they simply don't provide the nutritional value a racing animal needs. Commercial foods tend to be low in fat, which is good for sedentary pets but bad for the working Siberian. Fats provide quick energy for dogs. Racing dogs may eat a diet that contains 50 percent fat, 35 percent protein, and 15 percent carbohydrates. Mushers do sometimes use a base commercial diet, supplemented with ground meat, liver, oils, and fish.

Racing sled dogs are fed four or five times a day. They often dine on salmon and other rich, high-protein foods, to the tune of more than 5,000 calories a day. Siberians get along with less than other racing sled dogs, some of whom consume nearly twice as much. This food frequently smells awful, by the way.

Racing dogs also drink an enormous amount of water. They don't eat snow. Eating snow is a dehydrating activity, because it takes the body more energy to melt the snow than the snow provides by way of water. You never see Eskimos eating snow, do you?

Serious mushers are always seeking a diet that will give their dogs a winning edge. Brian Patrick O'Donoghue, in his book *My Lead Dog Was a Lesbian,* tells of a horrific stew called "honey balls," a nightmarish concoction of raw hamburger, honey, corn oil, and bonemeal, all stirred up in the bathtub with a broken hockey stick. The resulting product was too awful to use.

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The International Sled Dog Racing Association (ISDRA) sanctions these events. ISDRA also mandates safety regulations, trail conditions, and required mushing equipment. The welfare of both dogs and drivers is paramount. Dogs must be certified healthy and free of contagious diseases. Dangerous equipment like choke collars and muzzles are forbidden, and the canine athletes are routinely tested for drugs. Even aspirin is illegal.

In the continental United States, Idaho, New Hampshire, and Minnesota each host sled dog championships. Often, races for kids are offered, and many have torchlight parades, Mushers' Balls, and all sorts of thrilling Winter Carnival–like events.

Watching a sled race

If you get a chance, try to observe a sled race. It's an amazing event to watch, even if you don't feel the urge to try it yourself. Don't bring your own dogs, however, because they can be distracting to the canine athletes, especially if they break away and go charging into the middle of the course. You're free to take all the photos you like, but keep well away from the trail as the dogs rush past!

TIP

Ask permission of owners before petting their dogs, and don't give the animals any treats.

You'll often have some time before the race to observe the animals being harnessed and readied for their task, so this isn't a good time to talk to mushers about their hobby. However, after the race has begun, you can probably have a chat with the handlers, friends, and sled dog groupies about the joys of sled dog racing.

Understanding some mushing lexicon

Verbal commands are critical in the world of sled sports. The driver has no reins to guide the team; he relies on his voice and the common sense and obedience of his lead dog.

Mushers today say, "Hike!" instead of "Mush!" just like a quarterback. Sometimes they say, "Go!" The word "mush" is a corruption of the French "March!" meaning, "Get along! Walk on!" Some say that "mush" was felt to be too soft, and well, mushy a word for the drivers, who nevertheless, are still known as mushers. Go figure.

- **Gee!:** Turn right! This term and Haw both come from old draft-horse terminology.
- **Haw!:** Turn left! Some people just say "left" or "right," but the nice thing about Gee and Haw is that they're the same all over the world, in every language.
- **Tshckt!:** Keep going!

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- **Go by! (or On by!):** Pass on, pay no attention to whatever is distracting you!
- **Trail!:** Yield the right of way!
- **Whoa!:** Stop! (More horse lingo.)

THE ALL ALASKA SWEEPSTAKES RACE

In 1909, the Russian fur trader William Goosak showed up in Nome with his nine Siberian Huskies to enter the All Alaska Sweepstakes Race. This famous race had been first run the year before in 1908 — a 408-mile dash from Nome to Candle. It was a vicious marathon that took in every hideous variety of weather and landscape that its architects could devise, including forests, tundra, narrow declivities, and a glacier or two.

The first prize for the All Alaska Sweepstakes Race was $10,000 dollars; that was a lot of money back in 1909, even if you did have to win a 408-mile race to get it.

Few people in Alaska had seen Siberians at that time, although there were plenty of other dogs around. The rugged Alaskans weren't particularly impressed with the newcomers.

Most Alaskans scoffed at the idea that the slender, 50-pound Siberians could be a match for the heavy-boned bruisers competing against them. They seemed too refined — and too short legged. The Nomers cheerfully dubbed the Huskies "Siberian Rats." Undeterred, Goosak hired a musher named Louis Thrustrup to pilot his team. Thrustrup then proceeded to come in third — at odds of 100 to 1. He probably would have won, had he not made a serious tactical blunder by not properly resting his dogs.

All sorts of nasty things were said about race-fixing and the like, but none of it was ever proved. Besides, if one were going to fix a race, it seems as if one would fix it to *win.* At any rate, it's probably a good thing the Siberians didn't win after all, for it was claimed that if they had, the Bank of Alaska would have gone broke, considering the number of bets laid against them. (The Bank of Alaska didn't have all that much money in 1909.)

Watching the race (and suitably impressed with the Siberians' performance) was Fox Maule Ramsay, a young Scottish businessman. He had come to Alaska interested in mining possibilities but became entranced with the Huskies instead — so much so, in fact, that he chartered a schooner to Siberia and bought 60 of the best racing stock he could find. By the time of the 1910 All Alaska, Ramsay entered the race with not one but *three* teams. Ramsay's teams placed first and second, and suddenly everyone was talking about the little dogs with the big hearts — which is still true today.

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Recognizing basic mushing equipment

The sport of sled dog racing isn't an inexpensive one. Here's a list of the basic equipment mushers need (prices can vary):

- **Sled:** Either a basket or toboggan type of sled will work. The former is better for beginners. Expect to spend $300 to $1,000 for a good sled. You can even get a fold-up sled for easy storage. These fold-up vehicles have no brake. You can also buy a cart; some carts can be used with or without snow.
- **X-back harness:** The x-back harness is just the traditional sled-pulling harness. You'll spend $50 for a good harness.
- **Gangline or towline:** The long rope that runs down the middle of the dog team. Tuglines are attached to it. A gangline or towline starter costs about $30.
- **Sled bag:** A sled bag isn't absolutely necessary to buy, especially for beginners. It's designed to carry gear. Prices are highly variable.
- **Snow hook:** A kind of emergency brake, a snow hook is used like an anchor in the snow and costs about $10 to $15.
- **Booties:** Huskies wear them to keep their feet protected from ice or slush. They run between $3 and $4 each for high quality booties suitable for sledding, unless you buy them in bulk, which you may want to do, because they do wear out and get lost.
- **Snubline:** A rope that attaches the sled to a tree or post while resting.

Getting a Sled Dog

If you're seriously interested in sled dogging, you should purchase a dog from a kennel specializing in breeding Siberians for sledding. But even this is a gamble, because kennels try to keep the best stock for themselves in order to improve their line. (The true qualities of a sled dog may not show up until he's about 18 months old.)

Still, sometimes kennels can be overstocked with males and may be able to sell you a very good sledding prospect. Even without a specially bred sled dog, however, you can still enjoy this exciting hobby. Most Huskies can happily learn to pull a sled.

A sledding or racing Siberian often looks a little different from his conformation counterpart. He's usually a bit rangier, with longer legs, and perhaps bigger feet. Many of the working or racing Siberians don't possess the classic close-set, inward-pointing ears of the conformation dog.

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In addition to physical prowess, mushers look for several key mental elements in a good mushing dog: attitude, a good work ethic, trainability, and a desire to please.

Sledding for Fun

It's said that a dog comes by mushing ability half through heredity and half by training. But if your object is just to have fun rather than to race competitively, it's important to note that almost any Husky can be trained to pull a sled. You don't need to worry about getting a high-quality racing dog. (This is a good thing, because a premium trained racing dog can cost upward of $5,000, if you can find one at all.)

TIP

Even if you're not sure whether you would like sledding or into owning a team of Huskies and becoming an amateur (or professional musher), you can still get a taste of the sport by going on one of the many sledding adventures available to the general public in most northern states. Many outfits run excursions of 30 or 90 minutes and offer both day and (thrillingly) night trips. You'll be accompanied by a professional *musher* (driver) and eight to ten dogs per sled. There is a person/poundage limit per sled for the sake of the dogs, but it's an unusual experience that can't be beat. Many companies can accommodate persons with special needs as well.

TIP

If possible, find a mentor to help you get started. Doing so can be as simple as contacting your local Siberian Husky Club or Sled Dog Club, and asking if someone will allow you to train with them. Most mushers are friendly and helpful people and will be glad to lend a helping hand to a neophyte.

You can teach your Husky to wear a pulling harness when he's about 5 months old, although some racing experts start earlier, using a soft harness designed to be attached to a small log. Make sure your Husky learns to pull a sled when wearing a harness and to heel when wearing a collar. Your job is to make sure he gets the connection. Stay behind the dog when teaching him to pull — don't lead him or walk along next to him. Start on a well-marked path — that will get him used to the idea of walking on a trail.

Serious training begins when the dog is about 1 year old, usually in the fall during cool weather. Most people try to place the pup in an established, harmonious team of dogs, so he can learn from example how to behave properly. Sled dogs must learn to get along with one another! The puppy's first jobs are to learn how to pay attention to his pulling, stay on the trail, socialize with the team, and listen to the musher (that's you). Start with short runs and gradually increase the length of your trips as your dog builds up his muscle and strength. (Fully grown racing dogs train from 10 to 90 miles every other day during racing season.)

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Understanding the history of the Iditarod
- Seeing where the Iditarod is today

Chapter 16
The Last Great Race: The Iditarod

For most people, the name *Husky* is synonymous with *sled dog,* and *sled dog* means *Iditarod.* The Iditarod is much more than a sporting event, however. It's a final test of stamina, loyalty, and courage. It's a commemoration of the Great Serum Run. And it's a glorious celebration of the great sport of sled dog racing. The Iditarod is also one of the few sporting events in which men and women compete equally. This chapter gives you a quick overview of the famous race. You can dream of your favorite Husky mushing over the frozen tundra in the warmth and safety of your living room.

Understanding How It Began: The Start of the Iditarod

The 1,000-mile race called the Iditarod was first run in 1973, the brain child of Dorothy G. Page, a native of Wasilla, Alaska. Page was worried by the fact that because snowmobiles had been invented, no one seemed to remember the Great Serum Run or any other feats of the famous sled dogs of the past.

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HOW FAST CAN A DOG RUN?

Running speed is connected to size, body shape, and length. For example, the streamlined Greyhound is the fastest breed, averaging 45 miles per hour in a race, with top performers hitting more than 50 mph. Huskies can sprint up to 28 miles an hours (not pulling a sled). They go at 20 miles an hour for about 50 miles.

Iditarod dogs don't have to be Siberians or any purebred dog at all. Most, in fact, are Siberians mixed with other breeds by mushers hoping for just the right combination of speed and stamina for long-distance racing. In fact, Iditarod mushers often use Greyhound mixes in their team, although a purebred Greyhound in the Iditarod would be completely unsuitable — for one thing, the dog would have a lack of a reasonable amount of fur for the cold.

Fifteen dogs died during the race in the first year of the competitive Iditarod, and 16 died the following year, not an especially large number in a race in which wind chill can reach minus 100 degrees. That intense temperature isn't healthy for anyone, even the hardiest Husky.

She approached Joe Redington, and together they organized the first Iditarod Trail Race in 1967. It wasn't much compared to the Iditarod today — only 27 miles long. This sprint was run again in 1969.

The Pages and Redingtons raised money for the event by donating an acre of land and selling square-foot "lots" with official certificates. They actually managed to scare up $10,000 by this scheme, and eventually the purse swelled to $25,000.

That first year, mushers from all over Alaska (and two from Massachusetts) entered. The race was won by Isaac Okleasik, and the Iditarod was born.

Naturally, the Pages and Redingtons weren't going to be satisfied with a mere 27-mile dash; they had their eyes on bigger things. Unexpectedly, they got some help from the United States Army, which decided, for reasons of its own, to open the sled trail all the way to Nome in 1973, thus following the old Gold Trail from Anchorage to Nome.

Following the Trail

The race begins in downtown Anchorage on the first Saturday in March. Most years, more than 1,000 dogs compete for the prize. The contestants then run 8 or 10 miles to Eagle River, which is a chance for mushers to check out their dogs

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and equipment. This is really a ceremonial, symbolic start and is followed by the official restart in Willow, a city 80 miles north. Up through 2007, the start was Wasilla, but global warming has affected the area so badly that there hasn't been sufficient snow in recent years.

A number of *joy riders* or *Iditariders* go along for the first leg, which is purely a ceremonial start. It doesn't count for overall time, and after the dogs get to the VFW Post in Eagle River, they're all loaded up in trucks and sent home for the night.

The Iditarod trail isn't a static stretch of road. In even years it follows a northern track, and in odd years a southern one. During the first years of Iditarod competition, only the northern trail was used. However, the small villages along the route were being negatively impacted by the mushers racing through their villages, and so the decision was made to alternate the trail, relieving places like Ruby, Galena, and Nulato of having to deal with thousands of extra dogs and people (including the press). Southern villages like Shageluk, Anvik, and Grayling were able to participate for the first time. (The ghost town of Iditarod is also on the southern trail.)

Most of the route is through tundra and spruce forest, with an occasional pass through a lonely village.

After the mushers reach the checkpoint at Knik, they say good-bye to roads for the rest of the race. Between 9 and 12 days later, depending on weather conditions, the first of the mushers will reach Nome.

Looking at the Iditarod Today

Usually between 50 and 80 teams compete, although few have any chance of winning. For most, finishing the famous race is enough of an honor. In 2000, a record number of 81 drivers did so. The following sections break down different facets of the race in bite-size pieces.

Entering the race

Not everyone with a sled and a bunch of dogs is eligible to run the Iditarod. Each team must

- **Pay the entry fee.** The entry fee is now $4,000. (The entry fee originally was $1,049, a dollar for every mile run.) In fact, everyone who finishes the race (after the top 20, who get larger cash prizes) receives $1,049 for his efforts — a dollar for every mile run.

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- **Pay all other related costs.** The associated costs can include the following:
  - **Transportation:** The Iditarod requires the musher to pay for flying the dogs home from the finish line in Nome, along with themselves, at least one handler, and the gear. That costs around $1,500.
  - **Lodging and food:** A team can expect to pay around $1,500 for lodging and food for the week before the race. During the race, mushers spend about $250 for their food.
  - **Handler:** If the team hires a handler, it'll cost about $500.
  - **Equipment:** Believe it or not, a team can count on spending (wait for it) $1,800 for dog booties for the whole team for the whole race.
  - **Dog food:** The dog food costs around $2,400 (which includes 1,200 to 1,800 pounds!). This is high fat meat, not your run-of-the-mill dog food.
  - **Sled maintenance:** It costs around $1,000 (which includes spare parts, plastic covers for the sled runners, and so on). It does *not* count the cost of the sled!
  - **Sled and other gear:** The initial cost of all the gear is about $8,000.
  - **Mandatory pre-race vet check:** That's $350.

  All in all, a team can expect to spend more than $20,000 — just to enter the race. If you want to lease a dog team for the season, it's another $15,000 to $20,000.
- **Qualify for the Iditarod.** Only mushers with a proven track record can race. They must have participated in three smaller races in order to qualify for the Iditarod.

REMEMBER

Mushers can *lease* their racing dogs, and they aren't required to take written exams to prove their knowledge of dogs, mushing, or canine first aid, which seems like a serious mistake. In fact, animal advocates have voiced opposition to the race on grounds of animal cruelty.

Each team is required to have 12 to 16 dogs, 5 of which must be hitched to the gangline at the finish in Nome. No more dogs may be added to a team during the race. Mushers must keep a veterinary log during the run, and the dogs are checked periodically.

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Over the years, teams have become larger. With a big team, the musher can be 80 feet from the lead dog, which means a lot of yelling. Many Iditarod drivers use two lead dogs, but it's not unusual for someone to run the race with just one.

The Iditarod has attracted mushers from Austria, Canada, France, Italy, Japan, Sweden, Norway, Great Britain, Russia, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, and even Australia. However, most human entrants are from South Central Alaska, the Interior, and the Bush (any area not connected to the North America road network or has no access to the state's ferry system). Only a small percentage are from the contiguous United States, Canada, or overseas.

Following the race rules

The officially mandated gear includes a proper cold-weather sleeping bag, an ax, snowshoes, an operational cooker and pot, a veterinarian notebook, and two sets of dog booties per dog. (More than 2,000 booties are used in the average Iditarod.) Mushers also carry a harness repair kit, extra mittens, and emergency food for themselves and their dogs.

Mushers have to pass through 26 checkpoints between Anchorage and Nome. Food, straw (for dog bedding), and supplies for both dogs and racers are flown in by Bush pilots (the so-called *Iditarod Air Force*), but mushers have to carry their own survival gear. The Iditarod organizers ship in as much as 200,000 pounds of food, provided by the mushers themselves, for the race.

It's illegal to use most kinds of drugs on Iditarod dogs: anabolic steroids, analgesics, antihistamines, anti-inflammatory drugs, cough suppressants, and more are all forbidden. Some exceptions are made for topical ointments to be applied directly to the feet. Dogs are subject to urine and blood sampling at any point on the race.

The veterinarians along the course determine whether a dog is able to continue to race. If a vet determines a dog can't go on, the dog is *dropped* and permanently removed from the race and may not be replaced. Refer to the next section for more about the vets' role. This rule, of course, is designed to prevent anyone from getting the idea that he can run his dogs until they drop and just replace them as they fall.

Furthermore, any driver who is cruel or abusive to his animals will be disqualified. Dropped dogs are shipped back to the Hiland Mountain Correctional Center in Anchorage, where attentive and responsible inmates care for the animals until

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they can be returned to their owners. This plan works as a healing therapy for both prisoners and the dogs. Dangerously ill or injured dogs are sent by medevac to an emergency veterinary clinic.

Some mushers begin the race with more dogs than they plan to finish with; younger dogs in particular are often run only for the first part of the race.

REMEMBER

The welfare of the dogs is a primary Iditarod concern; of the 57 rules of the race, 26 apply directly to animal care. Animal care shelters are also provided along the trail.

Running the race

The race is a true measure of speed and endurance — so much so that mushers are required to take a mandatory 24-hour stop during the race, at any time "most beneficial to the dogs." The checker at the rest point must be notified that the musher is taking his rest stop. In addition to the 24-hour stop, a musher must also take one 8-hour stop on the Yukon and one 8-hour stop at White Mountain.

Each checkpoint staff includes veterinarians. Veterinary checks are mandatory, and any tired or ill animals must be left behind. (The humans, however, are free to continue no matter how sick they are.) Each checkpoint usually has three vets per checkpoint, and the chief vet has the authority to require that a tired or ill animal be dropped from the race.

About six hours ahead of the dog teams are the *trailbreakers,* who use special snow-machines to break the trail and carry supplies. A 50-pound Husky will consume more than 5,000 calories per day during the Iditarod! Nearly all of the calories come from meat — fish, beef, caribou, and moose are favorites.

REMEMBER

If you want to participate in the Iditarod yourself, you're more than welcome, even if you've never seen a dog sled. The Iditarod Trail Committee needs thousands of volunteers every year — veterinarians, trail breakers, logistic personnel, publicity people, fundraisers, people to staff the checkpoints and information centers, and so on. You can also win a trip aboard a dog sled for the first leg of the Iditarod, thus becoming an Iditarider. The race uses auctioned bids to help support the teams.

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Finishing and even winning the race

Members of both sexes have won the famous race, and all of them come from places with names like Red Devil, Knik, Trapper Creek, and Clam Gulch. So if you live in Dayton, I wouldn't count on winning the Iditarod anytime soon.

The first woman to win the Iditarod was Libby Riddles in 1985. She and her team plunged through a dangerous blizzard to victory. In that same year, favorite Susan Butcher lost most of her team in an encounter with an enraged female moose. Moose sometimes stand in the middle of the mushing trail and attack the sledders. Two dogs were killed and another badly wounded; of course, the distraught Butcher was forced to withdraw from the race. The next year, however, she went on to win — and repeated her victory three more times! One of those wins earned her the title of Woman Athlete of the Year.

The Golden Harness award is presented to the MVP dog, usually the lead dog or dogs of the winning team. The mushers themselves decide, and in 2008 the award was presented to Babe, a third-place finisher. Babe was almost 11 years old when she finished the race, and it was her ninth Iditarod.

Even the last-place finisher in the Iditarod doesn't go unnoticed. He or she wins the Red Lantern award. This award started as a joke but is now taken quite seriously. The Red Lantern is lit at 9:00 on the first Saturday in March in Nome, and placed at the Burl Arch, where the finish line is. It stays lit as long as anyone is still competing in the race. The Red Lantern Award is a symbol of courage, sportsmanship, and stick-to-it-iveness. In fact, there's a Red Lantern Banquet for the late finishers.

Only the top finishers manage to complete the race in nine or ten days; it often goes on as long as two weeks. Mushers race during the night, as well as during the day; still, the dogs get between 12 and 14 hours of sleep per day, not necessarily all at once. The driver isn't so lucky. While the dogs are sleeping, he or she is preparing their food, fixing the harnesses, and wondering why he or she got started in dog racing in the first place.

When the race is over, a gigantic all-city party is held in Nome, including basketball tournaments, dart games, and the Ice Golf Classic.

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FAMOUS IDITAROD MUSHERS

Here are a few notable pieces of trivia about the Iditarod. Feel free to use them for your next trivia night:

- Mitch Seavey set the fastest time for the race in 2017, crossing the line in Nome in 8 days, 3 hours, 40 minutes, and 13 seconds, while also becoming the oldest winner at the age of 57.
- Carl Huntington holds the slowest winning time in 1974, finishing in more than 20 days, but he competed in the early days of the race.
- Rick Swenson has competed in 20 Iditarods and has always finished in the top ten. He's won the race a record five times.
- Martin Buser became the first international musher to win the race in 1992. Although Buser was from Switzerland, he had lived in Alaska in 1979. In 2003, Norwegian Robert Sørlie became the first nonresident of the United States to win.
- Dick Mackey beat Rick Swenson in 1978 in an incredible photo finish, unbelievable in a race of this length. Dick's son, Rick, has also won the Iditarod. They both wore #13 on their winning rides. So far, they're the only father and son winners.
- Norman Vaughan has finished the race four times, although he hasn't won yet. He still has time — at age 88.
- Susan Butcher was the first woman to finish in the top ten. She has won four times.
- Dr. Terry Adkins was the only veterinarian to race in the first Iditarod. He has completed the race 20 times, a record matched only by Rick Swenson.
- Joe Runyan is the only musher to have won the Iditarod, the Alpirod (Europe's version of the Iditarod), and the Yukon Quest (another Alaskan-Canadian race, and the Iditarod's chief competitor).
- John Suter entered the Iditarod with a team largely composed of poodles for several years in the early 1990s. Of course, they didn't win, because poodles are singularly unsuited to running the Iditarod. (Their fur sticks to the snow, for one thing.) Still, rather surprisingly, Suter has managed to finish the race three times over the years.

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IN THIS PART . . .

Get the lowdown on what you need to know about traveling (or not traveling) with your Husky and how to protect your best friend.

Be aware of ten hazards that can cause immediate danger to your Husky and how you can avoid them.

See how you can involve your Husky in water sports and ensure he gets the right amount of exercise that he needs.

Understand the ten (there are so many more) best reasons to deciding to invite a Husky into your home.

Review important terms you may need to know when you have a Siberian Husky living in your home.

Discover important resources that you can refer to regularly that will help you raise your Husky.

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Keeping your Husky safe and happy when you travel with him
- Looking into your options if you can't bring your dog along

Chapter 17

Ten (or So) Tips for Traveling with (or without) Your Husky

Siberians are born to be on the move; just lying around the house isn't for them. With proper planning, you can expand your own travel plans to include your dog. Why travel solo when your best friend is just panting to go along for the ride?

In this chapter, you get some quick tips for traveling with your dog, whether on foot or by plane, train, or automobile. I also give you some great suggestions for things to do if you can't bring your Husky with you. Planning a trip? Look no further.

Go for a Walk

Walking is not only a healthful physical exercise for both of you, but it also has many social benefits. As a physical exercise, regular brisk long walks can promote a healthy weight, improve cardiovascular function, lower stress, and build strong

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muscles and bones. As a social activity, you'll be surprised how many people you'll meet, greet, and become friends with. Huskies just attract people.

When you go for walks or hikes with your Siberian, keep him attached to you with a leash at all times. I can't emphasize this enough! Don't ever trust a Siberian off lead, whether you're in the city or the country. If given a chance, any Siberian can take off like a shot. Everything tempts Huskies: squirrels, horse manure, piles of trash, and rabid raccoons. Sudden loud noises spook them. If you want to keep your Siberian, keep him leashed (or attached to a sled).

REMEMBER

When walking your dog, make sure you're a good neighbor and always clean up after him. Dog poop is unsightly and dangerous. It may contain *campylobacteriosis,* hookworms, parvovirus, whipworms, roundworms, threadworms, giardia, and coccidia. If you don't pick it up, it contaminates the soil and infects the waterways. You, your children, your grandkids, and the neighbors will be swimming in it. In fact, the EPA puts it in the same category as oil and mine runoff. Pick it up.

TIP

If you're a hiker, consider getting a lightweight nylon backpack for your dog. Then the dog can haul his own food and water. This backpack is essential in warm weather. If you happen to be, by choice or necessity, a night walker, I recommend using a reflective vest, collar, and leash. Don't forget your flashlight.

Include Your Husky on Your Bike Rides

After your Husky is a year old, he may enjoy joining you on some bike rides. (Younger dogs shouldn't be so strenuously exercised.) Because allowing your dog to run free can be dangerous, you can purchase some nifty devices like the Springer or Canine Cruiser, which attach the dog to the bike while preventing him from getting too close and getting hurt. The Springer costs around $100. (It doesn't include the harness. ***Warning:*** Never use a collar when biking with your dog — only a harness.)

If possible, stay off concrete and pavement. Look for a dirt bike trail instead. When you get good at bike rides with your Husky, you may want to advance to skijoring, which I discuss more in Chapter 19.

REMEMBER

Use your head about bike riding with your dog. Make frequent stops, don't go too fast, and don't go too far. Dogs will exert every ounce of energy to keep up with you, and they can die of heatstroke or exhaustion in their gallant efforts. We human beings are by nature tropical beasts, but the Siberian is an arctic one. The balmy spring days you find so enjoyable are a little too hot for your Siberian to work hard. Some compromise is essential. Be alert and keep an eye on your friend's breathing.

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Travel in Your Vehicle

Most dogs love to ride, and car trips can be enjoyable for both of you if you follow some a few simple rules.

Fastening your Husky's seat belt

Your dog should ride safely in the back seat with a proper doggy seat belt and harness or in a carrier. Some countries, like Germany, require dogs to have seat belts. Several varieties of seat belts are on the market. They safely restrain your dog, keeping both you and him safe. Having a Husky leap into your lap while you're trying to negotiate a difficult turn isn't as much fun as it sounds. Unanticipated sharp stops or car accidents can also hurl a dog through the windshield.

You can also buy barriers to insert between the front and back seat. These barriers are adjustable both vertically and horizontally and are pressure-mounted for quick installation. Some versions are netlike, which is fine if you don't think your dog will chew them to pieces.

On longer trips, stop every couple of hours for exercise and elimination needs.

REMEMBER

If you're a tense or aggressive driver, your attitude will transfer to your dog. Then you'll both be on edge.

TIP

Keep your car at a cool and comfortable temperature — for the Siberian. Dogs tend to get very excited or anxious in a car, and what seems comfy for you may be unbearably hot for them. Open the window a crack and get some nice fresh air. This will help you both avoid the dreaded car trip vomit. Bring an interactive dog toy or two with you to keep your Husky entertained.

WARNING

Here are a couple definite no-nos when traveling with your dog:

- **Don't let your dog stick his head out the window while the car is moving.** Although dogs love to stick their heads out of car windows, enjoying the breeze, it's a dangerous practice. Debris from and pebbles kicked up from the road can seriously damage your dog's eyes. He's better off inside the car, listening to jazz on the radio.
- **Don't leave your dog unattended in the car.** It may be a pleasant 70 degrees outside, but the temperature inside your vehicle can hit a lethal 140 degrees really fast. Puppies are especially vulnerable to heat stress. Don't be tempted. (Keeping the car running isn't a solution. Dogs have managed to drive the car themselves out of the parking space and into a tree or worse, oncoming traffic.)

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You can buy a folding plastic barrier (it looks like a miniature baby gate) for your car windows. This type of barrier helps circulate the air if you absolutely must leave your Husky in the car. Still, be sure to park in the shade. And don't be gone long (more than a few minutes), if the outside temperature is above 60 degrees.

Dealing with a nervous Siberian

Although most dogs are crazy about riding in cars, a few dislike or fear it, probably because of a bad experience. (The first ride may have ended up somewhere bad, like a vet's office.) To desensitize your dog to car riding, be patient, because the result will be worth it. Try doing the following:

1. **Make your stationary, engine-turned-off car a friendly, familiar place for your dog.**

   Use treats, if necessary, to lure your dog to the car. If he won't go near it, get as close as you can to it and then give him a treat. Continue to do this until he seems comfortable. It may a take a few minutes, a few days, or a few weeks. If nothing works, you may have to resort to a vet-recommended medication or just leave him home (unless it's for a trip to said vet).

2. **When he realizes nothing bad is going to happen, start the engine, but don't go anywhere.**

3. **Take short trips that end in a happy place, like a dog park or even a quick trip around the block.**

   You may want to take short breaks and hop out of the car with him to show him that nothing bad is going to happen; however, then you risk the possibility that he won't get back in. Always reward your dog with calm praise.

TIP

If your dog gets carsick, a few ginger snaps may do the trick. Withhold food 6 hours before the trip, but don't limit water intake.

WARNING

Dogs love to ride in the back of pickups, but it's usually not a safe way for them to travel. Dogs will jump out of trucks, or worse, they can be thrown out and get severely hurt or killed. In fact, every year more than 100,000 dogs die from being transported in the back of a pickup truck! And a sudden stop or swerve could turn your Husky into a projectile, where he could be thrown onto the highway and hit by an oncoming car.

If your Husky must ride in the back of a truck for a short distance, put him into a secured crate, where at least he won't be thrown out. Remember too that grit, dirt, and blowing dust is hazardous to your Husky's eyes. A wire crate won't protect him from that.

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Truck beds are dangerous in the summer even when the truck isn't moving. A metal floor turns blazing hot in a matter of minutes. Your Husky, already prone to heat distress, can die within minutes.

REMEMBER

Dogs, especially when excited, pant and drool a lot and can quickly become dehydrated. To reduce chances of dehydration, bring along a canteen with a plastic dish attached. Many companies make special traveling water and food containers, some of which are soft sided for easy handling and storage. There's a product called Pet Galley that holds about 1 gallon of water and 7 cups of food. Freeze the water first to keep it extra cool for your pet.

Bringing your own water is especially important for puppies. Young animals are extremely sensitive to water changes and can acquire a bad case of diarrhea from drinking strange water. And believe me, puppy diarrhea is the last thing you want to deal with while on a long car ride.

Find a Pet-Friendly Hotel

According to a survey taken by the American Animal Hospital Association, 41 percent of pet owners take their pets along on a vacation, at least sometimes. Some hotels allow pets, but you need to inquire first. Expect to put down a deposit, because hotels take a dim view of having their carpets and furniture eaten or urinated upon by pets. For some great tips, check `www.petfriendlytravel.com`.

Even a dog who never chews anything at home may suddenly develop a tremendous taste for curtains when away. Most hotels won't allow you to leave your pet alone in the room and require that he be kept crated at all times, even when you're there.

REMEMBER

It's very important for dogs everywhere to make a good impression on the hotel management and staff. People make decisions about welcoming dogs based on the behavior of those who have gone before. Be sure to pick up after your dog every time. It's disturbing, but the number of hotels that accept dogs has dropped by 25 percent in recent years. If your dog isn't well behaved in every way, leave him at home.

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Take Public Transportation

Some municipalities allow you to bring your Siberian on a bus, even if he's not a certified guide or service dog. Some places merely require the dog to be restrained on a leash or confined in a crate. A few cities just stipulate that the dog should be "well behaved," while using public transport, whereas others add size requirements. Some cities want dogs to be muzzled. Sometimes the pets must pay a fare. Some cities employ the "one dog per bus or car" rule. Be sure to check with the city you're visiting to see what its policies are in this regard.

Fly with Your Husky: Yes or No?

Unless in cases of dire emergency, I strongly suggest you don't fly with your Husky. Huskies are too big to go in the cabin with you and throwing them on board as baggage or freight is even worse. You may think your Husky is a family member, but airlines don't. To them, your Husky is just baggage. Air travel is extremely stressful for dogs (the changing air pressure is terrifying for most of them). Imagine the terror of a dog locked in a dark crate if the plane encounters turbulence.

Flying is also downright dangerous. *Dozens* of dogs die every year flying. Planes that have been delayed can get stuck on blazing hot tarmac with temperatures inside the baggage hold escalating dangerously. Dogs sometimes get sent to the wrong airport. To avoid any catastrophe, keep your dog at home in loving hands with relatives or friends or in a good boarding kennel.

If you absolutely have no other option and must fly your dog, do your homework and start researching airlines and policies (which seem to change from day to day). You must purchase the approved pet carrier and get the proper veterinary paperwork. (Many airlines and state health officials require health certificates issued by a licensed veterinarian within ten days of the scheduled flight, so have your pet checked out within that time.) ***Tip:*** Also make sure to get liability insurance if the worst does happen.

REMEMBER

In addition, U.S. territories and many foreign countries have quarantines or special health regulations. Check with your travel agent, the airline, or the appropriate consulate for specific information about your destination. Dogs must be at least 8 weeks old and weaned at the time of flight, and don't ship elderly animals or a bitch in heat.

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If possible, schedule a direct, nonstop flight, which is less stressful for your Husky and will reduce his chances of being lost. Try to schedule flights during less-busy times. Don't have him sedated before a flight if at all possible; tranquilizers can wreak havoc on his temperature regulatory systems. Check with your veterinarian and get his advice.

Crate your dog in an airline-approved container, and attach all necessary instructions to it. Approved containers are big enough to allow the dog to sit, lie down, stand, and turn around. The floor of the container must be solid and covered with absorbent lining or litter. Pegboard flooring isn't allowed. Most airlines require that wheels on the container be removed or made immobile prior to the flight. Kennels must be ventilated.

TIP

Do the following for your crated dog when flying:

- **Put one of your Husky's favorite toys in the kennel with him.** Items with your scent will keep him comfortable and happy.
- **Make sure your pet has a flat, buckle collar with identification tags firmly attached.** Never use a choke chain. Include your name and a phone number where you or a friend can actually be reached during the pet's flight time. Also provide food, water, or medical information. Food and water dishes must be securely attached. Ideally, your Husky will be able to hold his bladder for the length of the flight.
- **Write the words *live animal* clearly on the crate.** Include arrows or the words "this end up" to make sure your pet doesn't get transported upside down! You should also print directions reading, "keep away from hot sun and extreme cold" — and hope somebody pays attention. Secure the crate firmly, but don't lock it. It's more likely that someone will need to reach your Husky to help than it is that he'll be stolen from the crate.

TIP

Bring along a current photo of your pet in case he gets lost. Doing so will be immensely helpful in locating him. Believe me, just saying, "He's a Siberian Husky" won't create an instant mental image in the mind of most people. I once had my Basset Hound mistaken for a Pit Bull.

Are you thinking of trying to get your dog on the plane as an emotional support animal? The U.S. Department of Transportation may soon revise current rules for service and "support" animals on planes, including allowing airlines to ban those used for emotional support. The proposed changes will permit only specially trained service animals aboard. Passengers will be required to fill out a form attesting that the dog is actually trained to perform a specific task for someone with a disability. Proof of the dog's temperament and manners will also be required. And as a general rule, don't pretend your pet Siberian is a service dog by

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throwing a bogus red service dog jacket on him and taking him into restaurants and the like. No one is fooled, and you're doing a disservice to people with real disabilities.

Find a Reputable Pet-Sitter

If your Husky can't accompany on your travels, he would probably prefer a pet-sitter to a kennel. Most animals resent being hauled off to a pet motel, even the luxury kind with heated pools and exercise classes.

A good pet-sitter should have references and be animal knowledgeable. Make sure you discuss fees in advance, and allow the pet and the sitter to meet beforehand. If your Husky (or the pet-sitter) has a negative response, try a different sitter.

TIP

Before you leave, make sure your pet-sitter has all the information she needs about food, medication, and your itinerary.

Locate a Good Boarding Kennel

If you feel more comfortable sending your dog to a kennel, ask for recommendations from your vet, groomer, and friends. Many vets and groomers operate boarding facilities themselves. Whatever option you choose, your pet will board much more successfully if he has been crate-trained at home. Animals unused to confinement can really suffer at a kennel, where restraint is usually necessary for at least part of the day. Today many kennels resemble true canine resorts, with swimming, massage therapy, dog walking, grooming, exercise and rest schedules, special meal preparations, and other extras. Your Husky may not ever want to come home.

TIP

Inspect the place before you board, and ask questions. Provide the kennel management with your itinerary and where you can be reached, your veterinarian's number, and a complete health record for your dog. Give them a big clear photo of your dog also, in case he gets lost somehow while you're gone. Leave the name of a local person who can pick up the dog in case you can't.

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TIP

Before you leave your dog in a kennel, visit yourself and look for and ask about the following:

- **Is the kennel clean?** Dirty walls, floors, and soiled bedding are a warning sign. Even though floors are always the main concern, walls, doors, and even ceilings can spread germs. Ask the facility manager what the cleaning regimen is. If she seems uncertain, that could be a problem.
- **Is the kennel heated and cooled according to the season?** Every modern boarding kennel should have both heating and air-conditioning. The ambient air should feel comfortable when you walk it.
- **Is there a vet on call?** Most boarding kennels have an arrangement with a local vet. Ask about this. Find out what the procedures are if your dog becomes ill while in their care. Exchange information about your own vet.
- **Does the kennel employ veterinary technicians on its staff?** Larger kennels may also employ a vet technician to keep an eye on the wellbeing of their animals and to administer medications and first aid if needed.
- **Are there both indoor and outdoor runs?** Siberians like to be outside, but in very hot or extremely inclement weather they should be able to enjoy a comfortable indoor siesta.
- **Is the kennel secure?** With the Siberian's propensity for escaping and taking off for the far hills, this should be a prime consideration. If your Husky is an escape artist, let the kennel manager know in advance. Fences should be a *minimum* of eight feet high.
- **Is the indoor area well ventilated?** It shouldn't feel stuffy or oppressive, even when the air-conditioning is off.
- **What kind of bedding is provided?** Most kennels allow you to bring your dog's own bed for him, if you prefer.
- **How are the animals separated?** Good kennels don't allow nose-to-nose contact between animals, both for fear of spreading disease and to prevent fence fighting.
- **Does the kennel have adequate quarantine facilities?** This is an important consideration if a boarded dog develops symptoms of a contagious disease.
- **Can you pick up your pet on Sunday?** Many boarding kennels are closed on Sunday, and pets are unavailable for pickup. Sunday, of course, is the very day when most people return from trips and want to pick up their pets.

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Identifying some common hazards in your home
- Remembering outdoor hazards
- Knowing how to keep your Husky safe

Chapter 18

Ten Hazards for a Husky (and How to Avoid Them)

Thousands of pets in the United States die unnecessary deaths every year. Some are run over by cars, and many others are poisoned, electrocuted, or strangled in their own homes. However, you can prevent much of this from happening to your Husky and other pets with a reasonable degree of foresight. Dogs are very much like small children: curious, innocent creatures who are at the mercy of electricity, household chemicals, and weird plants. Your benign looking house can quickly turn into a chamber of horrors for an unsuspecting puppy. In this chapter, I let you know about ten potential hazards for your Husky and offer tips to help you dog-proof your home to keep him safe.

Electricity

The ordinary 110-volt circuitry in your house can easily kill your dog. Siberians don't seem to be aware of this simple fact, however, and they enjoy pulling on electrical cords and dragging whatever is attached to them, usually lamps, to the floor. When the item is on the floor, the light bulb is available for swallowing. Puppies especially are very fond of eating light bulbs.

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Attach all electrical cords to the baseboard where they're inconspicuous or removed completely from your Husky's reach. You can also raise cords out of reach with u-shaped cable brackets. One of the best solutions, however, is to protect the cable with corrugated wire loom tubing or plastic spiral wrap, available at office supply or hardware stores.

DUMMIES APPROVED

Try the Petcords Dog and Cat Cord Protector for about $16. It's designed to protect your dog from chewing through insulated cables up to 10 feet. Crittercord is another option.

REMEMBER

Don't forget to hide your cellphone charger. If you leave your phone plugged in, you're just asking for trouble. Keeping it unplugged when you're not using it will save you money and help the environment.

TIP

Make sure every plugged-in item is *firmly* plugged in.

WARNING

If your Husky is a victim of an electric shock, approach carefully. If your dog is still connected to the source, use a nonconductive object (like wood) to separate the two or shut off the current. Wrap your dog in a blanket and get him to the vet immediately, even if your dog seems okay. He could have invisible burns.

Rat and Mouse Poison (Rodenticides)

Rat and mouse poisons are highly toxic to dogs as well as to rodents. Most of them are anticoagulants and interfere with the blood's clotting ability. If your Husky ingests the poison, he can bleed to death internally. Unfortunately, the dog may exhibit no signs for three to five days after ingestion. So by the time you realize it, it may be too late. Fortunately, some newer products are packaged to be fairly inaccessible to dogs and are also less toxic to them. Still, you don't want your dog eating rat poison.

TIP

If you have a problem with rats and mice, a professional company can advise you about safe methods to get rid of them.

Household Cleaning Agents

Evidence has been accumulating that some popular household cleaners may be dangerous for dogs. They contain phenol or phenol derivatives, which have been implicated in liver and kidney damage. *Phenols* are slow-acting toxins that may

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affect your dog so gradually that you don't know what's happening. They're especially dangerous around puppies. Some experts recommend disinfecting with rubbing alcohol instead of products containing phenol; rubbing alcohol works fast and has no side effects. *Caustics* like drain cleaners, automatic dishwashing detergents, and toilet bowl cleaners are also extremely dangerous to dogs.

TIP

Make sure you keep all household cleaners in a place where your dog can't get to them. And don't just assume that he can't get under your kitchen sink. Dogs have been known to get cupboard doors open. A high shelf in a pantry is a better bet.

DUMMIES APPROVED

Dozens of pet-safe cleaning products are available on the market (just search online). Here are a few good products: Puracy Natural All Purpose Cleaner; Puracy Carpet and Upholstery Shampoo; Clean + Green Pet-Safe Carpet Cleaner; Seventh Generation Laundry Detergent; Better Life Natural Dryer Sheets; Bean & Lily Pet-Safe Floor Cleaner; Eco-Me Multi-Surface Floor Cleaner; and Nature's Miracle Stain and Odor Remover. Don't forget plain old baking soda and white vinegar.

Medicine Chest Menace

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) says that 70 percent of pet poisonings are due to the ingestion of drugs. Curious dogs often get into both over-the-counter and prescription drugs, and they can easily end up dying. During this opioid crisis, dogs are also affected. Scientists at the University of Guelph in Ontario found dogs that are smaller, younger, or unneutered, or dogs that reside in areas with a high opioid rate, are at higher risk. The neutering aspect is interesting. It might be that nonneutered dogs have a stronger curiosity drive and attempt risky behavior like swallowing whole bottles of pills. Or perhaps owners of nonneutered dogs are more likely to abuse opioids or at least leave them lying about the house.

WARNING

Child-proof bottles aren't dog-proof. A Husky can chew his way through a plastic bottle faster than you can get it out of his mouth. Keep medications locked up, and unless specifically advised by your vet, never give your pet human medication. Tylenol and ibuprofen (Advil, Nuprin, Motrin) are particularly bad for dogs. Tylenol is toxic to a dog's liver. Ibuprofen is extremely toxic to dogs, even in low doses. And even when dogs and people take the same drugs, dosages can vary considerably. Don't gamble with your pet's life.

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Hazardous Plants

Poisonous and otherwise dangerous house plants include cactus, English ivy, dumb cane (dieffenbachia), wax begonias, yellow calla, peace lily, and philodendron. Both philodendron and dieffenbachia, members of the Araceae family of plants, can cause intense pain and allergic reaction; the latter can swell tissues in the mouth to the point of choking the dog. *Dieffenbachia* induces kidney failure. Clinical signs of Araceae poisoning include salivation, head shaking, pawing at the mouth, and vomiting or diarrhea. If your dog is exhibiting any of these symptoms, get him to the vet, and bring a leaf from the suspect plant with you.

WARNING

Household plants aren't the only plant hazard for your dog. Some common poisonous yard, garden, and forest plants include the following:

- Azalea and rhododendron
- Bleeding heart
- Boxwood
- Buttercup
- Caladium
- Daffodils
- Daphne
- Delphiniums
- Dutchman's breeches
- Elephant's ear
- English ivy
- Foxglove
- Holly
- Honeysuckle
- Horse chestnut
- Lily-of-the-valley
- Mayapple
- Monkshood
- Morning glory
- Mother-in-law's tongue

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- Mushrooms
- Nightshade
- Rhubarb
- Skunk cabbage
- Tomato and avocado leaves
- Tulip bulbs
- Wisteria

Holiday Hazards

I discuss the two types of holiday hazards here for your Husky:

- **Leftovers:** Just because a food isn't actually toxic doesn't mean that it's not dangerous. Gluttony is a deadly sin for pets, at least as far as turkey skin and fat go. They can give dogs a bad case of pancreatitis. You don't have to be a Scrooge with your Husky: Be generous, and give him a nice plate of lean turkey breast instead of the skin or fat. And never give him cooked chicken or turkey bones — they can get stuck or splinter in the dog's esophagus, stomach, or bowel.

  TIP

  Throw the bones away, if possible, in a large jar with a screwed-on lid. That will keep the smells in and save your trash from being ravaged by the neighborhood cats, dogs, and raccoons who don't need any turkey bones stuck in their throats either.

  Turkey stuffing sometimes contains onions, which are poisonous to dogs. Apple seeds, green potato skins, rhubarb, moldy cheese, and cherry pits are also bad for dogs. Although your dog isn't likely to gobble down rhubarb, you never really know. Chapter 11 discusses other people food that is dangerous for Huskies and other dogs.

  REMEMBER

  Even before your turkey dinner becomes leftovers, watch out. Most Huskies are excellent counter-cruisers and can lift a whole cooked turkey right off the old carving board when no one is looking.

  WARNING

  The main component of many holiday foods seems to be chocolate, one of whose ingredients is *theobromine,* a substance similar to caffeine, and one that is toxic to dogs, causing vomiting, diarrhea, neurological problems, irregular heartbeat, and in some cases even death. The darker the chocolate, the more theobromine it contains. By the way, it's toxic to people as well; it just takes a lot more of it to kill people. Death by chocolate . . .

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» **Decorations:** Christmas can be especially grisly for dogs. In 2019 a German Shepherd in Manchester, England devoured 30 feet of tinsel, which had to be surgically removed. Tinsel is the worst, but in fact *any* edible decoration is hazardous. Unfortunately, a dog's idea of what is edible is rather different from your own. For a lot of dogs, anything new or interesting that fits in their mouth is edible or lickable.

Ideally the entire tree with its precious ornaments, dangerous lights, and strings of popcorn and other garlands should be kept in a room inaccessible to your dog. The temptation is just too great. At the very least, supervise your dog when he's around this stuff. (Consider your playful Husky like a 2-year-old child and act accordingly.)

Garage Doors

Automatic garage doors can be extremely dangerous for your pet. A dear friend of mine lost her Golden Retriever puppy when he was accidentally caught in just such a door. Thankfully, most modern units have emergency safety devices built into them, which will reverse the door if it strikes something. Regardless, always be careful and check under the garage door before (and *during*) closing it.

Antifreeze

Without a doubt, antifreeze is the most dangerous item in your garage. Autumn, when people are changing their radiator fluid, is the time of greatest danger. Antifreeze is apparently sweet and pleasant-tasting, but the main ingredient of many brands, *ethylene glycol,* is deadly poison to dogs, cats, and children. Its metabolites attack and destroy the kidneys, and the final results are coma and death. Unfortunately, when dogs start drinking the stuff, they don't stop.

Because antifreeze is a necessary fact of life for people in the colder climates, try using one based on propylene glycol, rather than ethylene glycol. A propylene-glycol–based antifreeze is somewhat more expensive, but it's worth it. *Propylene glycol* affects the central nervous system, but not the kidneys. *Tufts Veterinary Newsletter* estimates that a medium-sized dog would need to ingest about 20 ounces of propylene glycol before getting seriously ill, whereas only 2 ounces of the more deadly ethylene glycol can kill. Propylene glycol is less tasty to dogs than is its deadly cousin. ***Remember:*** Even though propylene glycol is considerably less toxic that ethylene glycol, it's still a poison.

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Most commercially sold antifreeze is 95 percent ethylene glycol. The safer alternative, propylene glycol antifreezes, includes Sierra (Safe Brands Corporation) and Sta-Clean (Sta-Clean Products).

The best solution when it comes to antifreeze is prevention. Keep all antifreeze locked away from anywhere your Husky may possibly go. And, no matter what kind of antifreeze you use, clean up any spills immediately. You can use cat litter to absorb most of the liquid; follow up with rags. And dispose of the stuff carefully. Although antifreeze is biodegradable, it takes a couple of months to degrade. Rinse the area of the spill thoroughly with water.

Lawn Chemicals

Pets and chemicals don't mix. Americans pour, shake, powder, rake in, and dump 300 million pounds of pesticides on their lawns every year. This stuff isn't good for your pets — or your kids! It's also terrible for the environment. Most of these chemicals aren't water-soluble, which means that they're going to be in your yard for a long, long time. They're also poisonous.

So, if your lawn could double as a chemistry lab experiment, keep your dogs away from it. Pesticides come in two basic kinds: organophosphates and *carbamates.* Both types have similar toxic effects. If your dog does inadvertently walk on freshly applied chemicals, wash his little tootsies with a gentle shampoo as soon as possible.

Consider using organic, rather than chemical treatments for your lawn, like flea-eating nematodes and the seeds from the Asian neem tree. Both help rid your lawn of fleas and other pests naturally. The environment will appreciate it. Always dispose of yard-product containers safely away from pets and children. If you're out to get slugs, make sure the slug bait is safely enclosed. Or even better, try going without lawn chemicals altogether. Get rid of the grass and plant native plants. You'll be helping birds, pollinators, wildlife, and the planet.

Swimming Pools

The family swimming pool can be a death trap to your pet. Although many Huskies enjoy swimming, be sure that you never leave your dog alone — even for five minutes — in the pool. A good rule is, if you wouldn't trust the toddler, then don't trust the dog.

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TIP

If you do allow your Husky to use the pool, always show him how to find the stairs. Sometimes dogs get confused about which way is out. They should be trained to enter and exit the pool by the stairs only.

WARNING

If your Husky doesn't enjoy swimming, please don't force him to take part. You can encourage him to investigate the pool, but dragging or carrying a reluctant dog into the water just makes everyone unhappy.

Winter covers for pools can be dangerous. Unless you have a LOOP-LOC-type cover, make every effort to keep your dog and your covered pool strictly separated. Dogs cannot distinguish pool covers from solid ground until it is too late. And if they walk on the pool cover, they can get trapped and drown.

TIP

You can purchase a life vest for your dog; they come in various sizes and are really handy, especially if you and your dog will be traveling to a lake or going boating.

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Running through an obstacle course
- Following orders

Chapter 19

Ten Great Dog Activities for Your Husky (besides Sledding)

Huskies are multipurpose dogs with wide-ranging interests. Here is an overview of just few of canine activities you might enjoy trying. If you want to find out more, check with your local kennel club, breed club, or the AKC. Everyone is welcome!

This list by no means exhaust the kinds of things you can do with your Husky. The adventure is limited only to your imagination.

Agility

Canine agility is one of the fastest growing dog sports, providing excellent exercise for both you and your dog. Essentially, *agility* is a timed race over 14 to 16 obstacles at the Novice level that include jumps, tunnels, ramps, seesaws, pause tables, and weave poles. Speed and accuracy are both important.

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Your dog relies on your cues and body language to direct him through the course. Agility is open to all breeds and sizes, and the agile, speedy, energetic Siberian makes an excellent candidate (after you convince his independent spirit to follow your directions rather than making his own decisions). Siberians can excel at this sport, especially if you use treats and positive encouragement, because they have the perfect size and body type to compete. You just have to convince him that it's fun. (***Tip:*** Check out a few YouTube videos if you don't believe me.) Because of the Siberian's propensity for running wherever he wants, you *must* do obedience work with your Siberian first.

WARNING

Because Siberians tend to have focus problems, never attempt agility off lead unless the area is completely fenced — even if he has taken an obedience course.

TIP

Begin agility by taking an agility class at a dog club near you. Your Siberian should be a year old and fully developed before your start. (Official AKC competitions are open only to dogs 15 months or older.) I strongly recommend your dog get a thorough vet check before you start. He needs to be up on his vaccinations as well.

Many of these clubs already have the proper equipment. If your Siberian takes to agility, you can purchase your own obstacles (assuming of course that you have room in your backyard). You'll need to devote about 20 minutes every day for practice, because Siberian brains are too full of scheming plans to remember simple commands like "Pause!" Face it — it's not in their nature to pause.

If you belong to a dog club or dog park with publicly available equipment, you don't actually need anything. However, if you want, you can start building your own hurdles and walks or you can readily purchase them online — and gradually — you don't need to buy everything at once.

Bikejoring

Ready to ride? Get out your mountain bike and grab your Husky (or Huskies)! *Bikejoring* gives you the feel of sledding without the snow and lets your Husky fulfil his natural talents as a puller. In this sport you ride over land and let the dogs do the work, although you can assist any time you like by pedaling. You can find a few competitions in the United States for this sport (although Europe has more), and the races generally are geared more toward fun than winning. Just be aware that you and your dog must be in top condition!

You dog needs to able to follow verbal cues, so a strong obedience background is a must. Common commands are

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- Hike! ("Let's go!")
- On by! ("Ignore the dead possum in the road.")
- Leave It! ("Okay, *drop* the dead possum!")
- Out There! ("Run to the end of line and pull.")
- Slow! ("Take it down a notch.")
- Stop/Halt/Whoa! ("Stop!")
- Straight! ("Go straight through the crossroad!")
- Turn! ("Reverse direction.")
- Yield! ("Move off the trail; someone is coming the other way.")

TECHNICAL STUFF

Using the old-time commands "Gee!" ("Turn right") and "Haw!" ("Turn left") can be fun for higher-level dogs.

You first need to train your Husky while you're on foot first and then graduate to a bike (moving very slowly). Don't do this sport on concrete because it will murder your Husky's feet. Even hard-packed dirt can be a problem. Sandy or soft soil is best.

Make sure you bring your first-aid kit and plenty of water for this sport (refer to Chapter 13 for what to include in your first-aid kit). Constantly check your Husky's feet when you're practicing. If you pursue this sport with any passion, then your Husky should wear booties.

In addition to a dog or two and bike, you need the following equipment:

- Booties for the dog
- Eye protection for you (dogs kick up a lot of debris)
- Gloves
- Padded x-back harness
- Skijoring line, 9 or 10 foot

  If you're running two dogs, you'll need a neckline between them, bridle loop to attach to the bike.
- Reflective vests for both of you

Another sport similar to bikejoring is *footbiking* or *scottering*.

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Canicross

Canicross, also referred to as *CaniX*, is serious jogging with your dog — but without holding a leash. Yes, Huskies aren't reliable off lead. However, the delightful hitch is that there *is* a lead — it's just not attached to your hand. It's attached to a belt and allows the dog to pull you, which is a perfect sport for Huskies.

Canicross isn't a sport for the weak of heart or limb. However, it's been estimated that dedicated joggers can shave off 30 seconds a mile because you're dog-powered! Your Husky is ready for Canicross between 12 and 18 months of age; you can start light training before then.

REMEMBER

Although bikejoring and skijoring are ultimately dog races, Canicross is a race for human beings, even though the dog gets a real workout, especially when he's pulling you uphill.

You need the following equipment to race:

- Padded x-back harness
- Husky boots
- Bungee cord (2 feet long at full stretch)
- Belt secured with leg straps

Use the same commands as you do for bikejoring (see the previous section). As you get comfortable with running, you can figure out how to use your body weight, leaning back to slow your dog down.

Carting (with a Cart or with Equipment)

Carting, also referred to as *drafting*, is an activity in which your Husky (or Huskies) pull two- or four-wheeled vehicles. It's a summertime version of mushing/sledding, and as the name suggests, it's done with a cart instead of a sled.

Carting can be done competitively or just for fun. Competitions have separate events for dogs pulling people and those pulling equipment. Each event uses a different style of cart. In carting you can use voice commands to control your Husky, or, if children are in the cart, you can lead him. Commands in carting are the same as for bikejoring and canicross, with special emphasis on Stop. If there is one thing any dog needs to learn, it's to stop doing what he's doing when told.

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A two-wheeled vehicle is technically called a *cart* or a *sulky*. The four-wheeled type is a *wagon.* A wagon can carry more weight, but perhaps its greatest advantage is that it supports itself and isn't bearing down on the dog the way a cart is. Carts must be balanced extremely carefully to avoid injuring your Husky.

In carting competitions (both this type and the type in the next section), dogs have to pass ten tests:

- Making 90 degree right and left turns
- Making right and left circles
- Halting
- Moving at normal, fast, and slow speeds
- Backing up
- Ignoring sound and moving distractions
- Moving through gates of different widths
- Weaving through poles or posts
- Making Figure 8s around a tree or traffic cones
- Standing quietly while persons or objects are being unloaded

Some competitions include a freight haul of half a mile or so to test endurance.

You aren't limited to one Husky in carting — two Huskies side by side make excellent partners! Just make sure your Husky is old enough. No dog under 18 months should be allowed to pull anything heavier than himself.

Dogs can pull an amazing amount of weight with ease, often three or four times their own weight. All breeds of dog, large and small, are able to enjoy this sport, but Huskies are especially suitable.

As with every dog sport, obedience training is a must. An untrained dog running amuck with a cart attached isn't something to be taken lightly.

Although carting can be great fun, it has a serious side. Service dogs able to cart can be of great assistance to their owners, carrying heavy items you can't carry, like bags of mulch.

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Conformation

Because Huskies are among the world's most beautiful dogs, who wouldn't want to show them off in *conformation* (otherwise known as a dog show)? Yes, a dog show is a beauty pageant (a combination of *Miss America* and *Survivor*) for dogs, in which a judge compares your dog to the ideal (as described in the breed standard; refer to Chapter 2 for the Husky's breed standard).

Your Husky competes against other Huskies. If he is chosen Best of Breed, then he'll go on to compete against other dogs in the Working Group for more honors. If he wins that competition, he is up for the all-important Best in Show title, competing against other group winners. It's hilarious watching a Yorkie competing against a Great Dane, but that's the way it goes, and as often as not, the little dog wins.

Dogs entering conformation shows must be registered with the organization sponsoring the event, normally the American Kennel Club or the United Kennel Club. In the United Kingdom, it's simply The Kennel Club as if there were no other.

If the only experience you have of conformation is watching the *Westminster Dog* show on TV, you may be sucked into the glitz and glamor of the whole thing. Most dog shows, however, are much lower-key, family affairs. To get started, all you need is the right dog. And that's where things can be dicey. Conformation is a rather unforgiving affair: An ear that is incorrectly set, a kink in the tail, or an improper bite can doom your precious Siberian to the also-rans of dogdom. Conformation is also a very subjective affair. Many dog shows occur in weekend clusters with a different judge each day. I've seen a dog who placed first on one day in front of one judge end up without a ribbon in front of another judge on subsequent days against the same competition, all of whom performed in pretty much the same way.

REMEMBER

In any case, a good breeder should be honest with you about a dog's show prospects. Not every puppy in a litter is of show quality, which may not be apparent for a few months. If you want to show, talk to the breeder *before* you get a puppy. She'll be happy to work with you in picking the right dog and in all probability be a coach and mentor to you. A responsible breeder won't sell you a non-show quality dog for showing because doing so would reflect badly on her.

One technicality that many pet owners object to: Conformation dogs aren't usually allowed to be shown if they're neutered because the original purpose of a dog show was to promote breeding stock. Although many have complained about this rule, it still stands. (All other events, such as agility and obedience, are open to neutered dogs.)

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The best way to get started in this sport is to work with your breeder and your local kennel club, which may offer handling classes. Some people hire a professional handler to show their dogs for them, but there's no reason to miss out on the fun. You can find out how to do it yourself. It's not particle physics. (It's a lot easier than agility, where nearly everyone handles their own dog.)

Experienced dog handlers know which judges tend to like which type of dog and choose their shows accordingly.

Diving Dog

This sport started out as *dock diving*, but apparently *diving dog* sounds better. In any case, you still need a dock or a good approximation of one. (It should ideally be a pretty *long* dock, about 40 feet.) The North America Diving Dog (NADD) offers events that may be held in conjunction with AKC dog shows, and the AKC recognizes NADD titles.

You stand at the edge of dock and toss in your Husky's favorite toy as far as you can. On your command, he races to the end of the dock, flings himself headlong into the water, and fetches the toy. (Don't worry. You're allowed to have someone hold your Husky for you.) The object is for him to leap as far as he can. Beginner dogs often jump just a couple of feet. The more experienced ones go 30 feet or more. (Dogs can compete for height or distance; the former is called *air retrieve*, and the dog attempts to knock the *bumper*, which is suspended over head into the water.)

All you need is a towel and a toy, although you're allowed to outfit your dog with a life vest as well. Your dog should be at least 6 months old to compete.

Obedience

AKC Obedience is a sport designed to showcase your Husky's ability to follow specific commands and routines. The goal is to score 200 for a perfect score, but a score of 170 is considered qualifying. Obedience has many levels, but challenges that the dog must meet include the following:

- Heeling off Leash
- Standing for Examination

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- Recall
- Long Sit (1 minute)
- Long Down (3 minutes)

Higher levels ask the dog to do broad jumps and high jumps, retrieve on command, use scent discrimination to find his handler's item among a bunch of others, and other tricky maneuvers.

Obedience is a sport that pays off well beyond the show ring. Don't confuse this competition with the ordinary obedience with which you should be treating your Husky, although it's related. Obedience is a judged AKC event, developed in the 1930s. Unlike other dog sports that encourage your dog to run around like a crazy person, jumping into water and dragging you along by leash, Obedience teaches your dog to sit and lie down on command and do all sorts of other lovely things, including jumping and retrieving.

Did I just hear you gulp? I don't blame you. Huskies need a lot of work in the retrieving department. In this event, the judge gives orders for each element. All dogs are allowed to compete in Obedience. The one caveat is that mixed breeds must be neutered first.

Dogs must be 6 months of age to compete. (AKC rules specify that blind dogs can't compete.) Obedience tests are available at many levels from Novice (beginner) to Utility (expert).

Huskies are independent thinkers and tend to resist being told what to do. That doesn't mean you can't excel in Obedience with your Husky. It just may take more patience than you would need if you had, say, a Golden Retriever (who walks off with all the honors in this sport).

Rally

Sometimes called *Rally Obedience* or simply *Rally-O*, this competition used to be considered a kind of beginner's obedience, but it's now recognized as a sport on its own merit. Rally has no set course, unlike Obedience, in which you follow a set pattern. In Rally, you don't know what to expect. The course generally isn't known until about half an hour before the event.

The Rally course is marked with between 10 and 20 signs indicating what you should do at each sign. Examples include the following:

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- About turn right. Halt.
- 180 pivot left. Halt.
- Halt. Down. Walk around dog.
- Back up three steps. Dog stays in position.
- Halt. Turn right one step. Call to heel. Halt.

Teaching your dog to read the signs for himself would be a tremendous help and save you the trouble. The goal is to score 100 points.

At lower levels you're allowed to have your dog on a leash, which helps a lot with Huskies. Higher levels of Rally include jumps, including so-called *directed jumps* in which the Husky is supposed to go off and jump where you tell him. Huskies have no problem in jumping. It's jumping where you want him to jump that presents the problem.

Another major difference between them is that in Rally you're allowed to talk to and encourage (but not touch) your dog. In Obedience you aren't allowed to talk to him. In Rally you also get a redo; in regular Obedience you don't. Most people think that Rally judges are easier than Obedience judges in terms of strictness about Heel position and so forth. (I've actually heard Obedience people claim that Rally "ruins heeling." However, that's really an individual matter.)

Skijoring

Skijoring is a Norwegian word that mean "ski-driving." It's a cross between sledding and cross-country skiing. You can skijor with horses, motorized vehicles, or in this case, your Siberian. At one time people commonly used this method of getting about the slopes; nowadays it's done for recreation and competition.

Races vary in length from the short-distance (3 to 10 miles) and long-distance (20 and 50 miles) skijoring events for you to sample. If you're really ambitious, you could try the 64 miles (100 kilometer) Alaskan Iditasport. Siberians, as you would expect, excel at this sport and compete at both sprint and long-distance forms.

Although some people claim you don't need to be an expert skier to participate in this sport, don't be fooled. You do. If you can ski, however, this sport is a lot easier to master than dog sledding.

The number of dogs one needs to skijor is variable — most commonly it's one to three. ***Note:*** No leashes are involved. You need to guide the dog by voice and

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gesture. The commands and harnessing equipment are the same at for bikejoring (see the section earlier in this chapter). The correct skis for this sport are ultra-light skate-skis. No metal-tipped skis should be used because they're too dangerous around your dog.

Possibly the trickiest thing to teach the friendly Husky is the "On By!" command. It's important that your Husky zips right on by another team without slowing down. As with every other sport, have your dog checked by your veterinarian before embarking on this hobby. And start slowly, getting your dog accustomed to each element before throwing it all together.

A fun fact: In 1924, equine (horse) skijoring made an appearance at the Winter Olympics in St. Moritz. The experiment, sadly, wasn't repeated.

Therapy Dog

One of the most satisfying activities you and your Husky can participate in is that of therapy dog. Unlike many other activities, a therapy dog doesn't need to be in tiptop physical shape, and neither do you. Older dogs and even dogs with disabilities can contribute to the health and happiness of others.

Many organizations offer therapy dog training and certification, and some hospitals require this certification before you're allowed to visit. Dozens of great organizations will certify your dog; the AKC provides a list of organizations approved by it at `www.akc.org`. Check with your local institutions as to what they require.

The role of a therapy dog is varied. In some cases, his job is simply to stand there and be petted and loved on. Other therapy dogs take a more active role. They can help patients exercise and improve joint mobility. They encourage withdrawn, depressed, and lonely people to interact in a positive fashion.

To excel in this activity, your dog simply needs to be calm, well-behaved, well-groomed, and gently interested in people, which makes it perfect for older, settled dogs. In fact, most organizations won't grant certification to a dog under a year old. Although they don't need to do tricks, even though that's always an advantage, they do need to be obedient to commands. Therapy dogs can be welcome visitors to hospitals, nursing homes, and other places where challenged people can enjoy their unique beauty and charming personality.

REMEMBER

Even though the AKC doesn't itself offer therapy dog training and certification, it does grant your therapy dog an official AKC title, depending upon how many visits your certified therapy dog has completed. The highest title is AKC Therapy Dog Distinguished (THDD), which requires 400 visits.

A therapy dog is *not* a service dog. A *service dog* is a specialized, highly trained dog who provides a vital service for a disabled owner, and in that occupation has special privileges. Some people abuse the system and pretend their beloved pet is a real service dog. No one is fooled.

Tracking

Ever consider having your Husky become a search and rescue dog? Is your Husky forever smelling around and paying minute attention to every blade of grass and rock on the trail? If so, consider the sport of *tracking.* It could be the start of a hero dog at work. Every dog with a nose has the potential to excel. The beauty of tracking, at least from your Husky's point of view, is that *he* is in charge. No more stupid following directions and obeying commands. No, in tracking it's just the article, the wind, and your dog. You're simply an afterthought, trundling rather helplessly behind your sharp-scenting dog. Huskies love to lead, and in this sport, he is the one who decides where you're going.

Your dog can earn his first Tracking Dog (TD) credential by following a previously laid track 440 to 500 yards long with between three and five changes of direction. At the end of the track is the *article,* usually a glove well imbued with human scent.

The track is laid 30 minutes to two hours before the event by a human tracklayer. The dog, on a 40-foot lead, follows the track, while you follow behind offering encouragement. More advanced dogs earn the following:

- The Tracking Dog Urban (TDU) dog follows a track in a difficult urban environment. (Scent clings to grass a lot better than to concrete.)
- The Tracking Dog Excellent (TDX) dog follows an older scent (three to five hours).
- The Variable Surface Tracker (VST) can handle both urban and rural environments.
- The Champion Tracker (TC) credential honors your Husky after he manages all three levels.

The main challenge your Husky will face is that he must put aside his instinctive prey-drive. If a rabbit crosses the trail, he must ignore this inviting scent and stay relentlessly on his original track. (That's why Bloodhounds, bred exclusively for man-trailing, excel in Tracking.)

The AKC is fairly lenient in its requirements. Your Husky can wander a bit away from the track as long as he appears to be working. Other organizations require your dog to track with precision. Tracking is really more a test of your Husky's focus than his actual scenting ability. He may suddenly just get bored and run off chasing squirrels. The only way to know is to try it.

TIP

If you and your Husky are incredibly dedicated, you can win the coveted Versatile Companion Dog (VCD) title: certified in Agility, Obedience, and Tracking.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Figuring out what makes Siberians so special
- Seeing whether you're the right person for a Husky

Chapter 20
Ten Reasons to Have a Siberian Husky

If you're not sure whether a Siberian Husky is the dog for you, in this chapter you'll find ten great reasons to own one of these wonderful dogs.

Huskies Always Smile

That cheerful, devil-may-care look reveals something special about the Siberian Husky's personality and his relationship to you. Huskies are good-natured and willing to please. Plus, they're human-oriented, which means that they're happiest when they're with you. They look to you for companionship, guidance, and love. This is one of the qualities that makes them great pets — their very willingness to share their life with yours.

The Husky's smile also is a reminder that dogs need to be happy — and it doesn't take a whole lot to keep them that way. Siberian Huskies don't require expensive dog beds, high-priced toys, and expensive vacations to the Riviera. A comfortable pillow at your feet, a chew toy, and frequent trips to the great outdoors is a Husky's idea of paradise.

REMEMBER

The key to all these pleasures is you. Your Husky doesn't want to sleep alone, play alone, or run alone. But with you at his side, he'll keep that happy, cheerful smile.

Huskies Make Terrific Exercise Partners

Because Siberians must have adequate amounts of exercise, they're perfect pets for the human athlete. As long as the weather is cool enough (and for Siberians, the colder the better), your Siberian will go charging happily (on a leash, please) at your side. (For running the Iditarod, 0 degrees is considered ideal. Think about that for a moment.) Studies have shown that dog owners are likely to get 30 minutes more exercise a day than non-dog owners.

And if you aren't a human marathoner, having a Siberian is a great way to get you started — or at least enough to get your heart rate going. A Siberian Husky can turn the most dedicated couch potato into an avid exerciser. Exercise not only keeps both of you fit, but it also helps keep a dog's mind entertained and his body physically tired. This is a great combination for the hours your Husky must spend by himself. A tired dog is a nondestructive dog, and nondestructive dogs make for happy owners.

A Siberian Husky Can Pull You Wherever You Want to Go

This is one of the many things that make a Siberian unique. A Pekinese can't pull you. A Basset Hound won't. But with a Husky, a whole new world of sport can open up to you. In the summer, hop on your inline skates, and start going uphill as well as down.

In the winter, grab your sled or skis; a Siberian is just the ticket. Not only will you find this entertaining, but so will your dog. Siberians are bred to pull — it's in their blood. All you need to do is follow happily along.

Allowing your Husky to pull you is also a great way to make friends — or at least to get people to pay attention to you. And you can join a club of like-minded folk and make even more friends.

Siberians Have No Doggie Odor

Compare a Husky to a hound, and you'll realize just how lucky you are. Their odorless state makes it possible to keep your dog inside all the time without giving him a bath every week. This is an important consideration for people who are sensitive to such things.

Huskies Are Educational

You will learn more from your Siberian than he will ever learn from you. Dogs teach you the following wonderful virtues:

- **Neatness:** If you don't put your things away, the dog will eat them.
- **Patience:** Training a Siberian gives you practice in this important virtue. Rome wasn't built in a day, and you can't teach a Siberian to fetch in 5 minutes.
- **Tolerance:** You'll discover what you can expect from a dog, as well as what you can't.
- **Medical skills:** All experienced dog owners develop skills in handling medical emergencies. You never know when this may come in handy.

Huskies Provide Social Mobility

Although others have nothing more exciting to brag about than their child's last birthday party or toilet training triumphs, you can regale the office with any of the following tales:

- "What My Dog Ate Last Night When I Had My Back Turned for 5 Minutes"
- "What My Dog Dragged into the House That I Thought I Had Buried"
- "What Happened When I Went on a Sledding Trip with the Dogs and Somehow Got Lost"

And so on. Besides, your beautiful Siberian Husky is much better looking than any of their kids, and everybody knows it. Dogs can also add to your social life. Many dog owners met friends while walking their dogs.

Huskies Are Great with Children

Unlike many other breeds, Huskies are tolerant of kids. They are sturdy enough to enjoy roughhousin', and forgiving enough to endure being fallen upon. It's also a plus that Huskies are nonprotective. Many an unfortunate accident has occurred when a dog has bitten a neighbor's child because he thought the kid was attacking his owner's child (whom he views as his own), when all that was happening was normal child wrestling. You won't have to worry about your Husky doing something like that. Huskies welcome new children into the family circle readily. (Chapter 3 discusses more why Huskies are great with children.)

Huskies are also good *for* children, by the way. Studies at Johns Hopkins have shown that children who are exposed to dogs early in life (before their 13th birthday) have a statistically significant lower chance of developing schizophrenia. Weirdly the same study showed that children who acquired a cat between the ages of 9 and 12 were statistically more likely to develop schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Just saying.

Huskies Will Make You a Better Citizen

How can a Husky make you a better citizen? Well, a strong United States is a prosperous United States. And a prosperous United States is one in which the consumer supports the economy. The Husky owner *really* supports the U.S. economy.

Here's how: First, you buy the Husky (thus reducing the loss of some poor hobby breeder). Then you buy the dog food (helping the farmer and pet food industry). Then you buy the leashes, collars, and bowls (helping manufacturing). Then you buy the book about Siberian Huskies (like this one) and help the author and the publishing industry. Then you buy the computer to get online to get to the Husky websites and chat groups (helping the techies). Then you decide to take the dog on vacation and buy a new van to load up all this stuff (helping the automotive industry). Then you actually go on vacation (helping the tourist industry). And on and on. . .. Don't you feel better about yourself and all the ways you're helping just by owning a great dog?

Siberians Remind You What Really Matters in Life

In other words, they help you prioritize. Life before Huskies may have been taken up with mundane matters like housekeeping. You can forget all that now. Not only do you have better things to do — like playing with the dog — but the obliging Siberian makes perfect housekeeping impossible anyway. So why bother with it?

Siberians teach you that what's really important is having fun, going places together, keeping healthy and strong, and giving and getting love.

Huskies Love You Unconditionally

Huskies don't put boundaries, parameters, or limits on their affection. They don't care if you've put on a little weight recently or gotten a bit gray. They don't care if you're having a bad hair day or have bad breath. They don't care what kind of car you drive, clothes you wear, or accessories you sport. They don't care if you're poor. They don't mind if you're in a wheelchair, or deaf, or blind, or have epilepsy. They don't judge you by your race, religion, or sexual orientation. They don't care if you've been in jail.

They ask no questions, tell no lies, and make no judgments. They don't give up on you. They forgive you if you're short-tempered or absentminded. They feel for you when you're down. They try to cheer you up without prying into your secrets.

And they not only love you, but they love everyone you love, too. Your Husky will be a friend to your entire family and all your acquaintances. He won't complain about your mother-in-law or sneer at Uncle Marvin.

And whether it's that or the exercise they provide, the American Heart Association's research has found that owning a dog is associated with a 24 percent lower risk of early death for all causes, compared with not owning a dog. For people who have suffered a heart attack or stroke, the benefits are even more impressive: a 31 percent reduced risk of early death. And if you're going to own a dog, it might as well be a Siberian. This study was *massive,* involving more than 4 million people in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Scandinavia.

REMEMBER

Do the same for your Husky. Don't give up on him. Care for him when he gets old and sick. Forgive him if he rips up the couch or digs a hole in the yard. Give him the same love and tolerance he gives you. After all, it's only fair.

Appendix A

Glossary

AAFCO: Association of American Feed Control Officials, a private, nonprofit association of local, state, and federal agencies charged by law to regulate the sale and distribution of animal feeds and medications.

activated charcoal: A fine black powder made from bone char, coconut shells, peat, petroleum coke, coal, olive pits, or sawdust. The charcoal is activated by processing it at high temperatures and used to treat poisoning.

agility: Canine sport in which a dog runs a time course over obstacles.

agouti: The "wild" color. Guard hairs are banded with black at the tips and roots, with bands of yellow in the middle. *Agouti* is also the name for a wild rodent.

AKC: American Kennel Club, an organization formed to register purebred dogs. It also sanctions various canine events.

alpha: The dominant member of a dog or wolf pack, or the human in a dog-human relationship.

anal sac (or gland): Small paired glands near the anus. They're paired sacs on either side of the anus between the external and internal sphincter muscles.

bi-eyes: One blue eye, one brown eye.

bikejoring: A sport in which a harnessed dog or team is attached to a towline and who pull and run ahead of a cyclist.

bismuth subsalicylate: An over-the-counter diarrhea medication; also used to relieve an upset stomach. Brand name is Kaopectate.

bitch: A female dog.

bloat: An emergency condition in which the stomach dilates and then rotates, or twists, around its short axis.

booties: Protective foot covers for the Husky.

Bordetella: An inflammation of the dog's upper respiratory system often characterized by coughing. Secondary infections are possible. Also refers to the yearly vaccine. Also known as *kennel cough.*

canicross: Also referred to as *caniX,* a jogging sport in which the dog pulls the human jogger by lead attached to a waistbelt.

Canis lupus: The gray, or northern, wolf.

***Canis lupus* familiaris:** The domestic dog. Includes Siberian Huskies, Chihuahuas, Labrador Retrievers, and all other domestic dogs.

cart: Two-wheeled vehicle. Also known as *sulky.*

carting: A canine sport in which the dog pulls two or four-wheeled vehicles. Also known as *drafting.*

chinchilla factor: The guard coat hairs banded with white, producing a silvery effect.

Chukchis: Native people of extreme northeastern Siberia; the first breeders of the Siberian Husky.

conformation: The externally visible structure of the dog. It's what is judged in a dog show.

coronavirus (canine): A highly contagious intestinal disease specific to wild and domestic dogs. The coronavirus replicates itself in the small intestine. A CCV infection is considered to be a relatively mild disease with few or sporadic symptoms. Although a member of the coronavirus family, it's a different disease than the infamous Covid-19 affecting human beings, although Covid-19 can also affect dogs.

dam: The mother dog.

dewclaw: An extra, often believed to be unneeded, claw on the inside of the Husky's rear leg. It should be removed shortly after birth.

diabetes: A chronic metabolic disease caused by insulin insufficiency.

distemper: A severe, often fatal, airborne virus that can cause permanent brain damage, vomiting, and diarrhea.

dog: A male dog.

epilepsy: The most common neurological disorder in dogs characterized by recurrent seizures.

forging: Pulling ahead on the leash.

gangline: A long lead that runs down the middle of the of the dog team and to which tuglines are attached. Also referred to as *towline.*

Gee: Command to turn right.

Great Serum Run: The historical event that gave birth to the Iditarod, in which teams of Huskies delivered the precious diphtheria serum to Nome, Alaska.

glaucoma: An eye disease characterized by an elevation in intraocular pressure that is incompatible with normal ocular function. There is no cure, although several treatments are available.

Go By: Command to the dog to continue without rubbernecking at the same interesting object. Also known as *On By.*

guard hairs: Long, smooth guards that grow through and conceal the undercoat.

Haw: Command to turn left.

hip dysplasia: A largely inherited skeletal condition in which the ball and socket of the hip don't develop or fit together properly. Several treatment options are available, including surgery for severe cases.

howl: A long, low-pitched vocalization that can carry for miles.

Husky: A term, derived from a derogatory slang word for Eskimo, for any of several northern dog breeds.

hypothermia: Excessive loss of body heat; a serious chill.

hypothyroidism: The most common hormone imbalance in dogs; usually caused by inflammation or shrinkage of the thyroid gland. Several treatments are available.

Iditarod: A Gold Rush city of interior Alaska; the great sled race that takes place every March in that state.

infectious canine hepatitis: An acute viral liver infection. The virus is spread in the feces, urine, blood, saliva, and nasal discharge of infected dogs.

Irish: Colloquial term for a Siberian with a mask, white legs, and a white underside.

lead: A leash.

Leptospirosis: A bacterial disease affecting the liver and kidneys. An annual vaccine is available.

level bite: Where the top and bottom teeth meet evenly; considered a fault in this breed.

loperamide: An over-the-counter anti-diarrhea medication. Brand name is Immodium.

Lyme disease: A tickborne bacterial illness characterized by fever, appetite loss, lethargy, lameness, and pain. A vaccine is available, but it isn't 100 percent effective.

monochrome: A hair of one solid color.

musher: A sled driver.

obedience: Dog sport in which the canine contestant is judged on the ability to follow a series of commands.

obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD): A condition in which a dog manifests repeated, destructive, or annoying behaviors like whirling or paw-licking.

parti-color: An eye with patches of two or more colors. Sometimes referred to as *pinto* or *split.*

parvovirus: Highly contagious viral illness that affects dogs.

progressive retinal atrophy: A group of degenerative diseases that affect photoreceptor cells in the eyes. The cells deteriorate over time, leading to blindness. Both an early and late onset form.

rabies: A nearly 100 percent fatal viral infection causing inflammation of the brain. It can infect any mammal; preventable by vaccine.

rally: A dog obedience sport in which the dog proceeds along a course marked with instructional sign.

sable: Guard hairs banded with red near the roots, but tipped with black.

scissors bite: The correct bite in Huskies. The outer side of the lower incisors touches the inner side of the upper incisors.

Siberian swirl: Common name for a sleeping position in which the Husky lies swirled, nose buried in his tail.

sickle tail: Carried up and out in a semicircle.

sire: The father dog.

siwash harness: Special padded harness designed for carting or drafting dogs.

skijoring: A winter sport in which a dog tows a skier over snow.

sled bag: Bag to contain a musher's gear.

slicker brush: A pin brush to remove tangles and remove loose hair with double coated breeds.

snipy: A pointy, weak muzzle, lacking breadth and depth.

snow hook: Emergency brake for the musher's sled.

snow nose: A normally black nose that acquires a pink streak in winter.

snubline: A line to attach the team to a tree while resting.

stop: The step up from the muzzle to the back of the skull; indentation between the eyes where the nasal bones and cranium meet.

taiga: A moist, subarctic forest at the edge of the tundra, composed mostly of firs and spruce.

theobromine: The toxic (to dogs) ingredient in chocolate.

topline: A dog's outline from just behind the shoulders to the tail set.

tracking: A canine sport in which the dog is expected to follow a human scent over time and distance.

Tschkat (or something): Command that means "Straight ahead, keep going!"

Trail!: Command that means "Yield the right of way, please."

tugline: Line attaching the canine team member to the gangline.

undercoat: The soft dense hair that supports the outercoat.

vaccine titer: A measure of the level of disease-fighting antibodies present in the blood.

wagon: Four-wheeled vehicle.

Whoa!: Command to stop.

withers: Top of the shoulders.

wooing: Plaintive noise produced by Huskies for a variety of mostly incomprehensible reasons.

x-back harness: A harness design in which the x-design keeps the harness in place, controls vertical motion, but doesn't restrict the dog's gait.

zinc malabsorption disorder: A genetic condition in which the intestines don't absorb zinc properly; found in Siberian Huskies, Alaskan Malamutes, and similar breeds.

Appendix B

Siberian Husky Resources

Refer to the following Husky resources when you need them:

The Siberian Husky Club of America

The Siberian Husky Club of America (SHCA) website (`www.shca.org/shcahp4g.htm`) includes a plethora of helpful advice, including following:

- Specific information about owning Siberians
- Ways to rescue a Siberian (which includes a current list of all approved Siberian rescue organizations)
- Research on health problems in the breed
- Siberian Husky events and local area clubs
- Ways to find a reputable breeder
- Information about Working programs (including sled dog titles)

International Sled Dog Racing Association

The International Sled Dog Racing Association's website (`www.isdra.org`) includes sled dog basics, events, current standings, and other information vital to the sled dog enthusiast.

American Kennel Club (AKC)

The American Kennel Club's website (www.akc.org) is chock-full of information about all things dog, including finding a puppy, events, expert advice, products and services, and breed clubs. You'll register you AKC-purebred puppy on this site.

International Siberian Husky Club

The International Siberian Husky Club's enjoyable website (www.ishclub.org) includes information about recreational opportunities, exercises with your Siberian, fun facts, training, and more.

Mushing/Sledding Equipment

If you're interested in introducing your Husky to sledding or he's already a sled dog, the good news is you don't have to look far to find equipment. You can find a plethora of websites that sell sledding and general dog equipment. Here are some of the most prominent (and don't forget eBay):

- Sled Dog Central: https://www.sleddogcentral.com/equip_supplies.htm. This general clearinghouse site lists MANY commercial suppliers.
- Go Mushing: https://www.gomushing.com/
- Snow Paw Store: https://snowpawstore.com/collections/sled-dog-equipment

Sled Dog Central

Sled Dog Central is a clearinghouse site (www.sleddogcentral.com/clubs_usa.htm) that will point your to your nearest organization to suit your needs. The site covers everything from sledding to skijoring to bikejoring.

National Association of Professional Pet Sitters

The National Association of Professional Pet Sitters (NAPPS) website (`https://petsitters.org/`) is so helpful. If you don't completely trust the teenager next door, NAPPS can help you locate a certified pet sitter in your area to provide the level of care your dog needs.

Pet Poison Helplines

If your Husky is poisoned by any chemicals that I discuss in Chapter 14, you want to take immediate action. Keep these numbers on your fridge and stored in your phone for quick and easy access:

- Your vet (during her office hours).
- Your local animal ER (after your vet's hours).
- Animal Poison Control Center at (888) 426-4435. (This number is free.)

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Dedication

For Ricky Ulmer: First friend, best friend, blood brother, and more than blood brother, and companion and lover of the Greenwood.

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