

LEARNING MADE EASY



2nd Edition

Pit Bulls

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Confronting the
facts about Pit Bulls

Keeping your dog healthy
with diet and exercise

Training basics and dealing
with behavioral issues

D. Caroline Coile, PhD

Columnist for AKC Family Dog

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Introduction

Pull up a chair and spend some time with one of the most amazing, yet controversial, breeds to ever wag a tail. A breed of satin and steel, Pit Bulls are a mixture of softness and strength, an uncanny canine combination of fun, foolishness, and serious business, all wrapped up in love. If you ignore any of these ingredients you're cheating yourself, and your dog, of the best relationship possible. My aim with this book has been to include the same mixture. Parts of it will be fun, a few parts perhaps even foolish, and much of it serious — always with the aim of strengthening and lengthening the bond between you and dog, and ensuring the Pit Bull earns back its good name.

But this book, like the breed, also comes with a caveat. As much as I hate to admit it, the breed has earned its controversial status. The Pit Bull has another side, one that too many dog lovers (and books) deny, ignore, or excuse. To do so isn't fair to Pit Bull owners, other dogs, and the breed itself. Understanding this breed — both the good and the bad — is the best way to protect it. The irrefutable fact is that more Pit Bulls have killed more people and other dogs than any other type of dog has done. Owning any dog is a big responsibility, but because Pit Bulls aren't like any other dog, owning a Pit Bull requires even *more* vigilance.

This is not a book meant to sit on your shelf as a collector's item. This book should have ragged pages and chewed covers, with dog hairs as bookmarks. It should have imprints of tiny puppy teeth and full-grown paw prints marking the pages with your dog's progress through life, and when one day it comes time to place it back on the shelf with the last chapter christened with tears, you will have no regrets. You will have known that you and your dog shared a life of fun, foolishness, and love, all made possible because of some serious stuff. But for now, just make sure you don't get so immersed in reading that you forget to play with your dog!

About This Book

Whether this is the only dog book you'll have on your shelf, or whether your shelves are jammed with dog books, I wrote this book to be the one book you can count on when it comes to caring for and enjoying your Pit Bull. Too many dog care books are filled with unrealistic scare tactics that would cause anyone to just give up, and others are filled with hand-me-down dog lore that has no basis in reality. I did my best to make sure you won't find either of those in this book, but instead, evidence-based information that you can rely on when deciding whether this is the breed for you and, if the answer is yes, how you can best raise your dog to be the dog of your dreams.

Who should read this book? The people who think Pit Bulls should be purged from the face of the earth, as well as those who think it's all how you raise them. Neither point of view is correct. The real Pit Bull lies somewhere in between, the victim of both people who hate him too much or love him too much to understand the total dog.

This book is a reference. The chapters are self-contained chunks of information that you can read in any order you want. If you want to read the book from beginning to end, feel free, but if you prefer to skip around and read the topics that interest you, be my guest! The Table of Contents and Index can help you find what you're looking for.

Sidebars (text in gray boxes) and paragraphs marked with the Technical Stuff icon (see "[Icons Used in This Book](#)") are skippable. Also, within this book, you may note that some web addresses break across two lines of text. If you're reading this book in print and want to visit one of these web pages, simply key in the web address exactly as it's noted in the text, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist. If you're reading this as an e-book, you've got it easy — just click the web address to be taken directly to the web page.

Foolish Assumptions

When writing this book, I made some assumptions about you, the reader:

- » You may be considering getting a Pit Bull, and you'd like to learn more about the breed.
- » You already have a Pit Bull, and you want some tried-and-true advice about how to care for and manage your four-legged friend.
- » You have an open mind, and you're interested in hearing the facts about Pit Bulls so that you can be a well-informed ally to the breed.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout, the text, I use little pictures, called *icons*, to flag special bits of information. Here are what the icons represent:



TIP

For good, old-fashioned, helpful advice, look to this icon.



REMEMBER

When there's a general concept that I don't want you to forget, I use this icon.



WARNING

When presenting information that may protect you or your dog from harm, I give you this icon.



**TECHNICAL
STUFF**

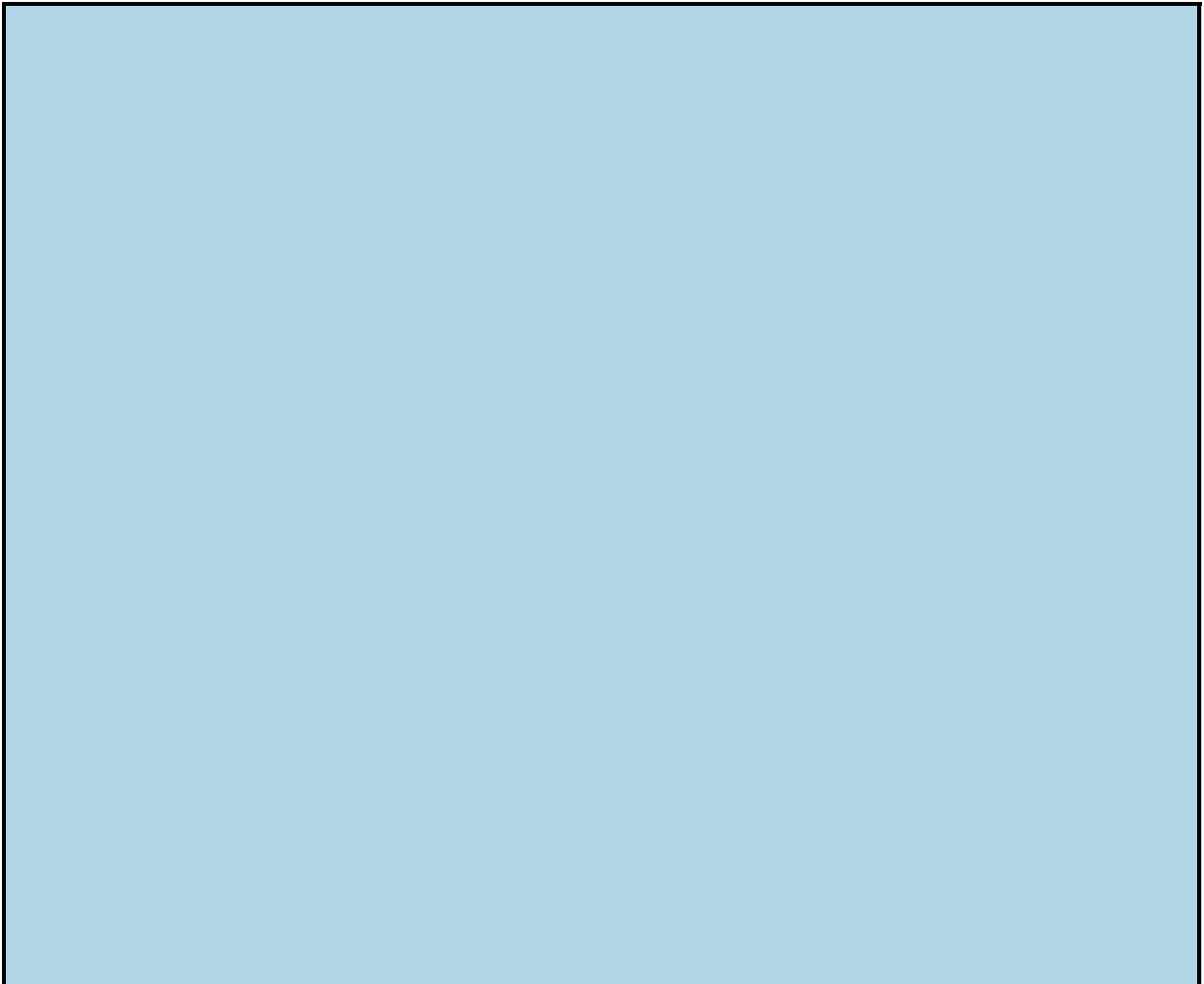
When I wade into the weeds on more technical information on Pit Bulls or caring for them, I mark that material with the Technical Stuff icon. You can skip anything marked with this icon without missing the point of the topic at hand.

Beyond the Book

In addition to the material in the print or e-book you're reading right now, this product also comes with some access-anywhere goodies on the web. Check out the free Cheat Sheet for a five-minute health check you can do for your Pit Bull, as well as medical basics and emergency first aid. To access the Cheat Sheet, go to www.dummies.com and type **Pit Bulls For Dummies Cheat Sheet** in the Search box.

Where to Go from Here

If you're interested in the history of the Pit Bull breed, its current controversies, or whether this is the breed for you, check out [Part 1](#). Jump to [Part 2](#) if you need advice on choosing a Pit Bull, breeder versus rescue, and what to look out for. The rest of the book gives you the scoop on caring for and training your Pit Bull friend.



WHY THIS BOOK ISN'T SUGAR-COATED

I'm a lifelong lover of dogs, but also a lover of science. I've been trained in the biological bases of animal behavior, including the science of behavioral genetics. Dogs are the greatest experiment ever performed in behavioral genetics, representing thousands of years of selection for behavior — selection that makes Pointers point, Retrievers retrieve, Greyhounds chase, and Beagles sniff. So, it always seemed strange to me that Pit Bull advocates claimed that their breed was exempt from any genetically influenced behaviors.

Some years ago, when writing my *Encyclopedia of Dog Breeds*, I included some cautionary statements about Pit Bull-type breeds under their breed descriptions. I did this with several other breeds that had bad bite, or even fatality, records. The book then went out for review. I was, to put it mildly, attacked by Pit Bull advocates, quick to tell me that Pit Bulls were nanny dogs, all the statistics were rigged, they were far sweeter than any other breed, and so on. The intensity of their response convinced me that my viewpoint was wrong.

So, when I saw two tiny dumped Pit Bull puppies on the road one day, I snatched them up and brought them home to raise like one (or two) of our own. Our friends told us it wasn't a good idea, that Tuggy and Scooty could harm our other dogs. I scoffed at them, parroting what I'd heard: that Pit Bulls used to be nanny dogs, and it was "all how you raised them." We raised them like we had raised all our other dogs over the past 40 years — 30 or so dogs in all — with never a serious incident. We shook our heads at how Pit Bulls were misunderstood and the unfairness of how the breed was discriminated against. Tuggy and Scooty were shining examples that it was, indeed, all how you raised them. They became best buddies with one of my other dogs, Luna, and I trusted them implicitly.

One day they all had big new chew bones. Luna decided she should growl possessively at Scooty. And that was all it took. With no warning, not a bark or a growl, not a sign of anger, Scooty jumped on Luna, grabbed her around the neck, and proceeded to choke the life out of her. Tuggy joined in, silently grabbing a back leg and pulling as hard as he could. My mother and I desperately tried to get them off of Luna and pry open their jaws. Luna's tongue turned blue, she lost consciousness, and let loose her bowels. At that point I knew we had lost her.

You know the worst nightmare you've ever had? The one where something horrible is happening to someone you love, but you're moving in slow-motion, as if you have 50-pound weights on your hands and feet, and you can't speak or yell because you have no breath? That's how I felt when I saw Luna getting killed in front of me. You may think you could react well in such a situation and save your dog's life, but you can't.

I tried to pry Scooty's jaws off Luna, but all that got me was my hand bitten clean through (it would later require a \$26,000 surgery to repair). Scooty took off running around the house dragging Luna's lifeless body like a leopard with a dead antelope in a macabre game of keep-away. I tried to think of any weapon I could use, anything that looked like a break stick, but I had nothing because I trusted my Pit Bulls. I trusted what

people had told me, and as I result, I was totally unprepared. In desperation, I overturned a marble table and Scooty finally let go.

I learned a very hard lesson that day: Pit Bull behavior is not, in fact, about how you raise them. I had been duped by people who, in their quest to defend their favorite breed, had given me wrong information and caused me to be overconfident. Had I been better prepared with the facts, chances are, this tragedy could have been prevented. I never would have given the dogs bones together. I never would have trusted them to the extent I had. And I never would have been so unprepared to break them up.

I tell you all this to explain why you won't just get the standard, sugar-coated, "nanny dog," "It's all how you raise them" mantras in this book. I won't do that to you, to your family (human, canine, and feline alike), or to your Pit Bulls. I refuse to set them, or you, up for failure. I want you to have a *great* life with your Pit Bull, but to do that you need to fully understand the best, and the worst, this breed has to offer. Because when they are good (and most of them are, most of the time), they are great, but when they're bad, they can be deadly. If you have a Pit Bull, your job is to understand and accept both sides of the breed, and prepare accordingly.

Part 1

Getting Started with Pit Bulls

IN THIS PART ...

Get acquainted with the Pit Bull's past and how it affects his present.

Know what Pit Bulls look like and how big they get.

Look beyond the public image (good and bad) and consider whether a Pit Bull is the new best friend you're looking for.

Find the right source and the right Pit for you.

Chapter 1

Pitting and Petting: The Pit Bull's Past

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Explaining the Pit Bull's origins
 - » Creating a distinct breed
 - » Going mainstream
 - » Being labeled unfairly
 - » Growing in numbers
 - » Facing the facts
-

Perhaps no other dog breed has endured as many public misconceptions as has the Pit Bull. These misconceptions truly run the gamut: Although some people consider Pit Bulls to be the safest and gentlest companions, others regard them as evil enough to be Satan's understudies. Neither viewpoint is correct, but both have some basis in fact — and in the breed's controversial roots.

Creating Canine Gladiators

Dogs and humans around the world have long shared a special relationship — a relationship originally based on function. Early dogs who proved least useful — or who were too wild, skittish, or dumb — probably ended up in the cave man's pot, but the most helpful dogs (who were good at sounding alarms at intruders or at chasing down game) lived to produce others like them. Eventually, breed forerunners were created by breeding the best guards to the best guards and the best

hunters to the best hunters. Of these, some strains proved to be especially brave and tough — valuable traits in a rough world.

Of course, these strains weren't really breeds. Few cave men had American Kennel Club or United Kennel Club papers for their dogs, so pure breeding wasn't terribly important to them. Still, with time the strains of dogs became more and more specialized. By classical Greek times, large fierce dogs called *Molossians* were so valued that Phoenician traders used them as bartering items. Because of this practice, the Molossian type was distributed along Phoenician shipping routes, some of which included stops in ancient Britain. The Molossians who ended up in Britain became further specialized and gave rise to the Mastiff family of dogs.

In Britain, Mastiffs were perfected as war dogs. When the Romans invaded Britain, they were so impressed by the Mastiff's warring ability that they brought some back to Rome. Romans valued entertainment, and the courageous dogs became infamous as gladiators who fought humans, bears, lions, bulls, and even each other in Rome's great Coliseum.

Rome was not, however, the only civilization to revel in blood sports. The British, too, placed high value on contests that featured animals fighting to the death. The spectacle of a dog killing a bull was the highest entertainment that most small villages could offer its poor inhabitants. But this kind of entertainment spanned all classes: By the 16th century, bull-, bear-, and even horse-baiting provided the finale for a royal evening of entertainment (for an explanation of bull-baiting, see the sidebar "[Bull-baiting](#)"). In the 17th century, the King even appointed a Master of the King's Games of Bears, Bulls, and Dogs.

The dogs' owners won prizes for their animals' spectacular performances, and the progeny of famous or particularly *game* dogs (meaning those dogs who refuse to quit the task at hand despite overwhelming adversity) were sought after and capable of bringing high prices. As distasteful as it sounds, these dogs produced the never-say-die stock from which today's Pit Bull claims her heritage.

An end to legal blood sports in England finally came about in 1835, but that only pushed the fans and gamblers to conduct covert matches. Staging a clandestine bull-baiting would have been difficult, but scheduling a dogfight in a barn, cellar, or back room without being discovered was quite simple.

Dog fighting favored a slightly smaller, more agile gladiator than the dogs who were adept at baiting larger animals. Most historians believe that the stocky bull-baiting dogs were crossed with the swift and agile terriers of the time to produce the aptly named Bull and Terrier, a relatively small, smart, agile, tough, and strong game dog the likes of which had never been seen before. Other breed historians contend that no such cross was made and point out that the Bulldog of the time, the Bullenbeisser, was, in fact, so similar to the modern Pit Bull that it was simply a matter of selecting the most successful fighters. Whatever the recipe, it worked.

BULL-BAITING

Although the role of canine gladiator was the most visible job for the tough dogs of ancient Europe, it was far from their most important one. A subtype of Molossian dogs known as *Bullenbeissers*, or German Bulldogs, were valued for their ability to control unruly cattle, earning their keep as butcher's dogs. These dogs had to catch and grip escaping or uncooperative bulls on their way to market. The dog would hang on the bull's nose, gripping the nose without letting go until the butcher could regain control. A good butcher's dog could make the butcher's job easy; a bad dog could be killed by the bull. As with all people who depend on their dogs, butchers were proud of their best "bulldogs" and anxious to prove them better than the neighboring town butcher's dogs. So began the cruel practice of bull-baiting, in which a bull was tormented (sometimes for hours) not only for entertainment, but also in the mistaken belief that torturing the animal before killing it made its meat more tender. In fact, in some places selling meat from a bull that had not been baited was illegal. Bullenbeissers gave rise to the Boxer breed in Germany and to what would eventually become the Pit Bull in Britain.

Almost every town in England had a bull-baiting ring. One or two dogs were released, and they would attempt to grab the bull (which was usually chained to a stake) by the nose, often tormenting it for hours. The cruelties inflicted upon the poor animals (bulls and dogs alike) by people in the process were atrocious. In one well-known case, the owner of a dog demonstrated how courageous his dog was by cutting off each of her legs, one leg at a time, while she continued to drag herself to attack the bull. The dog was lost, but her offspring were in high demand.

As the Bulldogs or Bull and Terriers became known less for their bull-baiting skills and more for their fighting skills in the pits, they came to be known as Pit Bulldogs, or more simply, Pit Bulls.



WARNING The breed known today as the Bulldog or English Bulldog is not the same as the Bulldog of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The earlier Bulldog strain is the ancestor of both the modern Pit Bull breeds and the modern Bulldog, but it was more similar to today's Pit Bull than to today's Bulldog. Many people still incorrectly refer to Pit Bulls as "Bulldogs," though.

When English immigrants came to America, they brought with them their sport and their dogs. By the mid-1800s, dog fighting had a solid following in America. With the migration west, Bulldogs once again found themselves called upon to do the toughest jobs. They served as all-purpose farm and guard dogs, protecting families and stock from fierce wildlife, rampaging cattle, and marauding vermin. Many also served as hunting dogs, holding their own against bears, wolves, and on occasion, buffalo. Once again, the Bulldog underwent a metamorphosis — this time into a larger dog that could best serve these vital functions.

This variety of purpose is directly responsible for the great range in size of today's Pit Bulls. An example of one possible size is shown in [Figure 1-1](#).

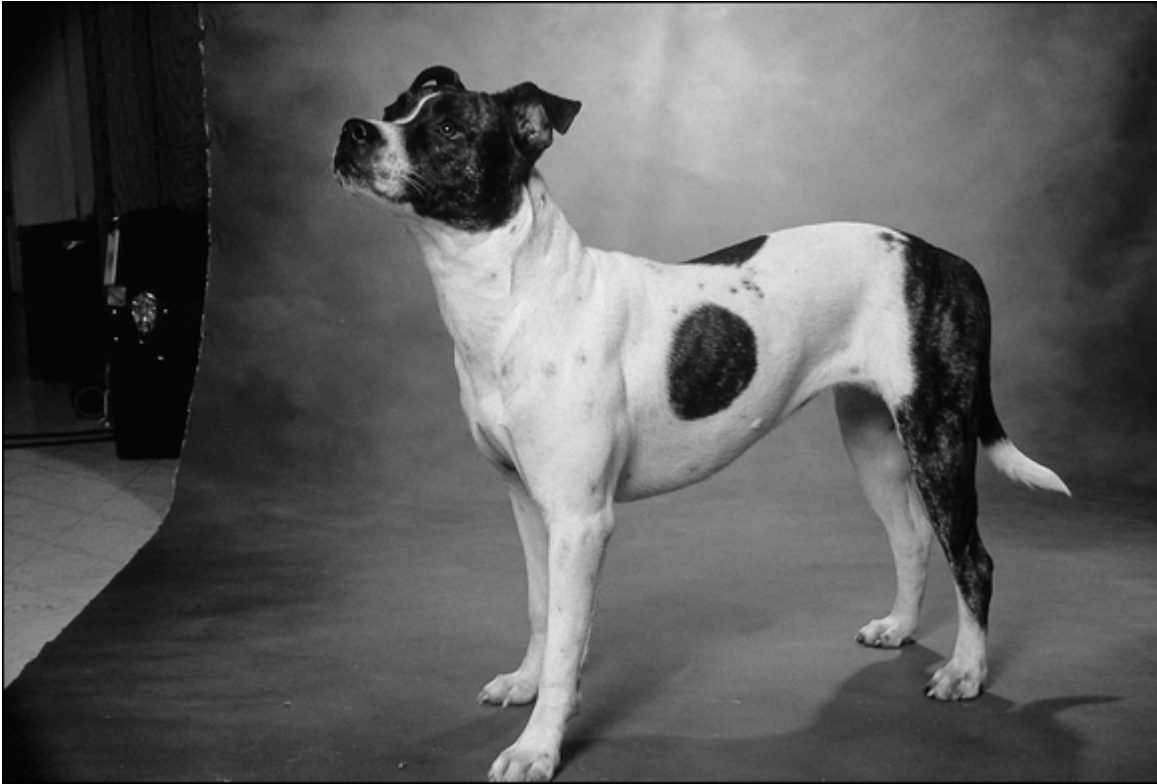


FIGURE 1-1: Pit Bulls, because of their toughness, have been asked throughout history to do the tough jobs.

Showing Off

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, purebred dog mania was sweeping Europe and America. Anything that looked like a pure breed — and could be paraded around a show ring — was fair game. The fighting dogs (now dubbed Pit Bulls) seemed unlikely show dogs, however, for they lacked the desired association with the upper echelons of society (any association the upper class would admit to, that is).

The American Kennel Club (AKC) was formed in 1884 to promote the interests of purebred dogs. It did so by maintaining a pedigree registry and by sponsoring performance and conformation competitions.

Performance competitions were designed to test dogs at the function for which they were bred; for example, pointing breeds competed at pointing field trials. *Conformation competitions* were designed to compare dogs to the breed's standard of excellence, which in turn was

written to describe a dog who was built to perform the job for which he was bred.

That the AKC was interested in promoting both the performance and the conformation of breeds was a problem because the job that the Pit Bull had been bred to perform was illegal. The AKC refused to endorse any aspect of dog fighting. And the old-time Pit Bull fighting men weren't too interested in exchanging the excitement of the dog pit for a trot around the show ring.

Thus, an alternative registration body, called the United Kennel Club (UKC), was formed in 1898 to register Pit Bulls (and later, other breeds). The UKC, founded by Pit Bull owner Chauncey Bennett, emphasized function and included dog fighting as a legitimate function of Pit Bulls. To this day, the UKC remains a strong registry for many breeds — especially its banner breed, the American Pit Bull Terrier — but it no longer endorses dog fighting in any manner.

FIGHTING WORDS

Although dog fighting is illegal in the United States, it does occur — and it even has rules! Understanding how a traditional match was (and still is) conducted is — no matter how unsavory — essential to understanding the way Pit Bull breeding stock were selected for generations.

In the heat of battle, the dogs must discriminate between biting another dog and biting a human. Before a fight begins, each dog is washed by the opponent's handler to make sure that no drugs or toxic or foul-tasting substances are on the dog's coat. Otherwise the other dog would get the substances in his mouth. The dog is then dried and carried to his corner. During the fight, a referee and the two handlers remain in the ring with the dogs. The handlers sometimes kneel right beside the dogs; they are allowed to urge their dogs on but not to touch them. If a dog becomes "fanged" (that is, if its canine tooth pierces its own lip), the handlers hold both dogs while the referee tries to push the tooth back through the lip with a stick or other utensil. The dogs are then released a few feet from each other.

True fighting dogs are eerily silent. Barking, growling, snarling, and showing teeth are threat displays that most dogs use in an attempt to discourage an opponent before a fight begins. Most dogs are more show than go, and fighting consists largely of bluffing the other dog into submission. Not so with a fighting Pit Bull. He is more likely to whine with excitement.

If one of the fighting dogs turns away from the other, the referee calls a "turn" and both handlers retrieve their dogs and take them back to their corners. The dog who turned is

then released and expected to “scratch,” meaning to cross the pit and attack the other dog within ten seconds. The dogs continue to take turns being released first every time one dog turns. The dog may crawl, stagger, or drag himself toward the other dog as long as he doesn’t stop or hesitate. A dog who fails to scratch loses the match, and perhaps his life, as he is considered to lack gameness. A dog who is losing, but nonetheless attempts to scratch, might lose the match but may return to fight another day if his handler concedes the match.

The UKC fancied up the breed’s name by calling it the American (Pit) Bull Terrier, later changing the name to the now accepted American Pit Bull Terrier. Because the breed’s roots are mostly European, and the Pit Bull may or may not have terrier influences, the name is somewhat of a misnomer.

The first American (Pit) Bull Terrier to be registered with the UKC was Bennett’s Ring, owned by UKC founder Chauncey Bennett.

In 1909, Pit Bull proponents organized yet another registry, the American Dog Breeder’s Association (ADBA). The ADBA registers only one breed: the American Pit Bull Terrier (APBT). The ADBA was traditionally the registry of fighting Pit Bulls. Although it no longer endorses dog fighting, it maintains that reputation. The ADBA instead now sponsors conformation shows and popular weight pulling contests.

NAME THAT DOG

A breed of many names, Pit Bulls have been called

- American Pit Bull Terriers
- American Bull Terriers
- American Staffordshire Terriers
- Brindle Bulldogs
- Bull and Terriers
- Bulldogs
- Half and Halfs
- Old Family Reds (Ireland)
- Pit Bull Terriers
- Pit Dogs

- Pit Terriers
- American Rebel Terriers
- Staffordshire Fighting Dogs
- Staffordshire Terriers
- Yankee Terriers

Until the 1970s, neither the UKC nor the ADBA sponsored conformation shows. Yet, some Pit Bull fans wanted to try their dogs in the show ring. In 1936, Pit Bull fans who wanted to try their dogs in the show ring sacrificed the breed's name (which was unacceptable to the AKC because of its fighting connotation) and replaced it with another name: the Staffordshire Terrier. The AKC welcomed Staffordshire Terriers into its registry and show rings. This turn of events set up an unusual situation in the world of dogs. The same dog can be registered as an American Pit Bull Terrier with the UKC and the ADBA, and as an American Staffordshire Terrier (the *American* was added in 1972 to distinguish the breed from the Staffordshire Bull Terrier) with the AKC. Over the years, Pit Bull fanciers have tended to stick with one registry (and breed name) over the other.



REMEMBER Today, the APBT and the American Staffordshire Terrier (or *AmStaff*) have diverged somewhat. AmStaffs tend to be larger and more muscular than APBTs. APBTs have a greater range in looks because APBT breeders traditionally breed for function in the fighting pit rather than for looks in the show ring. Although there is considerable overlap, in general, AmStaffs *look* tougher, but APBTs *are* tougher.

Becoming America's Sweetheart

In the early 20th century, Pit Bulls moved gracefully from fame as pit fighters to fame as national symbols. The Pit Bull's reputation for courage and tenacity, combined with his good nature, made him a

natural as the dog synonymous with the United States during World War I. A popular war poster of the period aptly captures the true Pit Bull outlook by showing a picture of a Pit Bull wearing an American flag bandana above the phrase “I’m neutral, but not afraid of any of them.” Another poster featured a Pit Bull named Tige, who was the companion of the then-popular cartoon character Buster Brown. (Buster Brown and Tige also represented Buster Brown shoes in advertisements.)

In fact, a possible Pit Bull (or Pit Bull mix or Boston Terrier mix — nobody knows for sure) named Stubby emerged from World War I as a national hero. Stubby was the unofficial mascot of the 102nd infantry, and when it came time to go overseas, the men smuggled him on board. Despite no training or experience in battle conditions, Stubby braved intense shelling to comfort wounded soldiers lying in the crossfire. He eventually served for 18 months and participated in 17 battles. Stubby repeatedly warned his regiment of incoming mortar shells and mustard gas attacks, and once he even prevented a spy from escaping. When Stubby was wounded, he played the role of therapy dog, cheering hospitalized soldiers. Even while recuperating in Paris, he was credited with saving a child from being run over.

Stubby was decorated by General Pershing, awarded the rank of honorary sergeant, and received by three presidents. He led more parades than any dog in history. Upon Stubby’s death in 1926, his hide was mounted over a plaster form of his body, with an urn containing his ashes inside. He was displayed wearing a medal-covered coat, first at the Red Cross Museum and then at the Smithsonian Institute. Until recently, Stubby was largely forgotten, packed away in a crate in a back room of the Smithsonian. But in 2018, an animated movie about him renewed interest and Stubby is back on exhibition at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History.

The next Pit Bull to capture America’s heart was Petey of *The Little Rascals* and *Our Gang* movie fame. Actually, Petey had already starred in several Buster Brown movies (as Tige) before becoming one of the most popular Rascals of all time. When the original Petey died, he was replaced with another Petey, an American Staffordshire Terrier registered

as Lucenay's Peter. Whatever his role, Pete the Pup exemplified the Pit Bull in his role as a roguish buddy, furthering the breed's appeal.

Popular with families and welcomed throughout neighborhoods, the Pit Bull basked in his reputation as a fun-loving and patient member of the family.

This is not to say that things were always rosy, however. As far back as the late 1800s and early 1900s, breed bans were put in place against "bulldogs," as they were called in several cities, including Washington, D.C. Although people tend to think of Pit Bull attacks as a more recent trend, around the turn of the twentieth century, they had already been in the news for killing people, with many reporters calling for their banishment.

THE PETEY PAPERS

One of the earliest cinema dog stars was Petey, of *Our Gang*. Petey was modeled after Tige, Buster Brown's cartoon dog. Like other *Our Gang* members, Petey's life and death is surrounded by rumors. Some reliable sources say that the original Petey (played by a dog named Pal) was poisoned after about two years as a Little Rascal and replaced by his son, named Pete — explaining why Petey's painted-on circle around one eye switches sides partway through the series. Another piece of Petey trivia: He was the first Pit Bull to be both UKC and AKC-registered.

Overcoming Pride and Prejudice

Dog breeds often wax and wane in popularity, and so it has been with the Pit Bull. After World War II, the Pit Bull gradually faded from the public eye and the family home. True devotees, however, remained as loyal to their dogs as their dogs were to them. Some of the breed remained as steadfast pets, others continued as game pit dogs — and many performed both roles admirably.

Dog fighting, although illegal, continued to be carried out with minimal interference from law enforcement until the 1970s, when the American Dog Owner's Association (ADOA) formed to lobby against dogfights. The ADOA was successful in bringing public attention to the pit —

helping to push dog fighting into the shadows and propelling pit dogs into an unflattering limelight.

As with many well-intentioned laws, some unforeseen problems accompanied the crackdown on dog fighting. Dog fighting continued; it just went underground. Its illegal nature attracted patrons whose major area of knowledge was in pay-offs and threats, not Pit Bulls.

Knowledgeable *dogmen* (the term for serious breeders of fighting Pit Bulls) could no longer distribute information about training methods, leaving newcomers to dog fighting — who often believed scare tactic propaganda — to experiment using cruel practices. They trained the dogs using stolen puppies and dogs as “bait dogs” in an attempt to encourage them to kill, fed them gunpowder in an attempt to make them mean, and hired strangers to beat the dogs with clubs in an attempt to make them aggressive to strangers. Not surprisingly, their dogs seldom succeeded at matches, and they were often discarded. The harm done to these dogs made them difficult to place as pets, and the harm done to the breed’s reputation was immeasurable.

A certain segment of the population has always wanted to have the toughest dog on the block. Various breeds have filled these shoes throughout the years, and beginning in the early 1980s the Pit Bull was on its way to becoming the “tough guy” poster dog.

GOOD SPORTS

Although illegal pit fighting still exists, Pit Bulls can legitimately compete in conformation, obedience, agility, and weight pulling competitions, and they are proving themselves helpful as boar hunters, search and rescue dogs, therapy dogs, and most of all, companions.

Growing in Popularity

Over the years, Pit Bulls have gradually become more and more popular. But popularity isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. In fact, it can be a big problem for any dog breed. The popularity of dog breeds is driven by

fads. People copy celebrities who own a certain breed, neighbors and friends who own a breed, dogs they see in TV shows and movies, in advertisements, and on social media. With more than 200 breeds to choose from (not to mention an endless number of mixed-breed dogs available), dogs from only about 20 breeds make up more than half of all the dogs in North America. These super-popular breeds change through the years. And when people lose interest in a breed, those dogs can end up being abandoned to shelters.

It's hard to track the popularity of Pit Bulls because most Pit Bulls aren't registered with any dog registry. What we can do is look at statistics. According to Animals 24-7 (www.animals24-7.org), a group that, among other projects, tracks dog statistics, Pit Bulls made up approximately 8 percent of all dogs offered for sale in 2019, which translates to approximately 1.3 million Pit Bulls. That number doesn't include the 31 percent of all dogs offered for adoption, which amounted to an additional 1 million Pit Bulls available in 2019. Together, Pit Bulls made up almost 12 percent of the dogs looking for a home that year. Overall, Pit Bulls made up almost 6 percent of all the dogs in the United States, or about 4.5 million Pit Bulls.

According to Animals 24-7, Pit Bulls and Pit Bull mixes make up about 33 percent of shelter intakes nationwide, with even higher numbers (up to 65 percent) in large cities. In fact, almost one-third of all Pit Bulls eventually find their way into shelters — a far higher percentage than any other breed in history. Why? For one thing, too many people get a Pit Bull because it's the in-style dog of the moment, without considering the special responsibilities that come with owning this breed. Also, Pits especially appeal to younger people, who may not have the maturity, experience, or resources to properly care for a dog of any breed, let alone a Pit Bull.

FAMOUS PIT BULL OWNERS

Famous Pit Bull lovers include Jessica Alba, Jennifer Aniston, Fiona Apple, Fred Astaire, Kevin Bacon, Lake Bell, Jessica Biel, Rachel Bilson, Humphrey Bogart, Tom Brady, Adam Brody, Sophia Bush, Kaley Cuoco, Jack Dempsey, Thomas Edison, Adrian

Grenier, Tom Hardy, Katherine Heigl, Liam Hemsworth, Josh Hutcherson, Marc Jacobs, Helen Keller, Miranda Lambert, Madonna, Cesar Millan, Judd Nelson, Pink, Rachael Ray, Norman Reedus, Theodore Roosevelt, Alicia Silverstone, Jon Stewart, Channing Tatum, Danny Trejo, Wil Wheaton, Betty White, Woodrow Wilson, and Serena Williams.

In the following sections, I dig deeper into why the Pit Bull is growing in popularity, and the consequences of that growth.

The Michael Vick influence

In 2007, football star Michael Vick was convicted for his actions related to dogfighting. At that time, Pit Bulls confiscated from dog-fighting rings were usually euthanized, but nearly all of the dozens of Pit Bulls taken from Vick's kennel were, instead, made the subjects of intensive rehabilitation efforts, each accompanied with a stipend of \$5,000 to \$20,000 toward their housing and training.

Vick's dogs became the faces of fundraising, and millions of dollars poured into Pit Bull rescue and advocacy groups. Even groups such as the Humane Society of the United States and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, which initially spoke out against rehabilitating fighting dogs, changed their positions.

Some people suddenly saw a financial profit in promoting Pit Bulls. Whether motivated by money or love for animals (or both), they embraced the idea that all it took was a little love, and even the most bloodied gladiator could become a child's best friend. Although many of Vick's dogs were never able to leave the rehab facility, some were reportedly rehabbed successfully and went on to live as family pets. They became all the proof people needed that any Pit Bull, no matter the dog's background, could become a loving and trustworthy family member.

But only two years after Vick's conviction, serious Pit Bull attacks started to rise. It wasn't just that Pit Bull numbers were rising; it was that Pit Bull shelter adoptions were rising, too. All of a sudden, adopting a Pit Bull, especially one with an underdog story, was the fashionable thing to do. Totally convinced that all you add is love, well-meaning adopters

made the shelter Pit Bull their pet project. That may sound great, but the results haven't always been as planned.

The consequences of no-kill shelters

The mid-1980s saw the birth of the no-kill shelter movement, in which the goal was to end euthanasia of any adoptable pet. To be labeled a no-kill shelter, a shelter must only euthanize terminally ill or obviously dangerous pets, and these euthanizations can make up no more than 90 percent of their shelter population. No-kill shelters may be eligible for funding and grants that other shelters are not, and they tend to receive far more support from the public.

Unfortunately, in an effort to keep that 90 percent adoption rate, some no-kill shelters resorted to refusing to accept less adoptable dogs (such as Pit Bulls), hiding the breed of some dogs (such as Pit Bulls) to make them more adoptable, not disclosing behavioral problems such as aggression, or transferring "problem dogs" to other shelters, which may then, in turn, transfer them again and again.

These practices have resulted in a great increase in attacks by dogs adopted from shelters. Between 1858 and 2010, only five fatalities were attributed to adopted shelter dogs (two of those from wolf hybrids). Since 2010, shelter dogs have killed 45 people; of those, 32 were killed by Pit Bulls. Shelters are now being sued for irresponsibly adopting out some dogs in which they failed to disclose a history of aggression.

The increased public pressure to adopt rather than shop, along with neutering and spaying, has had the desirable effect of greatly reducing shelter dog populations, to the point that many shelters in some parts of the country now import shelter dogs (either from other parts of the United States or foreign countries). But despite the efforts of Pit Bull advocacy groups, Pit Bulls tend to be the last dogs to be adopted. Some shelters have only Pit Bulls left. Overpopulation is still a real thing when it comes to Pit Bulls. Nobody wants to euthanize healthy dogs, but some government-run shelters now won't adopt out any Pit Bulls because of liability issues.

Other shelters have resorted to “empty the cages” days, in which dogs, including Pit Bulls, are offered at heavy discounts or for free. For-profit rescue groups often turn down Pit Bulls because they can’t charge the high adoption fees they can charge for other dogs, especially small ones. But giving away dogs is not the way to match people and dogs. And sadly, too many people get a free or cheap dog on a whim, and give the dog up just as easily. The Pit Bull overpopulation continues to be a problem without a solution in sight.

Breed-specific legislation

As public outcry has increased following Pit Bull attacks, some communities have adopted breed-specific legislation (BSL) that either bans certain breeds (always including Pit Bulls) or makes owners follow more restrictive rules than owners of other breeds. These restrictions can include mandatory spay/neuter, muzzling in public, not allowing them in designated areas, requiring the installation of special fencing, or requiring owners to have liability insurance. Pit Bull lobbies formed to oppose BSL, ultimately giving rise to the well-funded Pit Bull lobbies of today (see the nearby sidebar). The lobbies persuaded many states to prohibit BSL, but local laws can still override the state laws in some cases. As of this writing, more than 800 communities have adopted BSL, all including Pit Bulls in their target breeds.

THE PIT BULL LOBBY

Pit Bulls are the only breed of dog to have their own lobby, Best Friends Animal Society (www.bestfriends.org), which works to fight BSL and promote Pit Bulls as family pets. Best Friends is funded by private donations and by the Animal Farm Foundation (www.animalfarmfoundation.org) to the tune of more than \$100 million a year. The Animal Farm Foundation also funds the National Canine Research Council to conduct pro-Pit Bull research.

Opponents of BSL point to the toll on innocent Pit Bulls. Although in most cases, currently owned Pit Bulls are grandfathered in when BSL is adopted, many people ignore the laws and adopt Pit Bulls or move to a town with the Pit Bulls they already own. Opponents also point to the

difficulty of labeling Pit Bulls. They further contend that BSL is difficult and expensive to uphold, and that a better solution would be to enforce laws regarding dangerous dogs that are already on the books.

Proponents of BSL contend that laws regarding dangerous dogs only address dogs *after* they've maimed or killed a person. They consider BSL proactive and laws regarding dangerous dogs reactive. They further point to lower dog fatality and serious mauling numbers after BSL is implemented in various communities.

BSL almost certainly saves lives. But it does so by casting a large net that also ensnares innocent dogs because of their breed or appearance.

Finding the Middle Ground

No more controversial family of dogs exists today than the Pit Bull. On one side you have Pit Bull owners and lovers who think they are angels on four legs. They love their dogs like their children and are justifiably upset when they feel Pit Bull haters may threaten them. On the other side you have Pit Bull victims and haters who think they are demons on four legs. Some have been victims of Pit Bull attacks and are justifiably frightened of them and want the breed to be banned.

The truth is in the middle. No family of dogs comes close to being responsible for as many deaths as the Pit Bull has been. These deaths include human and canine family members and human and canine strangers. The attacks are committed by both well-raised and poorly raised Pit Bulls. But that doesn't mean every Pit Bull is a mauler. In fact, most go through their entire lives being perfectly peaceful.

MAKING A NEW BREED: THE AMERICAN BULLY

In the early 1980s, several breeders began crossing American Pit Bull Terriers or American Staffordshire Terriers with Staffordshire Bull Terriers along with English Bulldogs, American Bulldogs, Olde English Bulldogges, and French Bulldogs. Their aim was to create a tougher-looking but sweeter-acting bully breed: the American Bully. By 2004, they had their own association, the American Bully Kennel Club (ABKC).

The breed has four sizes: pocket, standard, classic, and XL. The UKC recognized the American Bully in 2013. As of this writing, you can single-register your dog with the UKC if it looks enough like an American Bully to probably be one. (Single registration means the dog is registered based on its appearance rather than parentage.) This rule has caused controversy, however, because some Pit Bull owners who don't want the legal implications of Pit Bull ownership have single-registered their Pit Bulls as American Bullies. By doing so, they may be able to get around BSL that affects Pit Bulls but may not include American Bullies.



REMEMBER It's up to Pit Bull owners to change the breed's reputation by being extremely responsible. If you own a Pit Bull, your dog must be impeccably trained and well behaved, and if you allow your dog to spend time in your yard, the yard must be escape-proof. You may know for a fact that your Pit Bull is a sweetie, but you have to be prepared for the unexpected. Dogs are dogs, and they often act and react in ways we would never have imagined. True, another dog owner may be at fault for allowing her dog to run up to yours, but that's not a deadly mistake with most dogs, and it can be with a Pit Bull. If your Pit Bull harms or kills another dog, you can be sure it will be the Pit Bull who gets the blame. As a Pit Bull owner, you must not only look out for your own dog's actions, but the actions of others as well. This level of vigilance is a big responsibility, but it's one every Pit Bull owner must assume.

Chapter 2

Sizing Up the Pit Bull

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Visualizing the ideal Pit Bull
 - » Sizing up your dog — ADBA-, UKC-, and AKC-style
-

You wouldn't hire a Sumo wrestler to moonlight as a trapeze artist, and you wouldn't ask a ballet dancer to do double duty as a weightlifter. Different body types excel at different athletic endeavors. It's no accident that Pit Bulls look like Pit Bulls. They look like they do because they are built a certain way to do a certain job.

But looks aren't everything. The best-looking Pit Bull would, historically at least, be a dead Pit Bull if he lacked the intelligence, agility, and gameness required to make it through a match. Although, fortunately, most Pit Bulls today will never see a fighting pit, they carry with them a heritage of physical and mental characteristics that were once essential for their ancestors' survival.

Now that most Pit Bulls are no longer subject to such an unforgiving means of selecting breeding stock as pit fighting or bull-baiting, how do we ensure that the very essence of this noble breed is not lost for posterity? We do the best we can by breeding them according to a standard of perfection that — as nearly as possible — aspires to the ideal vision of a successful fighting Pit Bull.

Toughing It Out

Because dog fighting is no longer condoned in our society, the Pit Bull is among those breeds that can no longer prove its merit by performance. This doesn't mean that the Pit Bull will die out, nor does it mean that we should let it. The goal of preservationist breeders is to preserve both the

physical and the mental aspects of purebred dogs, even if their original function no longer exists. The Pit Bull is a noble breed, a breed that provides a unique link to our own heritage (see [Figure 2-1](#)). As such, it is a sort of living antique — one that must be re-created with every generation. We can look to the fighters of the past as models by which to judge the Pit Bulls of today and by which to create the Pit Bulls of tomorrow.

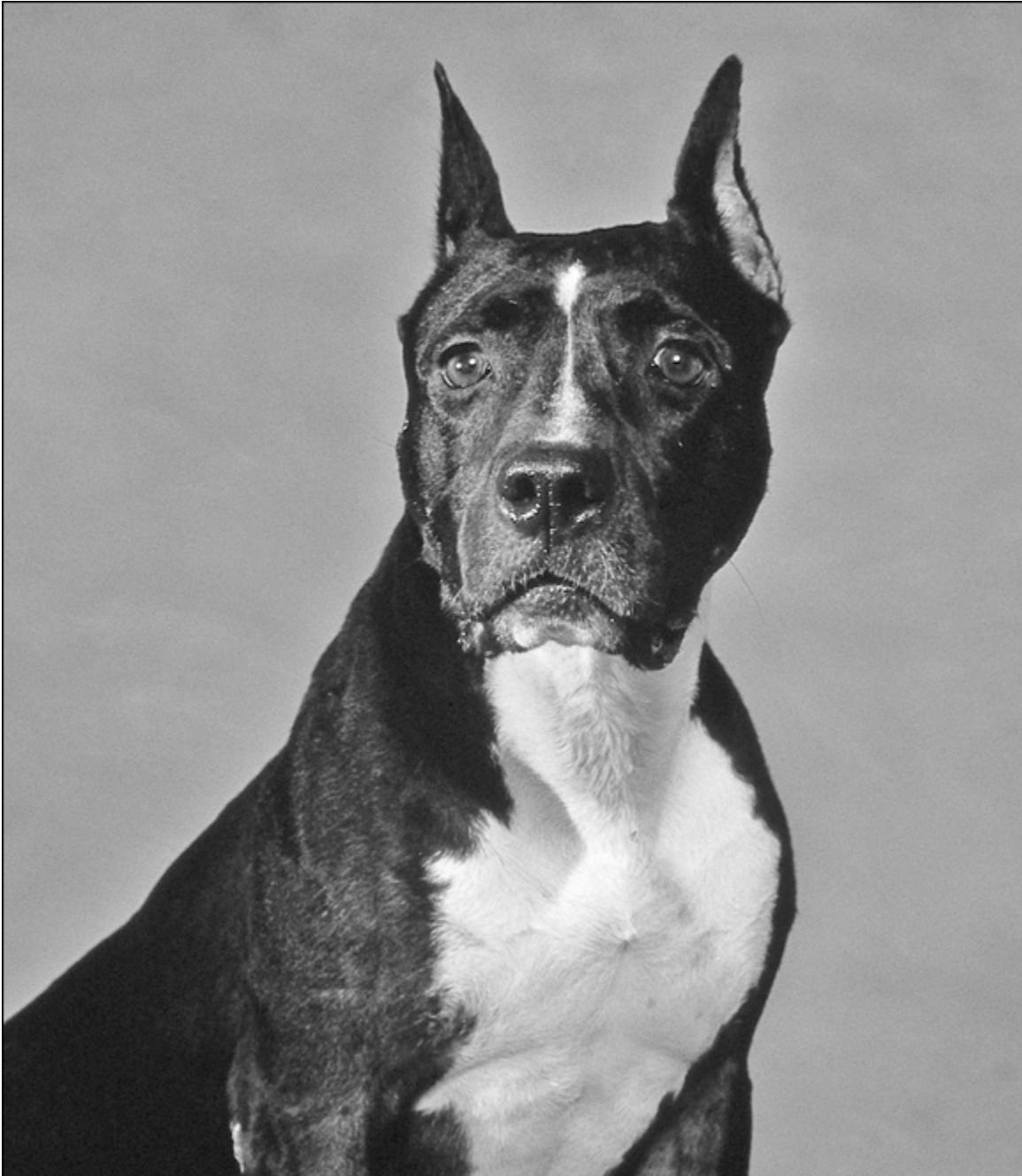


FIGURE 2-1: You can't deny the noble look of this dog.

What did it take to win a dogfight? For the most part, it took intangible character qualities like gameness and attitude. In addition, it took wrestling ability, biting ability, and stamina — qualities based (at least in part) on the way the dog is built. Because a fighting dog is more likely to overcome shortcomings in build rather than shortcomings in character, the physique of winning fighters varied greatly from one dog to another. Nonetheless, the best of the fighters combined strong characters with strong bodies, and it is from these dogs that the ideals are drawn.

Building a Better Bulldog

The standards of the American Dog Breeders Association (ADBA) and the United Kennel Club (UKC) for the American Pit Bull Terrier differ in many respects. In turn, the standard of the American Kennel Club (AKC) for the American Staffordshire Terrier differs from those of the ADBA and the UKC. Yet each organization describes a dog who is built to win a fight — and a good dog should be a good dog, no matter by which standard he is judged.

The American Dog Breeders Association standard

The ADBA standard was written by experienced *dogmen* (people who actually fought their Pit Bulls in dogfights) who realized that it was impossible to define the physical traits that make a dog a good fighter. Instead of trying to describe every part of the dog, as most breed standards do, they focused their descriptions on those physical characteristics that they felt related the most to fighting ability, while ignoring those they felt had little or no relationship. Thus the ADBA standard is less a standard of perfection than it is a checklist for evaluating a potential fighting dog.

The ADBA standard evaluates the American Pit Bull Terrier on a basis of 100 points (100 points equaling the ideal dog) that are broken down as shown in [Table 2-1](#).

TABLE 2-1 The ADBA Breed Standard

Category	Point Value	Criteria
Overall appearance	20 points	Health, height-to-weight ratio, overall body shape
Attitude	10 points	Alertness, carriage
Head and neck	15 points	Eyes, size and shape of head and neck, teeth
Front end	20 points	Chest, front legs, ribs, shoulders
Back end	30 points	Back legs and feet, loin, hip, hock, set of tail, stifle
Tail and coat	5 points	Gloss and length of coat, length and shape of tail



REMEMBER The ADBA standard uses some terms that may be confusing. For example, *Bulldog* refers to the Pit Bull. *Dibo bred* refers to a particular well-known strain of Pit Bulls. A *nose-fighter* is a dog who tends to grip his opponent's nose; an *ear-fighter* is one who tends to grab the other dog's ear. *Fanging* refers to the case in which a dog bites through his own lip, getting his fang stuck in it, in the course of a fight.

The ADBA standard can be found at www.adbadog.com/heritage-american-pit-bull-terrier-conformation-standard. The ADBA also publishes a Basis of Conformation, as follows (with a few more of my definitions interspersed):

1. Look at the overall profile of your dog.

Ideally, he should be square — that is, he should be about as long from the point of the shoulder to the point of the hip as he is from the top of the shoulder to the ground. A square dog will stand high and have maximum leverage for his weight. This means that — when standing normally with the hock slightly back of the hip — the dog's base (where his feet are) will be slightly longer than his height. Use the dog's hip and shoulder as guides to keep from being fooled by the way he is standing.

Your dog's height-to-weight ratio is critical. Because dogs were fought at nearly identical weights, the bigger your dog was at his

weight, the better were your chances of winning. Stocky dogs with long bodies, heavy shoulders, and thick legs usually lost to taller, rangier opponents.

A tall, rangy dog is usually blessed with a fairly long neck. This is a tremendous advantage in a fight because it enables him to reach his opponent's stifle when the other dog has his front leg, to take his shorter-necked opponent's ear and hold him off, or to reach his opponent's chest when the other dog is trying to hold him off. Ideally, your dog's neck should be heavily muscled right up to the base of the skull.



REMEMBER The *point of shoulder* is the front of the joint between the shoulder blade (scapula) and upper arm (humerus), situated at the foremost part of the dog's body. The *point of hip* is at the rearmost part of the dog's butt.

2. **Look at your dog's back end — that's the drivetrain of any four-legged animal.**

A dog does 80 percent of his work off his hips and back legs. A long, sloping hip is most important. By its very length, it gives leverage to the thighbone (or femur). A long hip will give the dog a slightly roach-backed appearance (hence the low set tail so often spoken of). The hip should also be broad. A broad hip carries with it a broad loin and permits a large surface for the attachments of the gluteal muscles and the biceps femoris muscles, the biggest drivers in the powertrain.

The upper thighbone should be shorter than the lower leg bone (or tibia), with the stifle joint located in the upper third of the hind leg. Dogs with a low stifle are not uncommon. Although these dogs are usually impressively muscled because of their bigger biceps femoris, they are surprisingly weak and slow on their back legs because leverage is lost by a long thigh. A short upper thighbone and a long lower leg bone usually mean a well-bent stifle, which in turn leads to a well-bent hock.

A well-bent hock is critical to good wrestling ability. When a dog finds himself being driven backward, he must rely on the natural springiness of his well-bent hock and stifle to control his movement. Dogs with a straight hock (or the frequently seen double-jointed hock of many of the Dibo bred dogs) will wrestle well as long as muscle power can sustain them, but, if pushed, they will tire more quickly in the back end and will soon lose their wrestling ability.



REMEMBER The *stifle* is the knee of the hind legs, located at the junction of the upper thigh (femur) and second thigh (tibia and fibula). A *roach back* refers to a back that is arched dramatically upward. The *hock* is anatomically comparable to the human ankle, although dogs walk on their tiptoes all the time. The *gluteal muscle* is the muscle just behind and below the front crest of the pelvis; the *biceps femoris* is the huge butt muscle making up the bulk of the upper thigh.

3. **Look at your dog's front end.**

He should have a deep rib cage, well-sprung at the top but tapering to the bottom. An elliptical — almost narrow — chest is preferable to a round, or barrel, chest. The rib cage houses the lungs, which are not storage tanks but pumps. The ribs are like a bellows, and their efficiency relates to the difference in volume between contractions and expansions. A barrel-chested dog, in addition to carrying more weight for his height, has an air pump with a short stroke. He must take more breaths to get the same volume of air as a dog with a deeper rib cage (which has more room for large lungs).

At the eighth rib, the shoulders should be a little wider than the rib cage. Too narrow a shoulder does not support adequate musculature, but too wide a shoulder makes a dog slow and adds unnecessary weight. The shoulder blade should be at a 45 degree (or less) angle to the ground, and it should be broad and flat. The upper arm should be at an equal angle in the opposite direction, and it should be long enough that the elbow comes below the bottom of the rib cage. The elbows should lie flat, and the upper arm should run almost parallel

to the spine (not jut out at the elbows, which can give the appearance of a wide English Bulldog stance and makes a dog more prone to fractures and dislocations).

The forearm should be only slightly longer than the upper arm, and it should be heavy and solid — nearly twice the thickness of the metatarsal bones at the hock. The front legs and shoulders must be capable of sustaining tremendous punishment, so heaviness can be an asset here. The relationship between front and back legs should be, at first appearance, of a heavy front and a delicate back. In an athletic dog, the metatarsal bones, the hock, and the lower part of the lower leg bone will be light, fine, and springy. The front legs will be heavy and solid-looking. The experienced Bulldog man, however, will note the wide hip, loin, and powerful thigh, which make the back end the most muscular.



REMEMBER The *metatarsal bones* are the bones leading from the toes to the second thigh, comparable to those of the human foot. This area is also referred to as the *hock* in a dog. The *loin* is the area just in front of the hips, over the abdominal area.

4. Look at your dog's head.

The head varies more than any other part of the body in the present day Pit Bull — probably because his head's conformation has the least to do with whether he wins or loses. Certain attributes, however, do appear to be of advantage. First of all, consider the overall size of your dog's head. A head that is too large simply carries more weight and increases the dog's chances of having to fight a bigger dog. A head that is too small is easily punished by a nose-fighter and is especially easy for an ear-fighter to shake. In an otherwise well-proportioned dog, the head will appear to be about two-thirds the width of the shoulders, and about 25 percent wider at the cheeks than the neck at the base of the skull. The distance from the back of the head to the stop should be about the same as that from the stop to the tip of the nose. The bridge of the nose should be

well developed, making the area directly under the eyes considerably wider than the area at the base of the ears.

The depth from the top of the head to the bottom of the jaw is also important. The jaw is closed by the temporal fossa muscle exerting pressure on the coronoid process. The deeper the head is at this point (that is, between the zygomatic arch and the angular process of the bottom of the jaw), the more likely the dog is to have leverage advantage both in closing the jaw and in keeping it closed. A straight, boxlike muzzle and a well-developed mandible will not have much to do with biting power but will endure more punishment. “Lippy” dogs are continually fanging themselves in a fight, much to their disadvantage. The dog’s teeth should meet in the front, but more importantly the canines (or fangs) should slip tightly together, the upper behind the lower when the mouth is closed. Fangs should be wide at the gumline, taper to the end, and be sound and healthy (with none of them missing). The dog’s eyes should be small and deep-set — elliptical when viewed from the front and triangular when viewed from the side. In general, the ideal head is wedge-shaped when viewed from the top or from the side, and round when viewed from the front.



REMEMBER The *stop* is the transition point (when viewed in profile) between the muzzle and the back of the skull. The *zygomatic arch* is the flare of bone that runs just below the lower margin of the eyes, essentially the widest bony part of the face. The *coronoid process* is the rear part of the lower jaw (the mandible) that extends upward under the zygomatic arch and has a broad area for muscle attachment. The *angular process* is the very rearmost part of the lower jaw that you can feel. *Lippy* means that the dog has loose or pendulous lips.

JAWS

A popular myth is that Pit Bulls have locking jaws with 1,600 pounds per square inch biting pressure. The anatomy of the Pit Bull's jaw and skull is no different than that of any other breed. Yes, the skull is wide and the muscles well developed, but no mechanism exists that would allow the jaws to lock in place. Besides, how would the dogs eat? As for their strength, Pit Bulls do have strong jaws, but accurately measuring biting pressure in dogs is difficult. With any strong dog, it's not so much the strength of the bite as it is the intentions and the determination of the dog that decide how serious a bite is.

5. Look at your dog's appearance.

The coat can be any color or any combination of colors. It should be short and bristled. The gloss of the coat usually reflects the health of the dog and is important to an athletic American Pit Bull Terrier.

The skin should be thick and loose, but it should not fall in folds. It should appear to fit the dog tightly everywhere except around the neck and chest. Here, the skin should be loose enough to show vertical folds — even in a well-conditioned dog.

The set of the tail is also very important. It should be low, and the length should come just above the point of the hock. The tail should be thick at its base and taper to a point at the end, hanging down like a pump handle when relaxed.

The feet should be small and set high on the pasterns. The dog's gait should be light and springy.

6. Finally, look at your dog's musculature.

When you look at muscles from a breeder's standpoint, it is much more important to look at the genetic features of musculature than at those features that result from conditioning. A genetically powerful dog can be a winner in the hands of even an inept owner, but a genetically weak dog needs a good matchmaker to win — conditioning alone won't do much for him.

Imagine the bones as levers with the joints as the fulcrum and the muscles as the power source. The power being applied to the lever is more effective the farther away it is from the fulcrum. In the same way, muscles should be long, with attachments deep down on the bone and well past the joint. Short-muscled dogs are impressive looking, but they are not athletic. A muscle's power value lies in its

ability to contract. The greater the difference between a muscle's relaxed state and its contracted state, the greater its power.

Above all, the American Pit Bull Terrier is an all-around athlete. His body is called on for speed, power, agility, and stamina. He must be balanced in all directions: Too much of one thing robs him of another. He is not an entity formed according to human specialists. In his winning form, he is a fighting machine — a thing of beauty.

The United Kennel Club standard

The UKC breed standard for the APBT was revised in 2017. It's extremely detailed. To read the entire standard, go to www.ukcdogs.com/docs/breeds/american-pit-bull-terrier.pdf.

The standard encapsulates the essence of the breed under its General Appearance:

The American Pit Bull Terrier is a medium-sized, solidly built, short-coated dog with smooth, well-defined musculature. This breed is both powerful and athletic. The body is just slightly longer than tall, but bitches may be somewhat longer in body than male dogs. The length of the front leg (measured from point of elbow to the ground) is approximately equal to one-half of the dog's height at the withers. The head is of medium length, with a broad, flat skull, and a wide, deep muzzle. Ears are small to medium in size, high set, and may be natural or cropped. The relatively short tail is set low, thick at the base and tapers to a point. The American Pit Bull Terrier comes in all colors and color patterns except merle. This breed combines strength and athleticism with grace and agility and should never appear bulky or muscle-bound or fine-boned and rangy. Above all else, the APBT must have the functional capability to be a catch dog that can hold, wrestle (push and pull), and breathe easily while doing its job. Balance and harmony of all parts are critical components of breed type. Eliminating Faults: Any disproportionate overdone characteristic (such as short legs, excessive bone or massive head or body) that would interfere with physical activity or working ability.

Its most severe faults, termed *disqualifications*, include a missing testicle, viciousness or extreme shyness, albinism, merle color pattern, deafness in either ear, long coat, dwarfism, and screw tail.

A NOSE OF A DIFFERENT COLOR ...

Some people put great stock in what nose color their Pit Bull has. The color of the nose (red versus black) is determined by a gene that has nothing to do with the quality of the dog. A red nose occurs when a dog has two copies of the recessive b gene; such dogs are unable to produce black pigmentation in their skin or hair. Breeders can fairly easily introduce the gene into or purge the gene from a bloodline without affecting other characteristics. Some very good bloodlines are known for their red-nosed dogs, but some just-as-good bloodlines have black-nosed dogs. It's all a matter of personal preference.

The American Kennel Club standard for the American Staffordshire Terrier

General Impression.

Should give the impression of great strength for his size. The dog should be well put-together — muscular, but agile and graceful — and keenly alive to his surroundings. He should be stocky — not long-legged or racy in outline. His courage is proverbial.

Head.

Should be of medium length, deep through. The dog should have a broad skull, with very pronounced cheek muscles and a distinct stop.

- » **Ears.** Should be set high on the head. May be cropped or uncropped; the latter is preferred. Uncropped ears should be short and held rose or half prick. A full drop is penalized.
- » **Eyes.** Should be dark and round, low down in the skull, and set far apart. They should not have pink eyelids.
- » **Muzzle.** Should be of medium length and rounded on the upper side to fall away abruptly below the eyes. The jaws should be well-defined. The underjaw should be strong and have biting power. The

lips should be close and even, showing no looseness. The upper teeth should meet tightly outside the lower teeth in front. The nose should be black.



REMEMBER *Rose ears* are folded back, similar to a Greyhound's ears. *Half prick ears* are erect at their base and then tip forward, similar to a Fox Terrier's. *Full drop ears* hang down, similar to a Beagle's.

Neck.

Should be heavy and slightly arched, tapering from the shoulders to the back of the skull. The skin should not be loose, and the neck should be of medium length.

Shoulders.

Should be strong and muscular, with wide and sloping blades.

Back.

Should be fairly short. Should slope lightly from the withers to the rump, with a gentle, short slope at the rump to the base of the tail. The loins should be slightly tucked.

Body.

The ribs should be well-sprung, deep in the rear, and close together. The forelegs should be set rather wide apart to permit chest development. The chest should be deep and broad.

Tail.

Should be short in comparison to the dog's size. Should be low set and taper to a fine point. Should not be curled or held over the dog's back. Not docked.

Legs.

The front legs should be straight, with large or round bones, and the pasterns should be upright. There should be no evidence of bend in front.

The hindquarters should be well-muscled, let down at hocks, and turn neither in nor out. The feet should be of moderate size, well-arched, and compact. The dog's gait must be springy, but the dog should not roll or pace.

Coat.

Should be short, close, glossy, and stiff to the touch.

Color.

May be of any color. A solid, parti-colored, or patchwork coat is permissible, but an all-white (more than 80 percent white), black and tan, or liver-colored coat is not encouraged.

Size.

The dog's height and weight should be in proportion with each other. A height of about 18 to 19 inches at the shoulders for males and 17 to 18 inches for females is preferable.

Faults.

In a competition, faults are characteristics that are penalized. They include the following:

- » A Dudley nose
- » Light or pink eyes
- » A tail that is too long or badly carried
- » An undershot or overshot mouth



REMEMBER A *Dudley nose* means a light pink nose.

Strutting His Stuff

Although many of the traits that make a good fighting dog are intangible, some physical traits are associated with fighting skill.

Conformation shows provide a venue in which the physical characteristics that have been correlated with fighting ability can be evaluated. The idea is that the dog who is built the best — that is, most conforms to the standard of perfection — should be able to function the best.

Conformation shows provide one means of preserving the breed when the original job of the breed is no longer available. They do have a drawback, however. The truth is, that no matter how good the standard, you can't absolutely predict function from form. You can't evaluate the gameness, strength, endurance, or intelligence of a dog from his appearance. Some breeders fear that if Pit Bulls are bred to be show dogs, they will become caricatures of the breed. Others believe that if Pit Bulls are to survive in today's society, they must give up at least the temperament aspects that made them relentless fighting dogs. Responsible breeders use conformation shows as only one of several means of evaluating their dogs; they also test their dogs in obedience, weight pulling, and other functional competitions, while selecting for a less aggressive nature.

Both the UKC and the ADBA offer conformation competition for APBTs; the AKC offers classes for American Staffordshire Terriers. Because AmStaffs have had a big head start in breeding for conformation, AmStaffs tend to win over APBTs when entered against each other in conformation shows. Remember, your dog needs to be registered with the particular organization that sponsors the shows you wish to enter. See [Chapter 4](#) to check whether your dog is eligible for AKC, UKC, or ADBA registration.

The Pit Bull's build reflects his athletic heritage (see [Figure 2-2](#)). At conformation shows, judges evaluate how well each dog conforms to the physical standard of perfection, both while standing and moving. They provide a means for preserving the breed without resorting to fighting. But you can't just show up and expect to start lugging home silver trophies, no matter how sterling your Pit Bull is.



FIGURE 2-2: A natural athlete.

Most local kennel clubs offer handling classes, in which you can learn the fundamentals of showing. Many also have occasional *match shows*

— basically practice shows (even the judges are just practicing). Many AKC shows offer introductory classes for puppies between the ages of 4 and 6 months. Informal match shows are sometimes held, but they're much less common these days than in the past. When available, they're a great chance to try showing in a stress-free arena. Don't take a win or loss too seriously, and at any competition, no matter how obviously feeble-minded you think the judge is, keep your opinion to yourself!

UKC conformation shows

Shows sponsored by the UKC offer the following classes:

- » **Puppy:** For dogs 6 months to under 1 year of age.
- » **Junior:** For dogs 1 year to under 2 years of age.
- » **Senior:** For dogs 2 years to under 3 years of age.
- » **Veteran:** For dogs 3 years of age and over.
- » **Breeder-Handler:** For dogs over 6 months handled in the ring by that dog's breeder or a member of the breeder's immediate family

All the males are shown first. Class winners are awarded 10 points toward their Championship and then compete within their sex for Best Male of Show (worth another 15 points). Then all the females are shown, and a Best Female of Show is awarded. Best Male and Female of Show then compete for Best of Winners (worth another 10 points). This is followed by the Champion of Champions class, in which male and female Pit Bulls who have already earned a UKC Champion title compete, and then by the Grand Champion class, in which only male and female Pit Bulls who have already earned a UKC Grand Champion title compete. Finally, the Best of Winners, the Champion of Champions winner, and the Grand Champion winner compete for the Best of Breed.

It's all about the points. To become a UKC Show Champion, your Pit Bull must win 100 UKC championship points, awarded by three different judges, and win either a Best Male or Best Female of Show. Because it's possible to win points even if a dog is the only one in his class, a further requirement is that at least two of the wins must be over

competition. A Grand Championship is earned by beating other Pit Bull champions (in the Champion of Champions class) in at least five shows under at least three different judges. Grand Champions compete against each other in the Grand Champion class.

The official UKC breed club, the National American Pit Bull Terrier Association, can hold a special National Grand Champion class at their fall National show, in which Grand Champions compete. The winner of this competition is declared the National Grand Champion and awarded the NTL GR CH title as part of his name.



TIP

What if you want to enter a UKC show but you haven't had a chance to register your dog? You can get a Temporary Listing from the UKC if your dog is not registered by calling the UKC at 616-343-9020 (and paying by credit card).

If you've spent any time around other dog breeds, you probably know that the AKC is the breed registry that governs most conformation dog shows in the United States. American Staffordshire Terriers are one of almost 200 breeds seen at a typical AKC show. Only a few UKC shows are for all UKC breeds, however; most UKC shows are for one or perhaps a handful of the most popular UKC breeds. Pit Bulls are one of the UKC's most popular breeds, and a large percentage of UKC shows have classes for American Pit Bull Terriers. Due to the unique history of the Pit Bull, the UKC governs most shows in which Pit Bulls compete.

Some ways in which UKC shows differ from AKC shows include

- » **No grooming in the ring.** Grooming is not allowed in the ring. This means no brushes, cloths, or spray bottles.
- » **No using gizmos to get your dog's attention.** You can't use squeakers, food, keys, or other artificial means of getting your dog's attention. You're allowed just your voice and your fingers.
- » **No professional handlers are allowed in the ring.** In AKC shows, many top dogs are handled by slick pros instead of their owners.

These rules help focus the judge's attention on the dog's structure rather than on the handler's ability. Dogs in a UKC show are shown in a more natural manner than are those in an AKC show. That doesn't mean that you can just show up with an untrained dog and expect to start lugging home ribbons. Your dog will need to know how to stand still in a show pose. For the Pit Bull, this means that the front legs are perpendicular to the ground and parallel to one another, with the feet facing forward. The hocks of the rear legs are perpendicular to the ground and parallel to one another, and the feet face forward. The dog should stand straight up on his toes, and may lean slightly forward. His head should be held high. The judge will need to examine his body, so he will need to hold his pose while allowing a stranger to touch him all over. He can act neither shy nor aggressive toward the judge. He will also need to trot in a straight line at your side, neither balking, lunging, nor galloping. He will be doing this in a ring with other Pit Bulls, so he must be under your control at all times.

AKC conformation shows

Only AKC-registered American Staffordshire Terriers and Staffordshire Bull Terriers can participate in AKC conformation shows. AKC shows are typically larger and more hectic than UKC or ADBA shows, in part because of all the different breeds also competing.

AKC offers the following classes:

- » **Puppy:** For dogs 6 months to under 12 months of age. This is often divided into a 6 to 9 month class and a 9 to 12 month class.
- » **12 to 18 months:** For dogs 12 months to under 18 months of age.
- » **Novice:** For dogs who have not won more than a limited number of first place awards in certain classes (the exact number depends on which class the dog's in).
- » **Amateur Owner-Handler:** For dogs handled by their owners, who must never have been professional handlers or assistants.
- » **Bred by Exhibitor:** For dogs bred, owned, and handled by the same person or an immediate family.

- » **American Bred:** For dogs bred in the United States.
- » **Open:** For all dogs over 6 months of age.
- » **Best of Breed:** For AKC Champions (males and females compete against each other).

Except for Best of Breed, male dogs compete in all their classes first. Each class winner then competes for Winners Dog. Then the female classes are held and the winners compete for Winners Bitch. Both Winners Dog and Winners Bitch then compete against each other for Best of Winners and against the champions for Best of Breed. The best AmStaff of the opposite sex to the male or female AmStaff selected Best of Breed is awarded the Best of Opposite Sex award.

Since most AKC shows are open to all AKC breeds, they usually have further competition. Every Best of Breed winner in the Terrier group competes against each other, and the winners of all seven AKC groups (Sporting, Hound, Working, Terrier, Toy, Non-sporting, and Herding) ultimately compete for Best in Show.

An AKC Championship is earned by winning 15 points. Points are awarded to the Winners Dog and Bitch. The number of points can range from 0 to 5, and depends upon the number of dogs defeated. Many intricacies are involved in calculated points, however, so the safest bet is to check with the steward before leaving the show if you're not sure what your dog has won.

The saying "every dog has his day" no doubt came from dog shows. Sometimes, the least-deserving dogs in the world seem to win. On other days, the judge has the wisdom of Solomon and points to your dog as the winner for first! Be prepared for anything, and cultivate a sense of humor.



WARNING No matter what, don't ever allow your dog's ability to win in competition cloud your perception of your dog's true worth in his primary role — that of friend and companion. A dog who is last in his class but first in his owner's heart is far better off than an unloved dog who is first in any competition.

Chapter 3

Deciding whether a Pit Bull Is Right for You

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Making a commitment to a Pit Bull
 - » Finding out whether you're a good match
 - » Getting to know the Pit Bull's personality
 - » Seeing the good and bad about the Pit Bull
-

Getting a dog should never be a trial affair. And that goes twice as much for a Pit Bull. Because of the number of Pit Bulls in shelters and rescues, and the number who will never make it back out, you owe it to any dog you get to make sure it's a lifelong commitment — and that means making sure that a Pit Bull is right for you.

Pit Bulls are strong dogs, and some are aggressive. What if you can't handle your dog? What if he pulls you off your feet when you go for a walk, bowls over your grandma, incessantly escapes, or goes after other dogs? What if you want to move to an apartment building that doesn't allow dogs, get married, have a child, or have other life changes that make keeping a dog difficult? These are things to consider now, before you get a dog, rather than later.

The Pit Bull Rescue pages on social media are filled with such tales of woe. Sometimes the dog is at fault; sometimes he isn't. But regardless, the situation is heartbreaking for everyone involved.



WARNING Before getting a Pit Bull, or any dog at all, ask yourself whether you have the time, money, facilities, and energy to deal with a dog for the next 12 years or so. A dog is a lifetime commitment. Most adult dogs never find a second home; the situation is even more dire for adult Pit Bulls. Don't get a Pit Bull just for today; get one for all your tomorrows together. And before you search for your soulmate, do some serious soul searching.

Making a Commitment

Ask yourself whether you can handle a strong dog who enjoys and needs lots of exercise. Pit Bulls love to play (see [Figure 3-1](#)). They love to exercise their bodies, their minds, and their senses of humor. Good Pit Bull owners share this sense of fun and are eager to join their dogs on a daily adventure — whether it's a run in the park, a game in the yard, or a jog around the neighborhood. If you think it's fun — and it involves activity — chances are your Pit Bull will think it's fun, too. If the idea of physical exertion horrifies you, think twice before inviting a personal fitness trainer into your home.



FIGURE 3-1: The pups will grow up to be strong dogs who will need lots of exercise.

You need to exercise your dog's mind as well as his body. Training your Pit Bull not only tires out his brain, but it also results in a dog who is a credit to his breed. For some breeds, training is a nice option; for Pit Bulls, it is a necessity. They are too smart, too powerful, and too active to be without a leader. A poorly trained Pit Bull is an opportunity for the public to condemn "those incorrigible beasts and their irresponsible owners." A well-trained Pit Bull shows these people just how wrong they are.

Pit Bulls are geniuses and — like many gifted children — are prone to get into trouble with their great ideas. Add the Pit Bull's sense of humor, and you have a combination of a stand-up comedian and crazed inventor running through your house. Most of the Pit Bull's pranks are harmless and provide a great floor show, but a few are bound to go astray. Pit Bull owners need to have a very good sense of humor.

All dogs are expensive to keep. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) estimates it costs an average of about \$1,500 to take care of a puppy during her first year. Pit Bulls are among the healthiest and hardiest of breeds, but even so, expect to spend a lot of money at the veterinarian's office. Your dog will need vaccinations, deworming, probably heartworm prevention, and neutering or spaying. He will occasionally get sick or be injured. Pit Bulls get sick less often than most breeds, but they may get injured more often. Their disregard for danger and total immersion in every activity means they've been known to jump off rooftops after balls, fall out of trees they've climbed, race trains, tackle wild animals too tough even for a Pit Bull, and jump so wildly they damage their legs. Accident prevention will save you money in the long run, besides saving your dog.

As muscular, active dogs, Pit Bulls need quality fuel to keep them going. The average Pit Bull eats about 20 pounds of food each month. Active dogs (or dogs who spend a lot of time outside in cold weather) need more than that — and growing dogs need even more.

Like all dogs, your Pit Bull will need a place in the house he can call his own and a secure yard. Some people — who want their dog to function as a guard dog — reason that letting him sleep inside will spoil him for his duties, but your dog is far more likely to guard his family if he actually knows who his family is. The truth of the matter, however, is that if you want a guard dog, you would be better off with another breed! Most Pit Bulls are more likely to maul a burglar by licking him to death than by attacking him.



WARNING If your dog will spend a good deal of time outside, you must provide him with a warm shelter in the winter, shade in the summer, and a fenced-in yard year-round. And when I say a “fenced-in yard,” I don’t mean the average fenced-in yard. You know those jaw-dropping feats of strength and agility that make you proud of your Pit Bull? The ones where he can climb trees and scale walls and muscle through barriers? He’s just as proud to apply those insane skills to your fence. Pit Bulls (especially bored Pit Bulls) are escape artists. And their escapes can lead them to their deaths. Loose dogs can be hit by cars, stolen, or taken to the pound — some are even killed by alarmists who think that a “savage” Pit Bull is on the loose. And as much as I hate to admit it, loose Pit Bulls have too often killed other pets and even people. Letting your Pit Bull run free is one of the dumbest things you can do.

Making the Match

Sometimes, people expect the impossible when choosing a breed. They want a dog who sleeps when they do, plays when they want to play, protects them against bad guys, introduces them to handsome strangers, barks to warn of drowning children, stays quiet when the news is on, never gets sick, doesn’t eat much, looks impressive, takes up no room, never messes things up, and never sheds. No such dog exists.

The Pit Bull is moderately active and very playful. He’s protective — sort of. He barks, but not excessively. He is impressive looking and comes in a wide size range. Most Pits are around 17 to 19 inches tall and weigh about 55 to 70 pounds, but some dogs can weigh as little as 30 pounds or as much as 100 pounds. As rambunctious, happy dogs, they sometimes create a trail of destruction when kept in small quarters. Most often, the destruction is caused by their wildly wagging tail that clears coffee tables in a single sweep. And although their coat is very short, Pit Bulls, like almost all dogs, shed.



WARNING You may meet similarly minded people through your dog, but you'll also be avoided by those who don't trust the breed. And there's some merit to their distrust, so if you share your home with children or even vulnerable adults, Pit Bulls may not be your ideal match.

Pit Bulls are a delightful mixture of exuberance and serenity, obedience and mischief, challenges and rewards — topped off with a sense of humor, loyalty, and gameness. Their athletic bodies can't help but elicit admiration. They are the perfect pet for many families — but not for every family.



REMEMBER Almost all Pit Bulls share common characteristics. Whether these features are positive aspects of the dog's personality or major hindrances to the owner getting along with the pet depends on whom the Pit Bull lives with. Pit Bulls are special — and they need special people.



TIP Read the following table to see whether a Pit Bull is for you.

<i>A Pit Bull ...</i>	<i>That's great if ...</i>	<i>That's terrible if ...</i>
Is energetic.	You are a get-up-and-go kind of person who is up for adventure with a canine accomplice.	You are already overwhelmed with work and you value what little relaxation time you have left. Or you can't stand the idea of a one-dog home demolition team.
Is strong and athletic.	You want a dog who doesn't break easily.	<i>You</i> break easily. Or you expect your 8-year-old to walk your dog all by herself.
Bonds deeply with his family.	You want to take your dog along on family outings.	Your plans can't include your dog.
Is very intelligent and	You figure out how to use the Pit Bull's great play	You think you can manhandle your dog into compliance. Or you expect a dog to hang

<i>A Pit Bull ...</i>	<i>That's great if ...</i>	<i>That's terrible if ...</i>
self-assured.	drive to channel that intellect.	on your every word.
Loves people.	You want a dog that will threaten to drown your friends with licks and slobber.	You want a dog that won't greet a burglar that enthusiastically.
Is loyal.	You're loyal too.	You think you can invite a Pit Bull into your family on a whim — and abandon him just as easily.
Is perceived as a tough guy.	You want a dog that makes you feel safe.	You want a dog that makes you feel welcome (by others) everywhere.

Getting to the Heart of the Matter (or Your Pit Bull)

Pit Bulls are undeniably good-looking animals. But their most distinguishing feature is their personality. A Pit Bull's character is as much a signature of his heritage as is his conformation.

» **Pit Bulls are game.** Gameness, though hard to define, is in essence the quality of pressing on cheerfully and with gusto in the face of adversity. In everyday life, this spirit expresses itself in self-confidence, determination, and a certain *joie de vivre*. Of course, these very traits can also express themselves as stubbornness when owners attempt to work against, rather than with, their dogs.



REMEMBER Pit Bulls need not be aggressive. Gameness is not aggressiveness. A non-aggressive dog can be game (for example, he avoids a fight but does not back down if pressed), and an aggressive dog can be ungame (for example, he starts a fight but turns tail if the victim fights back). Some Pit Bulls are aggressive with other dogs. Others are not. Most though, if challenged, will attempt to conquer.

Pit Bulls love to play. They seem to interpret gameness as a love of games, and here the Pit Bull is master of the game (see [Figure 3-2](#)). Pit Bulls are great comedians, and they enjoy playing the clown. Their mixture of playfulness, curiosity, and intelligence sometimes gets them into some wildly humorous situations. Pit Bulls thrive on rough-and-tumble play that challenges both their physique and their psyche.

- » **Pit Bulls are stoic.** They were bred to ignore pain and to keep their wits about them when they were hurt. Just because a dog tolerates rough children doesn't mean they should, nor does it mean they will continue to tolerate them. Don't set your Pit Bull up for failure — or your child up for worse.
- » **Pit Bulls are surprisingly sensitive.** Under the Pit Bull's rowdy exterior beats one of the biggest hearts in the dog world — and one of the most apt to be broken.

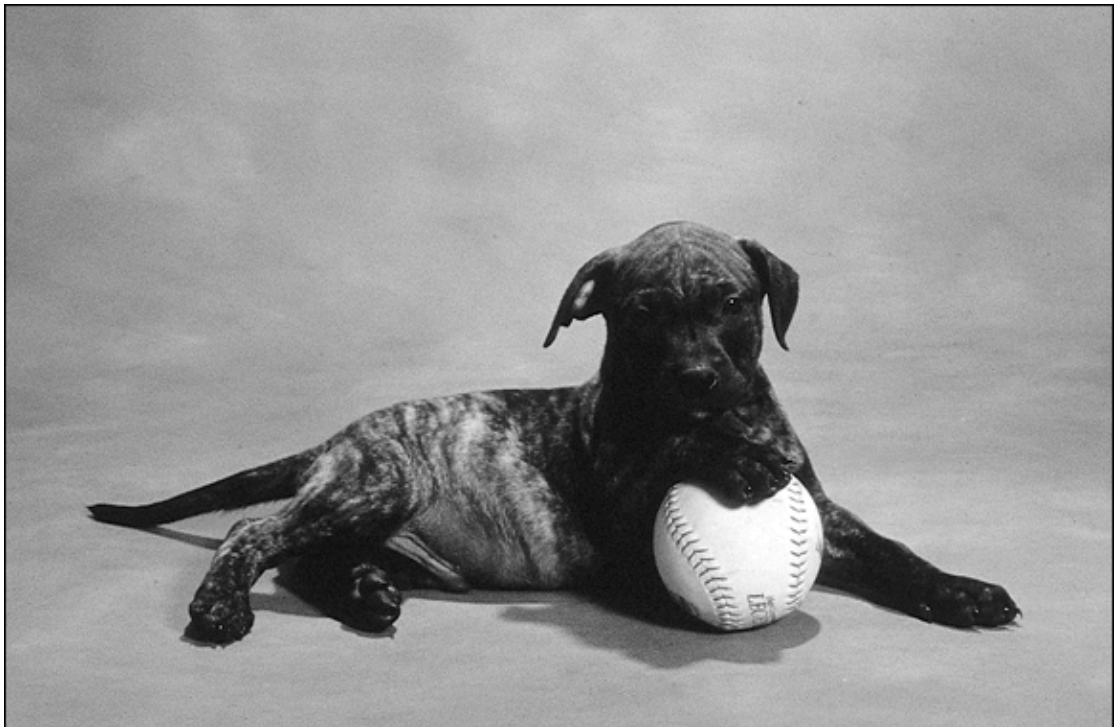


FIGURE 3-2: Softball, anyone?

- » **Pit Bulls are people pleasers.** What other breed of dog would risk its life time after time at the behest of its owner? This very desire to

please has — unfortunately — been at the bottom of some Pit Bull attacks on people. For some Pit Bulls, the only desire that can overpower their urge to befriend strangers is their need to please their masters. If a Pit Bull's master communicates to him that attacking a dog or person is what she desires, an attack can result — and the Pit Bull is the one who ultimately pays the price.



WARNING At her best, today's Pit Bull wears her fighting heritage not as a liability, but as a badge of courage and trustworthiness. Not all Pit Bulls, however, are at their best — and when a Pit Bull is bad, she can be very, very bad. Be sure that your Pit Bull represents the very best that this noble breed has to offer by choosing the very best Pit Bull.

Facing the Facts

When Pit Bulls are good, they are very good. But when they are bad, they can ruin lives.

Pit Bull owners do their dogs no favor when they ignore or refute the evidence that Pit Bulls are responsible for more disfiguring dog bites and fatalities than any other breed of dog. Understanding and accepting these facts will make you a better Pit Bull owner, so take the time to read this section with an open mind.



TIP Several groups track dog bites and attacks. Foremost among these are DogsBite.org (www.dogsbite.org) and National Pit Bull Victim Awareness (www.nationalpitbullvictimawareness.org). Many Pit Bull advocates dismiss these sites as being biased, but in reality, the sites just report on documented dog bite events and peer-reviewed articles.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Peer-reviewed means an article is stringently critiqued by other scientists in an attempt to find any biases, sampling errors, or statistical problems that can render the results false. Studies that do not pass muster are not published.

Basically every major medical journal that has reported on dog bites and breed has concluded that Pit Bulls are responsible for more serious dog bites than any other breed. For example, they've concluded that Pit Bulls are responsible for more fatalities, more disfigurements, more amputations, more surgeries, more complex wounds, more attacks on family members, more attacks on strangers, more attacks on children, and more attacks on adults than any other breed. A complete list of references and more studies can be found at

www.nationalpitbullvictimawareness.org/articles/medical-studies-on-pit-bull.



TECHNICAL
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PIT BULL BITE FORCE AND THE LOCKING JAW MYTH

A dog's bite force is determined by several factors. Looking at the purely physical components, they include heavier body weight (discounting obesity), heavier skull weight, a relatively short broad jaw, large teeth, full dentition, large jaw muscles, and large areas of attachment for these muscles on both the jaw and the backskull.

The jaw muscles travel from the outer and under parts of the jaw through the zygomatic arch to connect to the sides of the backskull. The *zygomatic arch* is the bone that flairs out to the side of the head just under the eyes. The larger the arch's opening, the larger the muscle that can fit through it. This is why Pit Bulls have such a wide head: You're seeing the flared zygomatic arches to accommodate the large jaw muscles.

Many studies have tried to objectively measure the bite force of dogs, but these studies can't factor in the psychological factor of motivation. Some researchers have tried to measure the force by using anesthetized dogs and electrically stimulating the jaw muscles, or by hiding sensors inside chew sticks or inside *K9 training sleeves* (the

heavy padded sleeves you see trainers use when, say, a police dog is being trained to attack).

None of these methods works well, but overall, although Pit Bulls are generally among the heavier biting dogs, they seldom finish first. Larger Mastiff-type dogs often take this prize, and smaller highly motivated police dogs win the prize when training sleeves are used.

Regardless of which breed is the strongest, Pit Bulls have a very high bite force. They do not, however, have “locking jaws” as some people claim. There’s no physiological way for the jaw to “lock.” However, the Pit Bull’s jaw strength, combined with its motivation, may make it *seem* like the dog’s jaws lock, especially to anyone who has tried to pry a Pit Bull’s jaws open when the dog was intent upon fighting.

The last 20 years have seen a steady rise in fatal Pit Bull attacks. In 2018 and 2019, there were 89 fatal dog attacks in the United States; 66 of the victims (or nearly 75 percent) were killed by Pit Bulls or Pit Bull mixes. In 2018, 283 children were disfigured in dog attacks in the United States and Canada; of these, Pit Bulls accounted for 214 of the attacks. (That was the fifth year in a row that Pit Bulls disfigured more than 200 children.) In 2018, Pit Bulls were also responsible for 358 of the 437 adults disfigured in dog attacks in the United States and Canada.

According to statistics kept by DogsBite.org, between 2005 and 2017, dogs killed 433 Americans, and Pit Bulls contributed to 66 percent of these deaths. They killed a higher proportion of adults (72 percent) than any other breed, but they also killed the most people in all age groups.

In 2018, Pit Bulls killed 14,850 dogs and injured another 16,900, according to Animals 24-7. Pit Bulls were responsible for 86 percent of dog fatalities and 88 percent of cat fatalities. Pit Bulls have broken into yards and homes to attack resident pets. In many cases, owners who were walking their dogs have been killed or seriously injured trying to protect their dogs from attacking Pit Bulls.

But wait, are these high numbers simply because Pit Bulls make up such a high percentage of the dog population? Pit Bulls *are* popular, but how popular are they? Most Pit Bulls and Pit Bull mixes are unregistered so we can’t go by registration statistics. But most estimates place them at making up about 6.5 percent of the dog population of the United States. So, that doesn’t account for the high proportion of attacks or fatalities.

Do the dogs who attack do so because they're abused? A veterinary study found that more Pit Bulls are the victims of abuse than any other breed. But many of the dogs who killed their owners were known to be beloved family members who were never treated poorly.

Do they attack because they're owned by irresponsible people? It's true that far too many Pit Bulls are owned by people who don't properly contain or control their dogs, and these dogs are often the perpetrators of attacks that occur off the dog owner's property, often when walking down the street. But the statistics from 2005 to 2013 showed that only 25 percent of fatal attacks occurred off the dog owner's property.

Is it because the Pit Bulls were just acting as guard dogs? Unlikely. Of the 284 fatal Pit Bull attacks between 2005 and 2017, 149 (or 52 percent) involved killing a family or household member.



WARNING You may think it's odd to have so much information about the dangers of Pit Bulls in a Pit Bull book, but urging people to ignore the dangers associated with a Pit Bull would be irresponsible. Ignoring or denying these dangers will only allow more accidents to happen, giving anti-Pit Bull people more ammunition against the breed.

So, here's the dilemma: About 90 million dogs live in the United States. Of these, about 4.5 million are Pit Bulls. Pit Bulls *do* account for an inordinately high percentage of serious attacks, injuries, disfigurements, and fatalities. But the majority of Pit Bulls spend their lives not making the news, not killing anyone, and basically being peaceable pets. Most people will spend their lives with their Pit Bulls without *ever* having a serious aggressive incident. These people will proudly tell you that their dogs might "lick you to death," and they're telling the truth (well, you won't be licked to *death*, but their Pit Bulls are sweet and affectionate and will never hurt a soul). The vast majority of Pit Bulls are *wonderful* dogs, especially to their own family.

ANSWERING THE PIT BULL ADVOCATES' CLAIMS

Pit Bull advocates often deny or refute these dangers, commonly using the following arguments:

- **“There is no such breed as a Pit Bull.”** True, related bully breeds bred to fight dogs are often lumped together, much as I do in this book. The term *Pit Bull* commonly refers to a family rather than a specific breed of dog. The family includes the American Pit Bull Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier, American Bully, Staffordshire Bull Terrier, and their mixes. American Pit Bull Terriers and their mixes almost certainly contribute the most to Pit Bull fatalities and serious attacks, in part because they are by far the most numerous.

The people who say that there is no such breed as a Pit Bull often have no problem with the moniker “Pit Bull” when selling puppies, writing articles, placing dogs, and describing heroics — in short, in everything but any negative events. Ironically, multiple sites that label themselves as Pit Bull sites and Pit Bull rescues, which say they only deal with Pit Bulls, often have a statement on their sites saying that there’s no such thing as a Pit Bull. You can’t have it both ways.

- **“You can’t identify a Pit Bull by looks, and the media calls any biting dog a Pit Bull.”** In a popular online quiz, a challenge is made to pick out the Pit Bull from a series of other dogs resembling Pit Bulls. It’s difficult, not because Pit Bulls are hard to identify, but because the other breeds are also bully and mastiff breeds, such as American Bulldog, American Bully, and Olde English Bulldogge. These breeds are so rare as to make it unlikely a random dog resembling a Pit Bull would be one of them. That’s not to say that appearance is infallible. A 2015 peer-reviewed study appearing in the *Veterinary Journal* found that when shelter workers were asked to identify a dog (25 percent of which were puppies) based on appearance, and compared that identification to DNA parentage panels, there was only moderate agreement between assessors, that one in five dogs genetically identified with Pit Bull heritage was missed, and one in three dogs identified as Pit Bulls lacked DNA for Pit Bull heritage. However, none of the current breed ancestry tests are peer reviewed, and critics cite the overrepresentation of rare breeds in their results as a cause to doubt their veracity. The Supreme Court of Ohio, in a 1991 decision, ruled that a person “of ordinary intelligence can identify a pit bull.” That decision was upheld by the Supreme Court of the United States in 2008.
- **“Pit Bulls are no more aggressive than any other breed.”** The vast majority of the various breeds of dogs were created not for their looks, but for their behavior. Pointers don’t have to be taught to freeze when they see a bird; Retrievers don’t have to be taught to retrieve; Greyhounds don’t have to be taught to chase a rabbit or even a lure. The very premise behind purebred dogs and choosing a dog that fits your lifestyle is that different breeds have been bred for generations to be more prone toward certain

behaviors. They perform these behaviors because, through selection, they find them rewarding and fun. To them, the best game on earth is doing what they were bred to do.

How can it be that the Pit Bull, among all these breeds, is the only one without any genetic influence on its behavior? And let's get real: Most of us love Pit Bulls because of their personalities! They're fun, loving, and always up for a good time. Pit Bull owners don't just love them for their looks, but for their behavior.

But you can't just say that only *good* behaviors are inherent in the breed. Part of their propensity for fun and games probably arose because fighting is a sort of game, or at least a contest. And they were genetically selected to be very good at it and to never give up. To do that, they must consider it fun! Watch any video of a Pit Bull attacking, and the first thing you'll notice is that he's having fun even if his victim isn't. His tail is wagging. He doesn't "hate" his victim; he's "playing the game" he was selected to love. Unfortunately, the game can be so exhilarating and rewarding that the Pit Bull seems to forget the consequences, and that's when things can get deadly.

- **"It's all how you raise them. It's bad owners, not bad dogs."** Some people believe that Pit Bulls who attack are themselves victims of abuse, or simply come from homes that failed to adequately train them. It's true that many of the "at large" Pit Bulls who have attacked strangers were probably not trained or were ineffectively trained. But a startlingly high percentage of fatalities have come from dogs owned by people who were known to adore and properly train their Pit Bulls. In addition, a large percentage of dog owners of other breeds don't train their dogs either, yet those dogs are comparatively rarely involved in attacks. Training no doubt plays a role, but it does not overcome genetics.
- **"Fighting Pit Bulls who attacked humans were culled from the gene pool."** This makes some sense, because fighting Pit Bulls had to be handled before and during a fight. But according to interviews with *dogmen* (the term for men who actually fought Pit Bulls), an otherwise good game Pit Bull was too valuable to be culled for human aggression. Some of the best fighters were even labeled as "man-biters" or even "man-eaters," a label that accompanied their pedigrees and bios. It is possible that fighting Pit Bulls of the early years may have been culled for biting people, especially if they were not great fighters, but it seems less likely when they began to enter the mainstream population in the 1970s, at which point human aggression may have actually been sought after. Perhaps not coincidentally, it was around this time that Pit Bull attacks on people started to receive public attention. However, Pit Bull fatalities are not new, with records of at least 30 people killed by Pit Bulls from 1859 to 1911 (see www.fatalpitbullattacks.com).
- **"Chihuahuas bite more people than Pit Bulls do."** This may be true. But most other breeds can't inflict the damage a Pit Bull can, nor do they have the "game," never-give-up attack mode that Pit Bulls have been selected to have. Most dogs bite once and then retreat. Pit Bulls bite and hang on, and if dislodged, they return to attack the victim again and again. **Remember:** Failing to do so would have meant defeat in the dog-fighting pits.
- **"Pit Bulls are so trustworthy they were once called the nanny dog and were left to take care of children."** This claim is often accompanied by an old

photo of a Pit Bull posing with a child. It turns out that there is zero evidence for this assertion. An exhaustive search of every old Pit Bull book and magazine article failed to uncover a single instance of this term until 1980, when a Staffordshire Bull Terrier owner said that Staffies love children and are often referred to as nursemaid dogs. In time, the name mutated into nanny dog, and the story morphed from loving children to being the canine Mary Poppins. In 2013, the major Pit Bull advocacy group BAD RAP finally admitted that it would no longer support the nanny dog myth because it was misleading to parents and endangered children.

- **“Pit Bulls have the highest pass rate from the American Temperament Test Society.”** Yes, they do! But many people misinterpret this to mean that they’re sweetie-pies. Actually, the test attempts to measure several things, selecting mostly against timidity. So, dogs must walk over an unfamiliar surface without being scared, or not freak out in response to an umbrella being opened, a loud noise, or a person approaching in either a friendly or aggressive manner. (They’re allowed to react aggressively to the person, but not to actually attack.) Other dogs are not allowed to be in the testing area, so there is no testing for dog aggression. Most of the dogs who fail the test do so out of shyness, not aggression. And Pit Bulls don’t tend to be shy.
- **“The National Canine Research Council (NCRC) has reviews that show Pit Bulls are no more dangerous than other breeds.”** Unfortunately, any group can give itself an authoritative name and publish non-peer-reviewed information on the Internet. It turns out that the NCRC is a subsidiary of Animal Farm Foundation, which has as its mission statement to seek equal treatment for Pit Bulls — which is fine, as long as they’re upfront about it. You should always be aware of the bias of any group presenting evidence, whether it be pro-Pit Bull or anti-Pit Bull.
- **“Accusing Pit Bulls of being dangerous just because some are is no different than being racist.”** Actually, it’s very different. Different breeds of dogs were artificially selected to excel at very different behaviors. Does that make it right to generalize to all members of a breed? That’s the big question....

Should we negatively brand a breed because a small percentage (but significantly larger than any other breed) will maim or kill people and pets in the family or community? Or do you accept that a certain number of people and pets will be seriously injured or killed as an acceptable trade-off? Most people value their freedom to own the dog of their choice. But they also value their freedom to walk down the street safely.

If you, your family member, or your pet is a victim of a Pit Bull attack, you probably won’t think this is an acceptable trade-off at all. But if

you're the owner of a loving Pit Bull, you'll feel discriminated against and defensive on behalf of your loyal friend.



REMEMBER Pit Bulls were bred to kill, and to ignore that fact is to put you, your family and friends, strangers, other animals, and even your own Pit Bull and the breed itself in danger.

Although this section may seem oddly anti-Pit Bull for a Pit Bull book, ignoring what the breed was bred to do or what it's capable of doing doesn't do anyone any favors. When you're deciding whether a Pit Bull is right for you, you need to be fully informed.

If this section has made you rethink your decision to add a Pit Bull to your family, that's good! Not every breed is suited to every family. Pit Bulls are *not* a good choice for you if any of the following apply:

» **You have small children or you're often visited by small children.**

Given the number of small children Pit Bulls have killed, if little ones are a regular part of your landscape, you should look for another breed. Yes, many if not most Pit Bulls do fine in families with kids, but why chance it? Your odds of having to deal with dangerous incidents are much lower if you choose another breed.

» **You have other dogs or cats.** As a breed created to kill other dogs, Pit Bulls are not the best choice for a multidog household. They're also not good for households with cats or other small animals (like rabbits). Again, many Pit Bulls do fine in families with other pets, but the risk is greater, and it's just not worth it.

» **You're not willing to keep your dog in a securely fenced yard.** Pit Bull determination can translate into the dog being an excellent escape artist. And a Pit Bull on the loose can be harmed or do harm to others.

» **You want to take your dog to dog parks or for off-leash runs.**

» **You're sensitive about people avoiding your dog.**

- » You believe “it’s all how you raise them.”
- » You think they make a good macho status symbol or virtue signaler. Yes, many shelters are full of Pit Bulls in need of good homes, but a dog isn’t about making you look good. You can adopt a dog from a shelter who isn’t a Pit Bull, and still feel good about the choice you made.

Pit Bulls *are* a good choice if any of the following apply:

- » You want a fun-loving companion who’s always up for a game or good time.
- » You want a buddy who never tires out before you do.
- » You want a dog who will love you with all his heart.
- » You recognize that you need to take precautions and not be oblivious to what your dog probably won’t do, but *could* do.



PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR LOCAL LAWS

Not all homeowner’s insurance policies will cover you if a Pit Bull is in the home. Some airlines prohibit shipping them in cargo because several have chewed through their crates inflight. And some airlines have prohibited them from flying as emotional support or service dogs because of attacks that have occurred to other passengers in the cabin.

Where you live matters: If you’re a Pit Bull owner, you’ll become familiar with the term *breed-specific legislation*, or BSL (see [Chapter 1](#)), which refers to local ordinances banning certain breeds of dogs (always including Pit Bulls). BSL may outright ban Pit Bulls; require them to be spayed or neutered; allow current Pit Bulls to remain but not be replaced; or label them as dangerous dogs and require their owners to muzzle their dogs in public, never allow them to run loose, and carry liability insurance. Do *not* get a Pit Bull without first finding out if your city or county has BSL. Similarly, if you plan to move to another town (or even another country — some countries, such as the United Kingdom, ban Pit Bulls), make sure you know whether they have BSL before you commit to the move. Note that the U.S. Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marines prohibit Pit Bulls in housing on their bases.

There's a part of the human spirit that says, "You can't tell me what dog I can own," but legally, BSLs have held up in appeals courts. They've also ended up with dogs being taken away from their owners, or owners forced to move. Don't make your dog or family suffer because you wanted to make a point.

Chapter 4

Shopping the Bull Market

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Separating good breeders from bad breeders
 - » Looking for a good Pit Bull
 - » Registering your new Pit Bull
 - » Picking the dog who's best for you
-

You probably want a Pit Bull because you like the way they look and the way they act. So make sure that the dog you get looks like a Pit Bull and acts like a Pit Bull. Equally important, you want to make sure that the dog you get will live a long and healthy life. You've chosen a great breed that has the misfortune to have some not so great breeders. Take your time and get the Pit Bull you deserve.

Avoiding Bad Blood

The best way to get a good Pit Bull is to find a good breeder. The problem is that virtually all the people who ever let two dogs of the same breed mate consider themselves to be expert dog breeders. In reality, Pit Bulls are too often bred by the wrong people for the wrong reasons. Beware of breeders who:

- » Raise "game-bred" Pit Bulls for fighting or think Pit Bulls should be aggressive. Pit Bulls can be game without being specially bred for aggressiveness.
- » Treat their dogs without respect, love, or kindness.
- » Sell cheap puppies. Expect to pay from \$500 to \$1,000 for a registered pet-quality pup, and an average of \$1,500 to \$2,500 or

more for show quality. Male and female pets should cost the same. Raising healthy puppies takes a lot of resources, and cheap pups probably are cheap because the breeder has cut corners.

- » Are ready to send pups home with you before the pups reach eight weeks of age.
- » Can't compare their dogs to the UKC, ADBA, or AKC standard; don't know the standard; or scoff at the standard.
- » Think bigger is better, or worse, meaner is keener.
- » Are unfamiliar with any Pit Bull health concerns, or insist that they don't have to screen because their dogs are free of problems. All Pit Bull breeders should have their dogs screened for hip dysplasia. The best breeders will have their dog's hips evaluated and the results on file with hip registries such as Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) or PennHIP.
- » Insist that you view the puppies at a place other than their home, even by means of a video chat, or don't allow you to see the dam of the litter. Such breeders are often hiding a small-scale puppy mill or large-scale dog fighting operation.
- » Have no pedigree, photos, or videotapes of both parents and of other relatives. Good breeders know every dog in their pedigrees and will have you running for the door when they go to retrieve yet another album or videotape.
- » Ask you no questions. Good breeders consider placing a puppy as no less a responsibility than arranging adoption for a baby (well, maybe that's an exaggeration). They ask about your facilities, dog and Pit Bull experience, and your plans for your Pit Bull.
- » Think Pit Bulls are ideal for everyone. They're not! But breeders in search of a buck would have you think so.
- » Tell you that you can make your money back by breeding your Pit Bull. Does the breeder look rich?

Searching High and Low

Unlike most popular breeds, Pit Bulls seldom are found in puppy mills or traditional pet stores — and that's a good thing! They just don't command high enough prices, are too difficult to keep together, and have too many available at low cost from backyard breeders and shelters to make them profitable. Instead, the most common sources of cuddly Pit Bull puppies are newspaper and Internet ads, which can include both the best and the worst sources, so you need to know what to look for.

Checking the classifieds

“Enjoys quiet evenings by the fire, strolls on the beach at dawn, and fine dining. Looking for a lifetime partner.”

Despite the convenience, finding your new family member in the classifieds or on websites like craigslist is seldom a good idea. Some things in life shouldn't be easy, and buying a dog is one of them.

Although reputable breeders sometimes advertise in the newspaper or on craigslist, most ads are placed by *backyard breeders* — novice breeders who naively breed the family pet or think that they can make a quick buck by throwing a few dogs together. They seldom have the knowledge or resources to produce healthy, well-adjusted puppies or to adequately evaluate your chances for a happy life with the dog; even worse, in some cases, they don't care.

Some ads may even be placed by breeders who cater to the fighting Pit Bull market and produce Pit Bulls who don't have the desirable temperament for a trusted companion. They may offer their rejects to the public. Older dogs or puppies advertised in ads may have originally come from these poor sources; now, their new families find they can't deal with them. Their problem may become yours. Use extreme caution when considering a Pit Bull advertised in the newspaper or online. The exception is litters advertised on puppy or kennel websites.



WARNING When it comes to Pit Bull ads, beware of a few terms that signal the dog isn't bred to be a companion. The acronym OFRN stands for Old Family Red Nose, referring to a strain of Pit Bulls from

Ireland known for their red coloration and noses, as well as their *gameness* (technically, the tendency to continue in the face of adversity, but also used to indicate a willingness to fight). Other strains you may see touted in ads include Dibo, Colby, and Jeep; these bloodlines, and American Dog Breeders Association (ADBA)–registered Pit Bulls in general, are known for their fighting ability and may be a sign that the breeder’s interests lie in the pit.

Buying from a breeder

Hobby breeders who have kennel websites tend to be more serious about the dogs they produce — although there’s still no guarantee that these people are good breeders or that they don’t also breed for fighting dogs. You can take some precautions by visiting websites that cater to reputable breeders, like those I cover in this section.



TIP

If you have friends who have Pit Bulls whose temperaments you like, check out the breeders of their dogs. But even better, get a purebred dog with known background from a breeder who specializes in producing companion dogs. When looking for a reputable breeder, start with the following websites:

» American Kennel Club (AKC) Marketplace:

<http://marketplace.akc.org>

» Good Dog: www.gooddog.com

» Staffordshire Bull Terrier Club of America (SBTCA):

<http://sbtca.com/finding-a-stafford/breeder-directory/>

» Staffordshire Terrier Club of America (STCA):

www.amstaff.org/breeder-s-listing.html

» United Kennel Club (UKC): www.ukcdogs.com/find-a-breeder



TIP

Try to visit the facilities personally and see for yourself whether the dogs are being treated like livestock, producing machines, or fighting animals. Some breeders are uncomfortable with welcoming strangers to their homes and may insist on meeting in a public location. This concern is understandable, but at the very least, you should ask to see a current video of the puppies and parents at home. Better yet, arrange a video chat.



WARNING

If you do visit, keep an eye out for clues that the breeder is breeding fighting dogs. Fighting operations often have all their dogs tethered on heavy chains. They often have treadmills, springpoles (see [Chapter 5](#)), and other muscle-building equipment. However, these “clues” are also found in the operations of breeders who are *not* raising fighting dogs. Many show breeders condition their dogs with treadmill running, and many pet owners have springpoles for their dog’s enjoyment and exercise.

Old scars on dogs may indicate that they have been fought, but they can also indicate some chance encounters with housemates. If every dog has such scars, especially located around the face, that more strongly suggests a fighting history — or a very careless owner or very aggressive dogs. Photos, videos, and magazines about fighting are a strong clue that the breeder may have fighting interests, but don’t expect such clues to be left in the open. In some cases, even having the intention to fight dogs can be prosecuted, and every clue mentioned here can be used as legal evidence of intention. A good rule may be: If the breeder seems suspicious of you, be suspicious of him.

Know what you’re looking for and don’t hesitate to make your wishes known to the breeder. A breeder of fighting dogs should have the good sense to discourage you from coming to visit if you want a cute dog for the kids, and a breeder of pet dogs certainly doesn’t want to send a pup

home with you if you think dog fighting is acceptable. Being honest with the breeder gets you the best dog for your needs and, in the long run, is the best route for you, the breeder, and the dog.

But what are you looking for? If you want a fighting dog, you won't find your answers here. If you want a conformation show dog, you need to find a breeder who competes successfully in conformation. The dogs in the pedigree should be either AKC Champion American Staffordshire Terriers or Staffordshire Bull Terriers or UKC Champion American Pit Bull Terriers (APBTs). If you want an obedience or agility competitor, find a breeder who competes in these sports and has breeding stock with obedience or agility titles. If weight pulling has caught your fancy, find a breeder with successful weight-pulling dogs. Although it's possible for a dog without a background in any of these areas to excel in them, your odds of competing successfully are far greater if your dog's ancestors have also been successful.



TIP

Even if your only goal is to find the best companion on earth, a hobby or preservationist breeder has invested the same time and energy into your pup that he has in every other potential winner. Take advantage of it.

Expect a lot from preservationist breeders; they should have dogs boasting titles in conformation, obedience, or pulling, and certifications for clear hips (see the description of hip dysplasia in [Chapter 13](#)). Why should you care if your dog has ancestors with titles if you just want a companion? Because titles are evidence of a breeder's effort and interest; they demonstrate a prolonged investment of time, money, and effort, and indicate that the breeder is not just producing puppies by accident or to make a quick buck. Ask to see the pedigree and look for titles before or after recent ancestors' names.



TIP

You can find lists of AKC titles at

www.akc.org/sports/titles-and-abbreviations and UKC titles at www.ukcdogs.com/titles.



REMEMBER

Fighting Pit Bulls also earn champion titles for their wins in the pit. These are *not* the accolades you want in your new family member's background. Have the breeder explain exactly what each title signifies.

Expect to pay more for well-bred puppies. Here is where it gets a little tricky. How much is too much? Some breeders charge outlandish prices for pups because they claim their dogs are the salvation of the breed, or they see them as a way to make a killing. Unfortunately, Pit Bulls are often offered at bargain-basement prices in order to compete with the hordes of Pit Bulls in shelters. But such prices often indicate that little planning or care went into the litter. In general, be cautious of a breeder whose dogs are priced well over or under the average price. There's no such thing as the "chance of a lifetime" litter, puppy, or dog — although chances are that the right dog will be a once-in-a-lifetime friend.



TIP

Join an Internet Pit Bull discussion group for more information, leads, and updates on current prices. Many Pit Bull groups can be found by searching for "Pit Bull" on Facebook. Join several groups and find one that seems to match your interest level.

Getting a dog from a shelter or rescue group

There are more Pit Bulls in shelters and rescue groups than any other breed. According to Animals 24-7, Pit Bulls and Pit Bull mixes make up about 33 percent of shelter intakes nationwide, with even higher numbers, up to 65 percent, in large cities. In fact, almost one-third of all

Pit Bulls eventually find their way into shelters — a far higher percentage than any other breed in history.

Why are so many Pit Bulls in shelters and rescues? For one thing, too many people get a Pit Bull because it's the in-style dog of the moment, without considering the special responsibilities and challenges this breed can entail. When breeds become super popular, like the Pit Bull is today, they appeal especially to younger people, who may not have the experience or resources to cope with the breed or may be more apt to move or start a family and relinquish their dog.

These problems are common with any fad breed, but the number of Pit Bulls in shelters far exceeds that of any previous fad breeds. Many Pit Bulls are picked up as strays, and although Pit Bulls are popular in both high- and low-income neighborhoods, low-income owners may be less able to pay to get them out, or may have fewer resources to even know where to look for them. But a large percentage are also Pit Bulls who are surrendered by families because the dog is out of control or has threatened or bitten family members or other pets. A dog who is out of control may just be the result of poor training, and that's typical of owner-surrenders of any large breed. Those with aggression issues, however, present a problem.

Unfortunately, the well-intentioned no-kill movement (see [Chapter 1](#)) has had the unintended consequence of placing dogs as pets who would've previously been labeled dangerous. Keep this in mind: If, as many Pit Bull advocates say, "It's all how you raise them," then how do you think most of these Pit Bulls in shelters, the ones found as dumped strays or rescued from fighting rings, were raised? And sad though it is to say, this also applies to the Pit Bull you found dumped on the roadside, the one whose owner didn't care enough to even take him to the shelter.

This absolutely is *not* to say that Pit Bulls in shelters or found on the roadside don't deserve a second chance, or that they can't make loving and trustworthy companions. But it does mean that even more so than choosing a Pit Bull from a breeder, you *must* be cautious and intelligent in choosing a Pit Bull from a shelter. As much as you'd like to save them

all, and as much as your heart goes out to the ones with the most desperate histories, it's not doing anyone a favor if the dog you rescue simply can't be salvaged.

Many people look for the challenge of the rescue dog with the saddest past and derive special pride in working with dogs with trust or aggression issues. But unless you're an experienced dog trainer, there are many reasons why such a dog is not for you. For one, you may fail, and the dog may end up back in the shelter — this time with yet another mark against him. Or you may fail, and the dog may end up hurting or even killing another pet, perhaps your existing dog or a neighbor's. How is that saving a life? What if he hurts a person?

You may fail, or continue to try even though it's more challenging than you imagined, and essentially be held hostage by the sacrifices and precautions owning such a dog entails. Owning a dog was never meant to be a sort of self-flagellation. Of course, you could succeed, and that's great, but what about the other dogs in the shelter whom you walked past simply because they didn't have that captivating my-dog-was-more-abused-than-your-dog tale of woe you can bandy about at the dog park? Adopting a dog should never be an excuse to brag about how dedicated you are and what hardships you've endured in an effort to virtue-signal. Choose a dog who has the best chance of success for you, your family, and your dog to lead a loving and stress-free future.

How can you find such a dog? Start by checking out shelters and rescues. Municipal shelters are generally funded by local governments. They pick up strays, confiscate dogs from neglectful or abusive situations, and may accept some owner surrenders. They charge low adoption fees and, if dogs are not adopted, they euthanize them or send them to rescues. Many municipal shelters routinely euthanize all Pit Bulls they receive rather than adopt them out either because of local breed-specific legislation or because of the difficulty in finding homes for them and the liability consequences if somebody gets hurt.

Municipal shelters have the highest turnover and often euthanize the most aggressive dogs first. Because the turnover is high, the chances of finding a sweetheart dog are higher than in a limited-admission, low- or

no-euthanasia facility, which tend to keep dogs for much longer periods of time, even permanently, which means their kennels fill up with difficult and dangerous dogs. This, in turn, allows for fewer intakes and lowers your chance of finding a sweetheart dog there.

Many rescue groups focusing on Pit Bulls strive to advertise available Pits or rehome them while they await adoption. Some of these groups perform temperament tests on dogs to evaluate how they act around other dogs, and some attempt to train or rehabilitate dogs with behavior problems. These groups are often manned by kind-hearted volunteers, but that doesn't necessarily make them behavior experts.



WARNING Unfortunately, rescue has turned into big business these days, and some rescue groups are actually well-disguised money-making operations. How can you tell the good from the bad?

» **Beware of rescues that believe every dog can be saved.** Sometimes all the love and training and work in the world can't prevent a dog from being a potential threat to people or pets. An irresponsible rescue chastises any shelter or individual who makes the heart-wrenching decision that a dog can't safely live as a pet and should be euthanized. Yes, in many cases you can spend months on training and improve behavior, but will that dog ever be truly trustworthy? Is it fair to adopt out such a dog? Or will the dog be sentenced to a life of isolation in a "sanctuary" kennel run because the rescue realizes he can't live safely in the community? And what about resources? The money it costs for months of rehab or years of kenneling in a sanctuary could pay for the placement of 20 dogs with good temperaments. Some rescues try to rehab every dog because they have big hearts but not enough experience to know it's not always possible. And some do it because having a high-profile project dog can bring in big donations and pay big salaries. Beware of rescues that post GoFundMe campaigns for "poster dogs," usually those with

particularly sad histories and large potential expenses for training or veterinary care.

- » **Beware of rescues that tell you Pit Bulls are the best breed for everybody, and that all the tales of aggression are made up.** No responsible rescue wants to see a dog going to a family that only sees the good side of a breed, because these are the dogs who are most likely to come back to the rescue after the family realizes they've bitten off more than they can chew. Emphasizing only the good parts and denying the bad parts of any breed — not just Pits — is unfair to everyone involved.
- » **Beware of rescues that seem as though they're trying to cover up any undesirable behaviors a dog may have.** For example, some use phrases such as “so full of love she can't share her family with other pets” or “prefers to be the center of attention so a single-dog home is essential” or other ways of skirting about the issue that she isn't trustworthy around other pets. All of these are red flags. A responsible rescue would never want you to leave with a dog you weren't prepared to deal with. Other red flags refer to the dog guarding beloved family members against other family members or strangers, or of being “protective” or “reactive.” More responsible rescues will clearly state “no children” or “no dogs.” But even then, what happens when that dog gets out of the yard and happens upon a neighbor's child or dog? Truly responsible rescues consider what is best not only for the individual dog, but also for the community.
- » **Beware of rescues that seem as though they're trying to cover up the fact that a dog is a Pit Bull.** Obviously, Pit Bull-centered rescues are proud of their Pit Bulls, but some all-breed rescues and shelters will label them as any breed *but* a Pit Bull in hopes that the deception will help get them adopted. Any black or yellow dog miraculously turns into a “Lab mix,” a black-and-white one is a “Border Collie mix,” a thin one is a “Greyhound mix,” and a black-masked red one is a “Boxer mix.” Some shelters have actually implemented a “no labeling” policy to avoid having to identify any dogs as Pit Bulls. A responsible rescue would never trick you into getting a dog of a breed you didn't want.

- » **Beware of rescues that appear to pay their officers an unusually high salary.** Some of these can be found by going to Charity Navigator (www.charitynavigator.org). There's nothing wrong with compensating rescue workers for their time, effort, and heart, especially those who work at it full-time. But when the annual salaries are in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, as they are for some of the larger rescues, including at least one Pit Bull rescue, it blurs the line as to the motivations of those in charge. A problem that's become rampant is that of "retail rescue," in which rescue groups sell shelter dogs for a profit. If a group is charging much more than the expenses for reasonable medical bills and neutering or spaying, they may be motivated more by profit than animal welfare.
- » **Beware of rescues that can't tell you a dog's history.** Granted, in some cases that history may simply be "picked up as a stray." In other cases it may be "surrendered by owner." In the latter case, did the owner give a reason? Were they moving and couldn't keep the dog? Or did the dog bite their child? Was the dog transferred from another rescue? If so, why? And how can you contact the former rescue for information?

It's not unusual for dogs to be shipped from a rescue, shelter, or foster home in one state to a rescue, shelter, or foster home in another. This can be a good thing to enable a fresh set of adopters to see the dog. But it has also been used to cover up failed adoptions in which dogs were returned for aggression. During the transfer, the dog's name is changed and his slate wiped clean — and he's offered to a new unsuspecting family. This practice was infamously brought to light when such a dog, a Pit Bull going under a new name but with a repeated bite history, killed his adopter's mother less than 12 hours after being brought home.

- » **Beware of rescues that don't ask you the same questions a good breeder would.** Good rescues care about where their dogs are going. Don't be offended if they ask for proof of home ownership or a landlord's permission, or even if they do a criminal background check (mostly to check for dog fighting or gang-related convictions). Good rescues, like good breeders, will always agree to take a dog

back if it doesn't work out. And, like good breeders, they'll never have puppies under 8 weeks of age available for adoption.

- » **Beware of rescues that show you only pictures of Pit Bulls adorned with flowers or wearing human outfits, and refer to them only as “fur babies,” “pibbles,” and “pitties.”** Nobody minds a few such instances, because let's face it, Pit Bulls *can* be cute, but constant use of these costumes and terms suggest the rescue is either unaware of the Pit Bull breed's past or hopes *you* are. The best rescues are those that acknowledge that, like any breed, Pit Bulls are a product of selection to do a job, and the best owners are aware that they're dogs, not kids in fur suits.
- » **Beware of posts that call for somebody to rescue a particular dog because the dog's time is almost up.** The posts are often in ALL CAPS, and worded to make you feel as though you're personally responsible if you don't swoop in and save this dog. The dog may have a bite history, but it's never (according to the poster) the dog's fault: A toddler provoked her, an adult startled her, a dog looked at her wrong, she was guarding a family member — and now she's being unjustly blamed. These posts prey on your sympathy, guilt, and impulse — never tactics a reputable rescue would employ.
- » **Beware of rescues that put down responsible breeders, shame people who buy from a breeder, or can't move past the “Adopt, don't shop” mantra.** If all puppies came from responsible breeders there would be no reason for rescues. Shelter dogs don't come from responsible breeders. If they did, they would be back with the breeders when the owner could no longer care for them. But many breeders, especially Pit Bull breeders, are not responsible. If the only dogs left to buy are rescue dogs, then that means eventually the only dogs left for anybody could only come from irresponsible breeders. How is that a good thing?



TIP

Google the name of your potential rescue organization along with “reviews.” Larger rescues may have a good number of reviews from former adopters and even employees. Nobody expects them all to agree, but you may see trends worth paying attention to.

EVALUATING TEMPERAMENT EVALUATIONS

Behavior, especially aggression, is the most common reason adopted dogs are returned to shelters by new owners. Many shelters and most rescues assess the temperaments of all dogs before allowing them to be adopted. You should ask for the results of every evaluation done with your prospective adoptee. If you go with an untested dog, you need to be very careful until you get to know that dog around children, other dogs, pets, food, and general excitement.

But even shelter temperament tests have come under fire as being unrealistic and unreliable. Dogs are under a lot of stress in shelter environments, which may inhibit behaviors or exacerbate them. Some shelters try to test in more homelike situations, but even so, the dog may be too nervous to respond normally. In fact, one study found almost half of all dogs who passed an evaluation test showed some sort of aggression in their new homes.

Many rescues evaluate dogs based on a combination of the dog's reported history, reason for surrender, how he acts around kennel staff, how he acts around other dogs, any information from foster homes, as well as formal temperament tests. And the truth is, even if any dog, of any breed, comes with a glowing résumé, you should always take extreme care at first to make sure he's safe around children, pets, and anyone else.

As much as you may want to save the dog with the hard luck tale, think long and hard before choosing a dog who has a history of returns. Again, behavior problems, led by aggression, are the reason for most such returns. However, many adopters don't admit their dogs have behaved aggressively for fear they'll be euthanized. So the dog goes back up for adoption, and the cycle repeats. It's heartbreaking for everyone, including the dog, but it's also potentially dangerous.

The same is true for dogs with medical problems. Before taking on a dog with any medical problems, talk to your veterinarian and discuss the prognosis and what caring for this dog may entail in terms of money, effort, and potential grief. You may feel like a hero as you carry your crippled heartworm-positive dog to the car, but how will you feel after a month of caring for him?

MEETING YOUR SOULMATE

Two recent trends make for feel-good headlines but aren't really a good way to get a dog. One trend is the massive "empty the shelter" event in which shelter dogs are offered at bargain-basement prices just to get them out. The fact that you can pick up a dog for the price of lunch shouldn't be the motivation behind getting a dog, and it really isn't fair to the dogs involved either. In a few of these cases, you don't even get to pick your dog — you just get whichever one is next in line.

The other trend is rescue transport. These transports are a great idea, because they move shelter dogs from regions in which the shelters are crowded to regions in which they're empty — most often from the South to the North in the United States. Unfortunately, many such transports break every rule imaginable that breeders would be held to, including overcrowding vehicles, crowding dogs into shared cages, neglecting health certifications, misidentifying dogs, and mislabeling breeds. Again, you often meet your new dog only when he's brought to you in a parking lot — not really the way you should be choosing the best fit for you. Rescue transport *can* be done well — in these cases, dogs are given time to adjust and adopters can find the dog that's the best match for them.

Ideally, you should be able to meet your prospective dog in a quiet area, not the noisy kennel. A worker should make introductions, and then allow you to interact with the dog. Keep in mind that the dog is probably under a lot of stress. He may shut down compared to his real personality, or he may be hyper-excited. But aggression is not something you can excuse or hope will get better, so cross off your list any dog who lunges or growls at you or acts menacingly toward other dogs. Acting menacingly includes not only barking, growling, or lunging (although some lunging can be friendly), but also standing stiffly and staring in a hard non-distractible manner. Otherwise, see if he improves as he spends time with you. Does he try to interact with you by nudging you, wagging his tail, or simply sitting and smiling? Does he know any commands or tricks? Those are good signs. Can he have any treats? If you have another dog, is it possible for them to meet? Some shelters have grassy areas you can take a short walk in, throw a ball or just relax. They shouldn't expect you to decide immediately, but they may not be able to reserve him for you while you make up your mind.

Checking the Bona Fidos



REMEMBER You may not particularly care whether your Pit Bull is a blue blood. Her value as a beloved companion isn't altered by the presence or absence of papers. Registration papers are one sign of responsible breeding, however, and responsible breeding is of monumental importance in this breed. Papers are also crucial if you intend to breed or compete with your Pit Bull.

Your dog generally needs to be registered with each organization in which you wish to compete with her. This means that if you dream of running around the show ring at Westminster (an AKC show), you need to get an AKC-registered dog; if you wish to earn a Weight Pull title, you need to register your dog with the UKC. Some organizations recognize dogs registered with other organizations, but some do not.

The largest registries of Pit Bulls in the United States are the United Kennel Club (UKC) and the American Dog Breeders Association (ADBA), both of whom refer to the dog as an American Pit Bull Terrier. The American Kennel Club (AKC) version of the Pit Bull is called an American Staffordshire Bull Terrier.

ADBA registration

Unlike the AKC and UKC, The ADBA registers only one breed: the American Pit Bull Terrier. The ADBA has been historically associated with dog fighting, and although it no longer officially endorses the practice, it still has not shaken the reputation as a fighting dog registry.

If your new Pit Bull's parents are both registered with the ADBA, then the breeder should have registered the entire litter with the ADBA by the time you take your pup home. You should receive a tan registration certificate (not a photocopy) from the breeder to return to the ADBA with your chosen name for the dog. If the parents of your dog are registered with the ADBA, but your pup hasn't already been registered, you need the signatures of the dogs' owners on your registration application to verify that the breeding between those two dogs did take place.

Even if your dog does not come from ADBA registered parents, you can *single-register* her with ADBA if the dog's ancestors have been registered with another organization. To single-register, you need to supply a three-generation pedigree with the complete registered names of all the dogs in the pedigree, and also submit a copy of your dog's registration papers if she is registered with another organization, such as the AKC or UKC.

The ADBA's recognition of dogs from UKC or AKC stock sometimes makes things a little tricky. Remember that the AKC recognizes American Staffordshire Terriers, not American Pit Bull Terriers. However, the UKC recognizes AKC-registered AmStaffs as UKC-registered APBTs. If dogs originally registered as AKC AmStaffs are registered with the ADBA, they are indicated by an asterisk (*) on the pedigree, denoting that they are technically AmStaffs.

UKC registration

If the sire and dam of your puppy are registered with the UKC, the breeder should give you a green puppy-registration certificate when you buy your dog, which you fill out with the name you choose for the dog and return to the UKC. If your Pit Bull is a purebred but isn't registered with the UKC, you can single-register your dog by submitting the proper documentation, as long as she is registered with another organization. APBTs registered with the ADBA and AmStaffs registered with the AKC and some foreign registries can usually be registered in this manner. Go to www.ukcdogs.com/single-registration-requirements-american-pit-bull-terrier for an application. If your dog is a purebred but isn't registered with any registry, or even if your dog isn't a purebred, you can apply for a UKC Performance Listing Number or AKC Purebred Alternative Listing/Indefinite Listing Privilege. These listings may require proof of spaying or neutering (rendering your dog ineligible for conformation showing), but allow you to compete in obedience, agility trials, and other fun performance and companion events like weight pulling, lure coursing, and trick training.

You may see the following terms on a UKC registration: The designation of *Purple Ribbon (PR)* is given to UKC-registered dogs who have 6

generations of known ancestors and whose 14 ancestors within the last 3 generations are all registered with the UKC (all the parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents). The UKC also offers the *Performance Pedigree* (PAD), which lists the number of offspring produced and the number of degrees earned for all 14 ancestors in the 3 generation pedigree. The UKC marks all registration papers as *inbred* when the breeding is the result of a mother-son, father-daughter, or brother-sister mating. *DNA-P* indicates a DNA profiled dog and *DNA-VIP* indicates that the dog and both of her parents are DNA profiled, so that the dog has *verified, identified parentage* (VIP). (DNA samples are obtained by swabbing the inner surfaces of the lips.)

AKC registration

The AKC registers American Staffordshire Terriers, and does not recognize either UKC or ADBA registered Pit Bulls as AmStaffs. AKC registration papers consist of a registration certificate or application form, which you complete and send to the AKC to register the dog in your name. If these papers are not available when you buy the puppy, the breeder is required by AKC rules to give you a signed statement or bill of sale that includes the breed, sex, and color of the dog, her date of birth, the breeder's name, and the registered names of the dog's sire and dam (with numbers if possible). A breeder who is concerned that a non-breeding quality AmStaff might be bred rather than neutered or spayed may sell a dog with a *Limited Registration*, which means that if the dog is bred, her offspring will not be registered by the AKC. Dogs with Limited Registration can still compete in AKC competitions (except for conformation). Limited Registration *can* be changed to regular registration, but only by the breeder, not by the owner.

Note that a dog born of an AKC-registered dam to a UKC-registered sire (or vice versa) will not be recognized as pure by the AKC. An AKC-registered AmStaff must have both parents AKC-registered as AmStaffs.



REMEMBER Your dog's AKC-registered name cannot be changed after she has been awarded any placement in competition. A UKC-registered name can be changed up until the time the dog becomes a UKC champion.

All this is pretty complicated, so I'll summarize some of the important points:

- » The AKC does not recognize UKC or ADBA registrations.
- » The UKC recognizes AKC and ADBA registrations.
- » The ADBA recognizes UKC and AKC registrations.

Picking Your Pit

Both Pit Bull males and females make equally good companions. Pit Bull males are slightly larger than females. Some males mark their territory inside your house by urinating on walls and furniture, a behavior that can be difficult to thwart. Males may fight with other males, especially other male Pit Bulls. Females, too, can fight with each other, especially other females, but are somewhat less likely to do so. Their main drawback is that they come in *estrus* (also known as *season* or *heat*) twice a year. Estrus lasts for three weeks. Neutering usually solves the marking and estrus problems.

Try to choose the best Pit pup, with the best parents and grandparents, you can find. If looks are important to you, be sure they have the look you like. Consider the essentials of the Pit Bull standard. The Pit Bull is a grand athlete, a combination of lithe movement and rippling musculature. The Pit Bull should give the impression of strength, agility, speed, and stamina, without sacrificing one for another. If you plan to show your dog, have somebody familiar with the Pit Bull standard come with you and evaluate the ancestors and puppies. If you don't plan to show, simply go with what pleases your eye (see [Figure 4-1](#)).

A good temperament is important in any breed, but even more so for Pit Bulls. This is why it's best if you can meet the family beforehand. The adult Pit Bull should display a great joy of life, enthusiasm for adventure, desire to please, and courage in the face of adversity. Above any of these traits are the abilities to control herself around strange dogs, the ability to calm down when asked to do so, and the ability to demonstrate no signs of aggression whatsoever. Walk away from litters from parents showing any hint of aggression.



Photograph courtesy of Cindy Noland

FIGURE 4-1: All puppies are cute. Take care to choose the one that's best for you.

These same traits should be evident in the puppy you choose. The puppy who comes to greet you, tends to follow you around, and doesn't object to being held occasionally is your best choice for a stable companion. Any puppy who shows dog aggression — beyond the typical mild and short skirmish over a toy — should be off your list. Any puppy who shows aggression toward people beyond the typical mouthing and

playing should be off your list. Be sure that the breeder interacts with the pups with kindness; early experiences can have lifelong consequences.

Health is another huge factor. Your pup has a better chance of living a long, healthy life if her relatives have also had long and healthy lives. Ask how old the parents are and how long the grandparents or great-grandparents lived. If the breeder doesn't have this information, it's a sign he isn't well versed in the litter's pedigree. Ask about hip dysplasia clearances from the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) or PennHIP. If the breeder has no idea what you're talking about, it's a sign that he isn't well educated about dog breeding.

Pit Bulls have the 26th highest hip dysplasia percentage out of 181 breeds evaluated by the OFA, with 77 percent having normal hips. (For comparison, the American Staffordshire is ranked 24th worst with 71 percent normal hips, and the American Bully is ranked at 20th worst with only 59 percent normal hips.) The good news is that although their X-rays often show them to be severely dysplastic Pit Bull breeds are less likely to be bothered by it. Good hip ratings lessen the chance that your puppy will develop dysplasia, but they're no guarantee your pup won't develop hip dysplasia as an adult. Hip dysplasia isn't the only issue affecting Pit Bulls. Elbow dysplasia is another concern, with only about 80 percent of Pit Bulls having normal elbows. Similarly, hypothyroidism is a concern, with only about 80 percent having normal thyroid function. The Canine Health Information Center maintains a list of conditions the various breed parent clubs recommend all prospective parents be tested for. Those suggested for the American Staffordshire Terrier are screenings for hip dysplasia, hereditary heart problems, autoimmune thyroiditis, cerebellar ataxia (neuronal ceroid lipofuscinosis), hereditary eye diseases, and optionally, elbow dysplasia. Even better, they maintain a list of all AmStaffs that have tested clear of these diseases. You can access this list by going to www.ofa.org/browse-by-breed, clicking your breed of interest, and clicking Search on the breed's page. This is a great tool to see how involved your potential breeder may be with health testing, and it's one indication of how much they care about producing healthy dogs.



REMEMBER Even the most carefully bred and chosen pup may not develop as hoped concerning conformation, temperament, or health. Discuss with the breeder what, if any guarantees are provided, and consider whether you can handle returning a pup to whom you've become attached if that is part of the bargain. If having a successful competition dog is of vital importance to you, consider buying an adult who has already shown potential.



REMEMBER Most Pit Bulls come from friends and neighbors who have a litter and are either giving them away or selling them for a few hundred dollars to help make ends meet. The breeders have never heard of standards, competitions, health testing or socialization. Others come from local breeders who constantly have puppies available but, again, think health testing means the puppy is vaccinated and wormed. Getting a puppy from these people is sort of like having your neighbor fix your airplane because he's good at fixing cars. It might go well ... or it might not.

Let's look at some other very important things good breeders provide: constant advice, mentorship, and a safety net. Bad breeders cash your check, hand you the puppy, and wave good-bye. They're eager for the little eating machines to be gone. But after all, how much hand-holding did you really expect for \$200? Good breeders charge more, but part of that pays for lifelong advice from an expert whenever you need it. And, good breeders will demand that, should a problem arise with the dog, they be contacted before you make any major decisions, and especially provide that you must return the dog to them rather than relinquish it to a shelter or give her away. They're concerned about that puppy's welfare for the rest of her life.

What sort of questions did the breeder ask you? They should ask at a minimum why you want a Pit Bull, if you have experience with Pit Bull

ownership, what's your history with other dogs you've owned, whether you rent or own your home and if you rent, if you have the landlord's permission to own a Pit Bull, what other pets you own, what age children are in the house, if you have a fenced yard, and where you plan to exercise the dog. If a breeder fails to ask you such questions, they don't care about the fates of their puppies, and aren't the kind of breeder you want.

Pit Bull pups require constant attention, careful supervision, and endless work. Consider whether you will have the time and energy to devote to a puppy. If not, consider getting an older dog from a breeder or rescue group. One of the many Pit Bull perks is that adults maintain their puppy playfulness for many years. If you have children, an older Pit Bull may be less likely to bowl them over with her exuberance. She will either be housebroken or be very easy to housebreak. She will have less tendency to chew. And don't worry: She'll bond to you as though she had always owned you. Oops, as if you had always owned her. You may find that the best way to ensure many years of pleasure is to start with an adult Pit Bull. Of course, you still have to do your part by providing the best care possible. Acquiring an older Pit Bull comes with its own caveats, however.

Part 2

Giving Your Pit Bull a Good Home

IN THIS PART ...

Prepare for your Pit Bull's arrival.

Set the house rules, introduce your Pit to friends and family, and travel with your dog.

Chapter 5

Bringing Home Your New Best Friend

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Puppy-proofing your house
 - » Going on a Pit Bull buying bonanza
 - » Making and buying Pit Bull toys
-

So, you're about to add a Pit Bull to your life.

Excited? Scared? You'd better be both. Take a last look around your home so you can remember how it looked BP (Before Pit). Heck, take a picture for posterity. You won't see it looking like this for about another year — maybe ten. After you take your pictures, roll up your sleeves and get to work. Channel your excitement into preparation, and get ready for your new friend before he arrives. When your new dog enters your home, you'll be too busy having fun to get any work done — and what little you do accomplish, your little troublemaker will undo faster than a speeding Pit Bullet.



REMEMBER Once home, your new Pit Bull faces a big transition. If he's a young puppy, he'll transition from canine litter member to human family member, a pretty remarkable change. Every new day is full of novel experiences and strange rules. He'll naturally be inquisitive and need you to safeguard him from danger and guide him toward becoming a well-mannered member of the household. And even if you've adopted an adult, he may never have lived as a house dog before. This may be a strange new world for him, so look at things from his point of view.

Puppy-proofing Your Home

A Pit Bull puppy is like a super baby. Imagine a baby who can run faster than an adult, jump his own height, and chew through wires: That's a Pit Bull baby. Because Pit Bull puppies are even more active than human babies, you have to be even more diligent in puppy-proofing than in baby-proofing. If you've never had a dog before, you may have some home improvement projects on your hands before your home is safe enough for a mischievous Pit Bull. Using your own imagination and diligence is the best way to insure your pup's safety.

Anyplace your Pit Bull may wander must be puppy-proofed, just as you would baby-proof your home and yard for a new child. Crawl around on the ground at puppy level to see what dangers beckon. You may as well get used to it down there — you'll be sprawling there with your pupster soon enough. In addition to baby-proofing your home, you need to be alert to these factors:

» Doors are a danger area:

- Puppies can be injured running into clear glass doors. Attach stickers at puppy eye level to avoid such accidents.
- Everyone in your family must be made to understand the danger of slamming a door — the pup may be in the way.

- Never close a garage door with a puppy darting about.
 - Doors leading to unfenced outdoor areas should be kept securely shut. A screen door with a dog grate is a vital safety feature.
-
- » Puppies love to chomp on electrical cords and lick electrical outlets. Such oral exploration can result in death from shock, severe burns, and loss of jaw and tongue tissue. Pups can also pull electrical appliances down on themselves by pulling on cords.
 - » Pups can pull over unstable objects, causing the object to come crashing down on the pup.
 - » High decks, balconies, and staircases are bad news. Use baby gates, temporary plastic fencing, or chicken wire (if needed) to prevent the puppy from accessing these dangerous areas.
 - » Careless people can undo all your safety efforts. Impress upon family members the dire consequences that can occur if they allow the dog to dance around the lawn mower, conduct target practice with the dog in the area, leave a puddle of antifreeze on the garage floor, and on and on. Everyone in the family needs to consider what consequence their actions may have on the pup. Keep chemicals, drugs, cleaners, sponges, small objects, strings, and coins out of reach of a puppy's adventurous mouth.
 - » Check the yard for poisonous plants, bushes with sharp, broken branches at a Pit Bull's eye level, and trees with dead branches or heavy fruits in danger of falling. If you have a pool, school your dog on how to find the steps so that he can get out.



TIP

You may want to invest in a remote camera so you can spy on your puppy (or even your adult dog) via the Internet while you're away. Even if he's crated, you can have peace of mind knowing he's contentedly snoozing while you're hard at work earning his keep. And if he's ripping up the sofa, maybe you can get home in time to save a cushion or two.

Fencing In Your Pit Bull

Good fences really do make good neighbors — and live dogs (see [Figure 5-1](#)). The number-one Pit Bull lifesaver is a securely fenced yard. In today's world of suburbs and automobiles, a loose dog is, at best, an unwelcome visitor, and more often road kill. Even a friendly Pit Bull intent on playing with passersby can be interpreted as a dog looking for trouble and reported to animal control or law enforcement. Roaming Pit Bulls can find themselves accused of various misdeeds, damaging the breed's reputation and possibly resulting in legal action against you. Loose Pit Bulls have too often been shot by police who were unsure if they were dealing with a dangerous dog. A Pit Bull rushing toward you can be frightening, even if he only planned to say hello. And unfortunately, escaped Pit Bulls have attacked and killed people and pets. More than with any other breed, with a Pit Bull it's essential to make sure your dog is securely confined.



FIGURE 5-1: A fenced yard is a safe playground for your Pit Bull.

Pit Bulls can be gifted jumpers, climbers, diggers, and wrigglers, and are often tempted by the greener grass on the other side of the fence.

Running dogs, playing children, racing bicycles, or just the call of the wild may prove irresistible to your dog. Privacy fences (such as stockade fences without cracks for a dog to peek through) are the best choice because they prevent your dog from being swayed by such temptations, and prevent potential dognappers from seeing your Pit Bull.

Unfortunately, Pit Bulls are also the target of dognappers who may see your innocent pup as an ideal bait dog for training a fighting Pit.

What about those invisible containment systems, in which dogs wear a device that gives them an electronic shock when they cross a certain boundary? They're really not a good choice for Pit Bulls. For one thing, they can't keep dognappers or other dogs from strolling right into your yard. For another, most Pit Bulls don't even notice such feeble attempts to contain them. After all, they were bred to grit their teeth and continue in the face of adversity. No little shock is going to keep a Pit Bull from her grand adventures!

Keeping your dog in a tiny pen on the far side of the yard is scarcely better. Pens do have their place for containing dogs securely, however. Such a pen should be at least 6 feet high or, preferably, have a solid top to keep out rain and sun and keep in climbing Pit Bulls. The pen must have both shade and shelter. Dogs can get more exercise in a long, narrow pen than in a square pen of equal area. If you place a doghouse within the pen, be sure that the dog cannot jump on the top of the house and then out of the pen. The most convenient pens have a doggy door leading inside the house or garage so that the dog has shelter. The pen can provide a secure area for your Pit Bull when you are away from home, but is not a substitute for taking your dog into your home and giving him regular exercise.

If you don't want to welcome your Pit Bull as a real member of your household, you'll be missing out on the best this breed has to offer. Pit Bulls raised as part of the family are more obedient, trustworthy, and protective. Reconsider getting a Pit Bull if you plan to exile him to a life of solitary confinement.



REMEMBER Pit Bulls may be tough, but they're not built to withstand either excessive cold or heat. Their hair is too fine and short to afford protection from the elements, and they don't take hot weather particularly well, either. If you wouldn't be comfortable sleeping outside in either hot or cold weather, neither will your Pit Bull. A Pit Bull is not a dog who should be expected to live outside!

Providing a Cozy Doghouse

If your dog will be spending a lot of time outside, he may need a doghouse. The best doghouses have a doorway system that prevents wind and rain from whipping into the sleeping quarters. This means a design with two offset doors and an "entrance hall." One of the doors should have a hanging rubber or fabric flap like doggy doors have. The

floor should be slightly raised and soft bedding should be in the sleeping quarters. For warm weather, shade must be available.



TIP A great summertime cooler is a kiddie wading pool. Introduce your Pit Bull as a pup and he'll learn to lounge in the water to keep cool on hot days. Be sure to change the water regularly as it stagnates quickly.

Giving Your Dog a Comfortable Place to Sleep

Do you have a bed? Well, what about your dog? You'd be surprised how many people go off to bed at night and leave their dog wandering aimlessly around the house, without a bed to call his own. When these people discover the dog sleeping on the sofa, they label the dog as "sneaky," but your Pit Bull needs a comfortable bed just as much as you do. You can choose from several sleeping options for your Pit Bull.



TIP

Decide now whether you want to share your bed with your dog. Remember that your pup won't understand why he was welcome in your bed last night (after you gave him a nice bath) but not tonight (after he gave himself a nice mud bath.) Whether you're willing to share your bed or not, your dog should also have his own bed. A bed can be a folded blanket, a crib mattress, a big cushion, a fancy bed made just for dogs, or anything moderately soft — and preferably washable. It can be placed in a corner, a box, a dog crate, or anywhere out of the way of drafts and excitement. Whatever you use and wherever you put it, the most important thing is that the bed is a place your dog can call his own. The next most important thing is that you don't use the traditional wicker basket bed, unless you have an insatiable desire to play a mind-boggling game of pick-up sticks.

Even if you don't share your bed, one of the best parts of having a Pit Bull is the chance to snuggle. Cuddling with your dog in front of the fire or the television is fun, so throw a blanket on the floor and share it with your dog.

In the following sections, I fill you in on other options for your Pit when you can't keep an eye on him (especially if he's a young pup).

Crates

The crate is a popular and useful dog bed and training tool. Many new dog owners are initially appalled at the idea of putting their pet in a crate as though he were some wild beast. At times, though, your Pit Bull *is* a wild beast, and a crate is one way to tame the beast.

Your pup needs a place that he can call his own, a place he can seek out whenever the need for rest and solitude arises. The crate can be that place (see [Figure 5-2](#)).



FIGURE 5-2: A crate can be your Pit Bull's sanctuary.

Think of the crate as the canine equivalent of a toddler's crib. It's a place for naptime and a place where you can leave your pup without worrying about him hurting himself or your home. It is not a place for punishment, nor is it a storage box for your dog when you're through playing with him.

Rethink getting any dog if you plan for him to live in a crate. Don't expect your dog to stay in a crate all day, every day, while you're at work. To lock an intelligent, active being in a crate without stimulation is not only cruel, but can also lead to behavior problems.



TIP

A crate *is* a good place to put your dog when company comes over, especially visiting children. As much as your Pit Bull may love everyone, not everyone will love him. And parents of visiting children may be uneasy when there's a Pit Bull in the house.

Crating *any* large dog when children are visiting is the responsible thing to do, no matter how much you trust your dog.

You can't just stuff your Pit Bull in a crate when you feel like it and expect him to take it lying down. In fact, if you do that he will do everything but lie down. Start by placing the crate where the pup won't feel secluded from the rest of the family. Place him in the crate on a soft blanket when he begins to fall asleep, and he will become accustomed to using it as his bed. Add a chew bone or favorite toy to keep him company. If you time it right, you should not have to worry about a crying puppy begging to be let out; if you time it wrong, you may have to steel yourself to his pleas until he finally falls asleep.

Most crates are either of the wire variety or the plastic variety. Wire crates provide better ventilation and view for your dog, and most (especially the suitcase models) are easily collapsible for storage or transport. However, they can be drafty and don't provide the coziness of plastic crates. Dogs can strain an amazing assortment of items through the gratings, so take care about what items you set on or near a wire crate. Most wire crates are not approved for airline shipping.

Plastic crates are relatively inexpensive. They don't provide ventilation as well as wire crates do, but they can be cozy, especially in winter. They take up more room when storing as they only break down into halves; however, each half can be used as a bed.



TIP Whatever type of crate you choose, pay special attention to the latching mechanism. Make sure a determined dog can't spring the door. The ideal crate is large enough for a dog to stand up in, but not large enough for the dog to walk around in. When a puppy can stroll about in a crate, he'll tend to walk to one side of the crate and potty in it and then go back to the other side to sleep. If you plan to travel with your crate, make sure it can fit into your car and that it is easy to transport.

If money were no object, then you could keep buying ever-expanding crates as your pup got bigger. A more realistic option is to buy a large crate and then place a divider in it that you gradually move to accommodate the growing pup. The adult crate can be larger once your dog is housebroken.

Exercise pens

Exercise pens (or *X-pens*) are transportable, wire, folding playpens for dogs, typically about 4 x 4 feet. X-pens are like having a little yard and are perfect for puppies. They provide a safe time-out area when you just need some quiet time for yourself but don't wish to confine your dog in a small crate.



TIP

Don't forget baby gates! They are better than shut doors for placing parts of your home off-limits. Do not use the accordion style gates, in which a dog can get his head stuck and asphyxiate.

Shopping for Your Pit Bull

Besides the big ticket items, don't forget all the little things that make life sweet for your sweetie. Start with toys, chewies, toys, food, toys, and a few more toys. The best places to find a selection are online vendors, vendors at dog shows, and large pet supply stores.



TIP

For more on food, check out [Chapter 10](#).

Toys

Toys play an important role in mental and physical stimulation and help keep your home in one piece. Dogs that have toys are less likely to destroy inappropriate items. A stroll down the toy aisle of any pet shop will have your pup choosing every toy within reach.

Pit Bulls love balls, especially big, bouncing balls. Hard rubber balls are ideal for tough-playing puppies. A large, partially deflated soccer ball also makes an ideal plaything.



WARNING Small balls (such as golf balls and jack balls) can be swallowed or inhaled, and soft rubber balls can be chewed to bits.

Rubber tug toys are great favorites with Pit Bulls, but use them sparingly with youngsters. Constant pulling on immature canine teeth and jaws may cause occlusion problems. This kind of play may also foster a sense of physical competitiveness that may not be appropriate in a full-grown Pit Bull. That doesn't mean you can never play tug games with your dog; just do so sparingly and intersperse other, more cooperative, activities.

Most squeaky toys are poor choices for Pit Bulls. Many are made of plastic that can be easily chewed and swallowed. In most of them, the squeaker is easily dislodged and also swallowed. Don't leave your dog unsupervised with a squeaky toy. These are toys, not chewies, and should only be used when you are playing with the dog.

Fleece toys are relished by most Pit Bulls, but some dogs are too rough with them and rip them apart. Again, these are not chew toys, and your dog should not be allowed to play unsupervised with them if he may chew them up. Children's stuffed toys are a good alternative for some dogs, but most Pit Bulls will have the room festooned with toy stuffing in short order.

Pit Bulls can destroy most normal dog toys, so you may have to invest in a heavy-duty toy (see [Figure 5-3](#)). The best choices are those made of durable rubber in which food (such as peanut butter or dog kibble) can be placed — such as the Kong or the Buster Cube. The dog then can spend a long time extracting the food from the toy. These toys are great for times when you must leave your dog alone.



FIGURE 5-3: Make sure to select durable, heavy-duty chew toys.



TIP

Homemade toys are a great option. Stuff a sock with a couple of other socks or a tennis ball, knot it near the end, leave a long “leg” for throwing, and you have one of the best toys money can’t buy. Stuff a long sock with a several balls all in a line and let your dog work to get each ball out, one by one. Take an old plastic milk jug or soda bottle, and you have a wacky, noisy throw toy that bounces erratically. Throw in a few dog biscuits or kibble and you have a challenging food puzzle. Small rubber tires are sturdy, roll erratically, and can be carried by a strong dog. Thick sections of rope can also be fun.

Don’t forget the traditional stick. Make sure the ends are blunt and that it is not long enough that the dog can jab one end into the ground if his is holding the other end in his mouth — many dogs have jabbed a hole in the roof of their mouth that way. Of course, make sure your dog doesn’t eat the stick!



REMEMBER Toys designed to withstand the average dog's destructive ability are child's play to a determined Pit Bull. If your dog likes to destroy and eat toys, you can't leave them with him. Homemade toys are especially ill-advised for these dogs. Dogs that swallow material can swallow long socks, causing a severe intestinal blockage in which the intestines bunch up around a long object. Dogs that munch plastic or wood can swallow shards of plastic containers or sticks. Super toy destroyers need super sturdy toys from pet catalogs or pet stores.

Pit Bulls especially enjoy games of strength, and toys involving jumping and tugging are great favorites. A homemade springpole is a great way for your Pit Bull to entertain himself. Springpoles can be simple or fancy; the basic design is a rope attached to an overhanging limb or arch with a heavy cloth attached to the rope by a big spring. The dog is encouraged to bite and pull on the cloth, and when he lets go, the cloth springs away and the dog tries to catch it. Start with the cloth at about the same level as the dog's head. Adult dogs can graduate to a higher placed cloth so they have to leap for it, but puppies should not be encouraged to jump high or hang from the cloth as doing so can injure their immature joints or teeth. Make sure your dog can't catch his teeth in the spring, and start slowly with the game. You don't want your Pit pup to become bored or exhausted.

Another fun toy is a pole lure, which is essentially a stick about 6 feet long or so with a string of equal length tied to the end and a toy or ragged cloth tied to the end of the string. The object is for you to run around and drag the toy, changing direction and generally trying to keep your dog from catching it. Don't let your dog get hurt by jumping too erratically after the toy, however. The toy will bounce around and the dog will have a great time trying to catch it as it bounces, changes direction, and goes up in the air. Your neighbors, of course, will think you're insane.



WARNING “Old shoes make great dog toys.” Pit Bulls are smart, but they can’t tell the difference between last year’s styles and this year’s styles — and when they come across your open closet, they may think they’ve truly hit the jackpot if you’ve conditioned them to chewing on shoes.

Like all dogs, Pit Bulls love to chew. They love to chew hands, feet, shoes, furniture, walls, sticks, logs, trees, cars, and heavy equipment with a natural-born talent that would put a beaver to shame. Chewing is natural for all dogs. Pit Bulls just happen to be very good at it. You will be far more successful redirecting your dog’s chewing than trying to abolish it. The most popular chew items are those made of rawhide, which you should avoid. Some rawhide is processed with poisonous substances. Dogs who swallow hunks of rawhide can choke or develop serious intestinal obstructions. A variety of vegetable-based chews are available. For gator-jawed dogs, hard rubber or nylon bones can last a long time and provide good dental cleaning.



WARNING Pig ears are a great treat but have high fat content and can cause diarrhea. Hooves tend to splinter and have been implicated in some problems. Hooves and bones have both caused cracked teeth and many veterinary dentists advise against their use.

Food and water bowls

Your dog needs food and water bowls, and although you can just let him use yours, most people prefer for the dog to have his own. Your choice of materials is plastic, ceramic, or stainless steel. Forget plastic. Pit Bulls can chew it up and many dogs are allergic to it. It’s also hard to keep clean. Ceramic is also not a great choice, simply because it can be awkward to clean and, if it cracks, harbors germs. Stainless steel bowls are best because they resist breaking and are easily washed.

A flat, wide bowl works best with Pit Bulls. To thwart ants if you ever feed your dog outside, place the bowl in a shallow pan of water so that the ants have to cross a moat to get to the food. If you plan to keep your bowl outside in freezing weather, be sure not to use metal (which the dog can get his tongue stuck to) and consider getting a bowl heater that keeps the water from turning to ice.

Collars

One size does not fit all, and your Pit Bull will be served best by a collar that fits his neck and your abilities. The three major collar styles are buckle, slip, and martingale.

Buckle collars

Every dog should have a traditional buckle collar (a flat collar that buckles) to wear around the house. Your dog's license tags (preferably the flat, plate type) should be on it. You will have to buy several buckle collars as your pup grows, but the little nylon puppy collars don't cost much. When your dog reaches maturity, you can splurge on a handsome leather or nylon collar.

Even though they look tough, resist the temptation to get a collar with spikes on it. They're not very comfortable for your dog and give a poor impression of the breed in public.

Buckle collars can have some shortcomings. For one, buckle collars with plastic clasps are notoriously unreliable; the clasps often break when the dog lunges against them, setting the dog free at the worst possible time. For another, the large neck of many Pit Bulls means that the collar has to be so big it is apt to slip off, over the dog's head, if he pulls back against it. Finally, buckle collars give the handler little control if the dog is strong and stubborn. This is especially true for a bull-necked Pit Bull.

Slip collars

For this reason a *slip collar* (sometimes incorrectly called a choke collar) may be a better choice while walking the dog. Slip collars come in nylon or chain, with chain giving a little bit more control. The main problem with slip collars of any type is their tendency to literally choke dogs to death if left on the dog while unattended if the collar gets snagged on

something. That's a mighty big problem. Countless dogs have gotten their collars caught on sticks, fences, car interior parts, or even a playmate's tooth and died — sometimes in front of their desperate owners, who couldn't rescue the dog because of the dog's frantic actions.



WARNING Never leave a slip collar on a dog. It's like sending your child out to play with a hangman's noose around his neck. But do use one to walk a strong Pit Bull.

Some training groups and organizations do not condone the use of slip collars because they can be misused in a punitive manner. These organizations point out that if you have a good relationship with your dog, you shouldn't need force to train him. That's a great idea, but all it takes is a cat scurrying across the sidewalk for instinct to overwhelm that good relationship, and not everyone has the strength to control a determined Pit Bull just by means of a harness or flat collar.

Martingale collars

A compromise between a buckle and slip collar is the martingale collar. It tightens when pulled, but can only tighten so much when properly fitted. Most martingale collars are nylon. A special type of martingale is the metal prong collar. These collars have links with prongs that bite into the dog when the collar tightens. Needless to say, their use is controversial. In some cases (in which the handler is physically unable to control the dog), they may be the only safe choice. Any person using a prong collar needs to get professional advice on the collar's proper use in training the dog. Again, many people will condemn you for using such a collar, but if it's the only way you can control your strong dog, it's better than not having any control at all.



WARNING Martingale collars should never be left on an unattended dog.

Other choices

A problem with any kind of collar is that controlling a dog by his neck is somewhat difficult. When the collar slips down low on the neck, the dog can throw his weight into it and pull with reckless abandon, oblivious to all your pulling. The Pit Bull's muscular neck renders him especially impervious to tugging. Head collars (also called *head halters*) can control your dog better, by controlling his head. They work on the same principle as a horse halter; where the nose goes, the body follows. Head collars can be an effective alternative for headstrong Pit Bulls. Used improperly, a head halter can be rougher on your dog than a prong collar, because the dog lunges against it and his head is whipped around suddenly. So, again, you need to have an expert show you how to use one properly. Another problem with head halters is that to the uninitiated onlooker, it appears that you have a muzzle on your dog, thus reinforcing the vicious Pit Bull stereotype.

Harnesses that fit around the chest can be a good alternative, but only if your dog doesn't pull. In most dogs, they are far less effective than collars. But most dogs don't have the strong necks that Pit Bulls have. Nonetheless, a harness generally gives you the least control over your dog. Sled dogs wear harnesses for a reason: Harnesses enable them to transmit their weight into pulling strength the most effectively. That means they can help your Pit Bull drag you wherever he wants! If you plan to compete in weight pulling, your Pit Bull will need to get used to wearing a harness. Some harnesses are designed to tighten around the armpits when the dog pulls — that may be a compromise if you really want a harness but your dog sometimes pulls too much to control.

Front-connect harnesses work on the same principle as head halters: When the dog pulls, the leash pulls the front of the dog toward you. Only when the leash is loose can the dog move forward. Front-connect harnesses are a better solution than traditional harnesses. Although training is the better answer, sometimes a training aid is needed along the way.

What about remote training collars? These collars can deliver a slight shock ranging in strength from an itch to a blast from a distance. Used correctly, they can help let your dog know exactly what behaviors are

unacceptable. Unfortunately, most people don't know how to use them correctly, and it's not a do-it-yourself job to learn. Remote collars have the potential for misuse and even cruelty, to the point where you may create behavior problems by using them incorrectly.

A number of new techno-collars can help save your dog's life. Some collars can constantly record your dog's activity and even health status, sending notices if your dog seems more lethargic than usual, repeatedly vomits, is restless, or has a high heart rate or temperature. But the most useful collars are the ones with global positioning system (GPS) tracking devices that sound an alarm if your dog escapes the yard and then track him so you can find him quickly. They require an app with cellphone reception, and usually a small monthly subscription fee.

Leashes

Many Pit Bull owners reason that they have a strong dog, so they'd better get a strong leash. True. Then, they reason that the strongest leash of all is one made of chain. Not so true. Sure, the chain part is strong. But the part where the chain is attached to the handle is usually just a weak rivet, making the weakest link in this chain very weak indeed. Add to this the fact that you can't grab the chain part of the leash or wrap it around your hand because it would really, really hurt, and you should realize that a chain leash is a bad choice for a strong dog. Get a sturdy braided, nylon, or leather leash — anything but chain! All dogs should have a four- or six-foot leash. Shorter leashes are better when walking in crowded places.

Keep in mind that your dog is a Pit Bull. No matter how sweet and well-trained he is, many people are going to be terrified if they see him unleashed and trotting down the street with a silly grin on his face. You have even more reason than other dog owners do to keep yours on a leash.

Retractable leashes are very popular and sometimes useful, but are often carelessly used. They're not for use around other dogs or people. Using them in a congested space can create a terrible tangle. Nor are they for use next to a road; dogs are too apt to run onto the road before you can

put the brakes on, and dogs can be just as dead if they're hit by a car when on-leash as when off-leash. Finally, they pose a hazard to the dog's owner too! Several people have lost fingers when the line whipped around their hands.

Remember, too, that a Pit Bull can build up a tremendous amount of momentum if he runs at full speed to the end of the leash. Whereas, in most dogs, such a charge would probably lead to the dog being snapped suddenly back, with a Pit Bull it can knock the leash from your hand or even snap the line. In addition, if you drop one of these leashes they retract toward the dog, which can cause the dog to think a monster is chasing him, creating a horrifying chase in which the panicked dog runs faster and faster in a futile attempt to get away. You can buy an additional part that prevents the leash from retracting uncontrollably, but that sort of defeats the purpose of the leash!



REMEMBER Retractable leashes are great, but they should be used with care.

Grooming supplies

Your new Pit Bull will need a few health and beauty aids to keep him looking and feeling his best. Being a Pit Bull, he doesn't need all the frou-frou type beauty aids of some other dogs, but he still needs a few essentials. For coat care, a natural bristle brush is ideal. Although Pit Bulls don't get tangled hair, a brush helps remove dead hair, stimulates the skin, and distributes oils. Brushing your Pit Bull also helps you bond. Don't forget the dog shampoo; although you can use people baby shampoo, dog shampoo is your best bet. Be sure to get some rinse-free shampoo for quick fixes. A good-smelling dog deodorant is also useful. And if you're in skunk country, consider buying premade skunk odor dip.



TIP

Get your dog used to having his teeth brushed while he's still a puppy. Get a soft doggy toothbrush or a child's toothbrush. In fact, many dogs seem to enjoy the sound and sensation of electric toothbrushes with rotating bristle heads. Add some meat flavored doggy toothpaste and you'll have a Pit who can show off his gleaming choppers for his entire life.

Nail clippers are absolute essentials. Two types are available: guillotine and scissors. Both are good. Be sure to get heavy-duty nail clippers for an adult Pit Bull. You can also use a Dremel tool to file your dog's nails for that nail salon look. Many dogs are less stressed by Dremel tools than nail clippers, but some are *more* stressed by them. [Chapter 11](#) explains how to use them all correctly.

Poop bags

A poop scoop may not be an exciting thing to buy, but it is an item you will appreciate for years to come. If you have a yard, don't try to clean it with makeshift shovels and buckets. Use something designed to make the job easy and less yucky. Get a poop scoop! The two-part ones are easier to use than the hinged ones. The ones with a rake are better for grass, and the flat ones are better for cement.

Then what to do with the scooped poop? You can flush it down your own toilet as long as you haven't stockpiled it, you can bag it and put it with the garbage (illegal in some places), or you can dig a hole and bury it (also illegal in some places). If none of these sound appealing, you can throw it into your neighbor's yard (illegal in all places!). Another option is to buy a doo-doo disposal unit, which is basically a buried bucket with bacteria that digests the waste into a sludge.



REMEMBER If you're walking your dog in public areas, a number of poop baggy systems are available. Use them. I cannot stress this enough! Whether you're walking in your neighborhood, hiking on a trail, staying at a motel, or going anywhere in public, carry a poop bag or two in your pocket and use it! This may shock you, but nobody likes stepping in dog poop.

Travel supplies

A temperature sensor is a great item to have if you travel a lot. It can send you a notification via text or email if the temperature exceeds a certain high or low point. This information is especially helpful as a failsafe if you need to leave your dog in the car for a few minutes while you run into a store. Temperatures can climb higher than you expect, and even if you've left the car running with the air-conditioning on, cars shut off and air-conditioning units sometimes quit in parked cars.

Temperature sensors are essential for RV travel, because generators can quit and campground electric plugs can get disconnected. And even for home use, what happens if the power goes out on a really hot day and your dog is home alone?

While you're at it, go to the hardware store and buy a fan with a rechargeable battery for your travel kit. If your car breaks down or your air-conditioning quits, it can be a lifesaver.

Chapter 6

Living with Your Pit Bull

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Learning the house rules
 - » Interpreting what your dog is trying to tell you
 - » Making introductions with babies and children
 - » Walking (and running and swimming) your dog
 - » Traveling with your canine copilot
-

From the moment you bring your Pit Bull home, you and your family have to adjust your lifestyle to accommodate the new dog. From house training to walks in the park, this chapter shows you what you need to do.

Acting Like a Pit Bull in a China Shop: House Rules

Your home may be your castle, but it's your Pit pup's playground. As cute as he may be the first time your Pit pup storms your castle, it will quickly dawn on you that this can't continue. Pit Bull pups don't wipe their feet, they chew like beavers, and they are not overly particular about where they deposit bodily wastes. A Pit Bull who's running amuck in your home is a mobile set of barracuda teeth set on auto-chew, powered by four mud-tracking pistons, and armed with a variety of orifices prone to randomly squirt out assorted yuck when you least expect it.

Unless you're trying to make sure your in-laws and neighbors quit coming over, you have to set up some house rules for your new family

member or your new family member will rule the house. Your puppy is a natural-born explorer, and his exploratory tools are his teeth. But any chewed items left in his wake are your fault, not your pup's — you are the one who should have known better. Harsh corrections are no more effective than a tap on the nose along with a firm “No,” and replacement of the item with a legitimate chewable. If you come across one of your cherished items chewed to bits and feel compelled to lash out, go ahead — hit yourself in the head a few times for slipping up. It may teach you a lesson!



TIP

Sprays and liquids are available that have a bitter taste that dissuades (sort of) dogs from chewing surfaces upon which they've been applied.



WARNING

Some people say you should discipline a puppy by grabbing him by the nape of his neck and shaking him, “just like his mother would do.” Nonsense. Mother dogs may grasp a pup by his neck, but they don't shake his neck as a means of correction. Shaking a puppy (or adult Pit Bull) is no safer than shaking a human baby. It's a good way to cause neck injuries or brain damage. It's also a good way to get bitten.

Taking the Pit Stop Outside

Don't think that you can raise a puppy without learning the secrets of cleaning a carpet. Still, you can spend less time scrubbing if you devote a little more time to housetraining. Start by restricting your pup's freedom in the house. Your pup is less inclined to relieve himself near his bedding area, and if you can restrict him to that area when he's not supervised he'll be more likely to hold himself. But don't make him wait too long. Even strong Pit Bull puppies have very weak control over their bladder and bowel, so if you don't take them to their doggy outhouse

often and whenever they need to go, they may not be able to avoid soiling. At the slightest hint of pending elimination, go outside with your dog and stay with him until he has done his deed. When the puppy does relieve himself in his outside toilet, remember to heap on the praise and let your pup know how pleased you are. Adding a food treat really gets the point across. Keep some tidbits in a jar near the door and always accompany your pup outside so that you can reward him for being such a smart Pit Bull.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Research has shown that dogs will prefer using for their potty whatever surface they used at around 9 weeks of age. So, weather permitting, you want your puppy to spend a good deal of time outside. If he gets used to using carpet at an early age, it can be hard to break that preference. At the same time, you want your puppy to grow up with lots of inside experience. So, be prepared to do a lot of shuttling back and forth.

Don't ask more from your pup than he's physically able to give. A good rule is that a puppy can, at most, hold his bowels for as many hours as the pup is months old. This means that a three-month-old puppy can hold it for three hours (but note that there are limits — your 12-month-old Pit Bull can't hold it for 12 hours). If the pup is forced to stay in the house or in a cage longer than you can reasonably expect him to hold it, you're causing an accident and teaching your pup to go in the wrong place. A doggy door is an invaluable aid in housetraining. Once your pup gets the general idea, he will usually elect to let himself out to do his duty while you are gone.

When a pup soils in the house, he labels that area as his bathroom and is likely to go there again. If your pup does have an accident indoors, clean and deodorize the spot thoroughly and block the pup's access to that area. If you catch your dog in the act, say "No" and scurry him outside. Harsh corrections won't help, and may even hinder your training as he may confuse the act of relieving himself at all in your presence with

punishment. Punishment after the fact is totally in vain, and serves to only convince your pup that you are unstable.

Years ago, some people thought that rubbing a dog's nose in her mess was the best way to teach her a lesson. Sorry, but it just doesn't work, and besides, it makes kissing your dog no fun at all!

No matter how biddable your Pit Bull is, don't expect miracles. Housetraining takes time and patience. Like all youngsters, your Pit Bull will have accidents, but he will learn, and he will learn more quickly if you do your part.

When the Plumbing's Broken

What happens when your housetrained dog appears to have forgotten his training? If your adult Pit Bull soils the house, the inappropriate elimination can be due to a physical or emotional problem. A veterinary examination is warranted any time that a formerly housebroken dog begins to soil the house. You and your veterinarian need to consider the following possibilities:

- » Older dogs may simply not have the bladder control that they had as youngsters; a doggy door is the best solution.
- » Older spayed females may dribble; ask your veterinarian about drug therapies.
- » Several small urine spots (especially if bloody or dark) may indicate a bladder infection, which can cause a dog to urinate frequently.
- » Sometimes, a housetrained dog is forced to soil the house because of a bout of diarrhea, and afterwards he'll continue to soil in the same area. If this happens, restrict the dog's access to that area, deodorize the area with an enzymatic cleaner, and revert to basic housetraining lessons.
- » Male dogs may lift their leg inside of the house as a means of marking it as theirs. Castration often solves this problem, as long as it's performed before the habit has become established; otherwise,

diligent deodorizing and the use of some dog-detering odorants (available at pet stores) may help. You can also buy a belly band that wraps around his loin and holds an absorbent pad in the appropriate place.

- » Submissive dogs, especially young females, may urinate upon greeting you; punishment only makes this submissive urination worse. For these dogs, be careful not to bend over the dog or otherwise dominate the dog. Keep greetings calm. Submissive urination is usually outgrown as the dog gains more confidence.
- » Some dogs defecate or urinate due to the stress of separation anxiety; you must treat the anxiety to cure the symptom. Dogs that mess their cage when left in it are usually suffering from separation anxiety or anxiety about being closed in a cage (claustrophobia). Other telling signs of anxiety-produced elimination are drooling, scratching, and escape-oriented behavior. You need to treat separation anxiety and start cage training over, placing the dog in the cage for a short period of time and working up gradually to longer times. Dogs who suffer from cage anxiety but not separation anxiety do better if left loose in a dog-proofed room, run, or yard.

Trying Your Patience

These next few months are going to be a time of incredible fun and hair-pulling frustration. Your Pit pup will have flashes of intelligence and obedience, matched by periods of apparent dim-wittedness and rule breaking. No matter how wonderful your dog is and how careful you are, you will lose a few cherished possessions and more than a few good nights' sleep. This is part of raising any puppy. You can go berserk and undo every bit of good training you've managed, or you can count to three, and then thirty-three, and end up with a far better trained dog in the long run. Dogs can't understand English, and they can't understand you losing your temper. They really do want to please you, but it's a strange world with strange rules that don't always make a lot of sense to a fun-loving pup. It will get better, so make sure you can look back at these precious months and remember the fun parts without regretting

your own lack of control. Your Pit Bull puppy will never be a puppy again. They really do grow up too fast.

Understanding Pit Talk

Say something to your Pit Bull and she will prick her ears, perhaps cock her head, and try her hardest to decipher what all that “blah, blah, blah wanna go out blah blah” means. Not only does your Pit Bull try her hardest to understand you, but she also tries to talk to you. You need to try to understand her as well. As much as they’ve shaken off their wild vestiges, Pit Bulls still speak the ancestral language of wolves:

- » A wagging tail and lowered, turned head is a sign of submission (see [Figure 6-1](#))

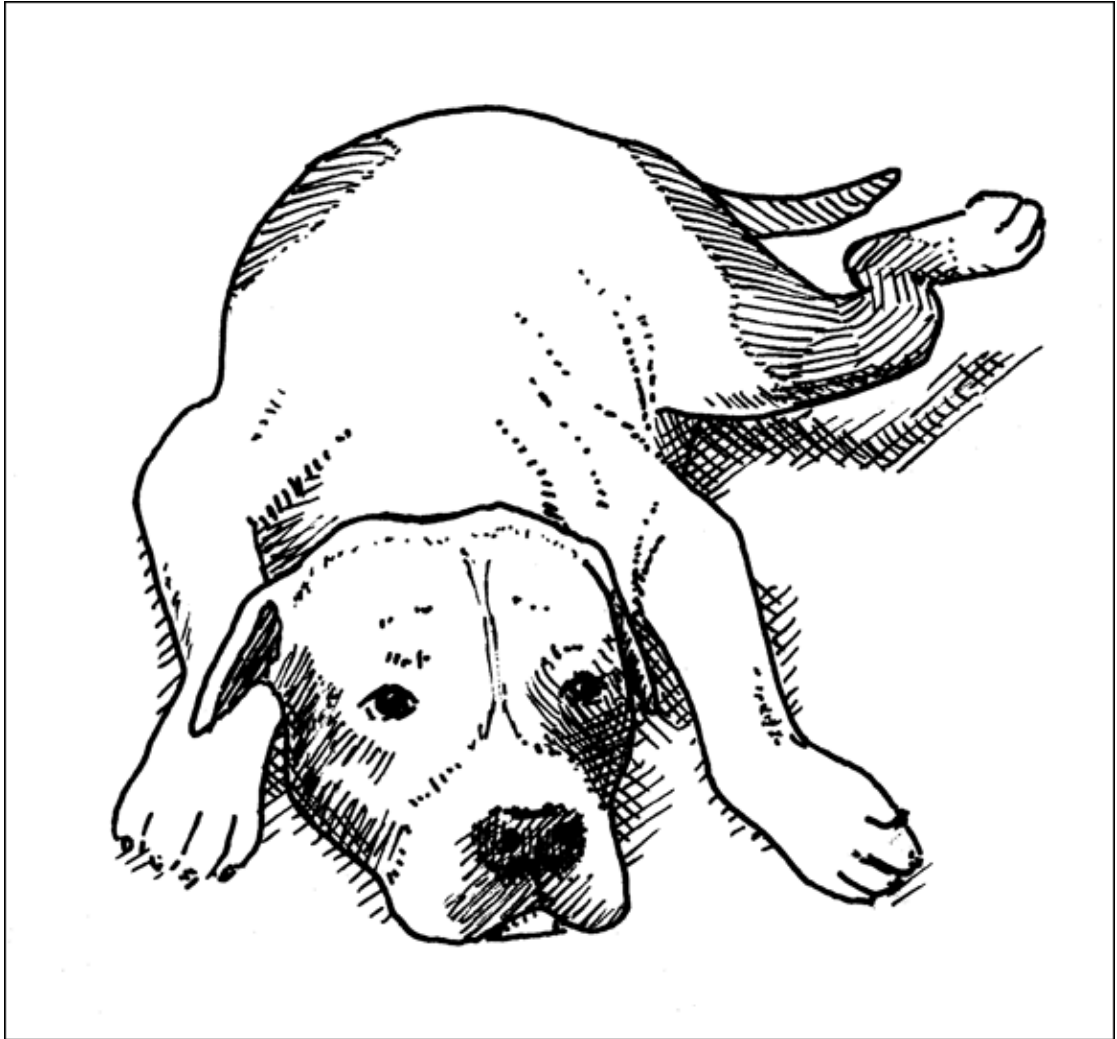


FIGURE 6-1: A submissive Pit Bull.

- » A lowered body, tucked rear, urination, and perhaps even rolling over is a sign of extreme submission.
- » A yawn is often a sign of nervousness.
- » Lip licking can be a sign of nervousness.
- » Drooling, panting, and shivering can indicate extreme nervousness.
- » Exposed teeth, raised hackles, very upright posture, stiff-legged gait, and direct stare indicate very dominant or aggressive behavior (see [Figure 6-2](#)).

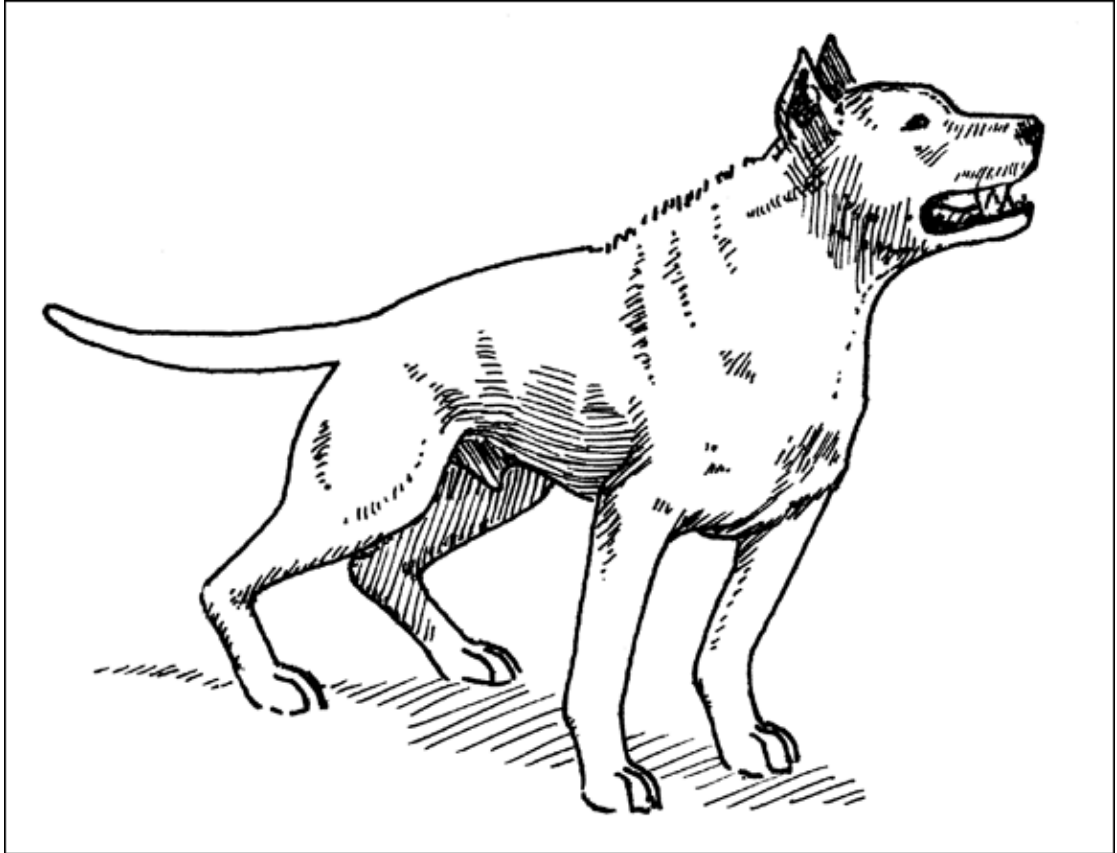


FIGURE 6-2: An aggressive Pit Bull.

- » Exposed teeth along with the submissive signs create the submissive smile, often used in greeting.
- » Elbows on the ground and rear in the air, is the classic *play-bow* position, and is an invitation for a game (see [Figure 6-3](#)).

WHAT PIT BULLS SEE

Dogs see well at night because they have highly light-sensitive rods in their retinas, as well as a shiny layer (the tapetum) in the back of the eye that reflects light back onto the retina (causing the eyeshine that dogs sometimes have at night). They have very good vision for detecting movement. But dogs have poor vision for fine details or color. Their color vision is like that of a red-green colorblind person: They confuse shades of yellow-green, yellow, orange, and red, but can readily see and discriminate blue, indigo, and violet from all other colors and from each other.

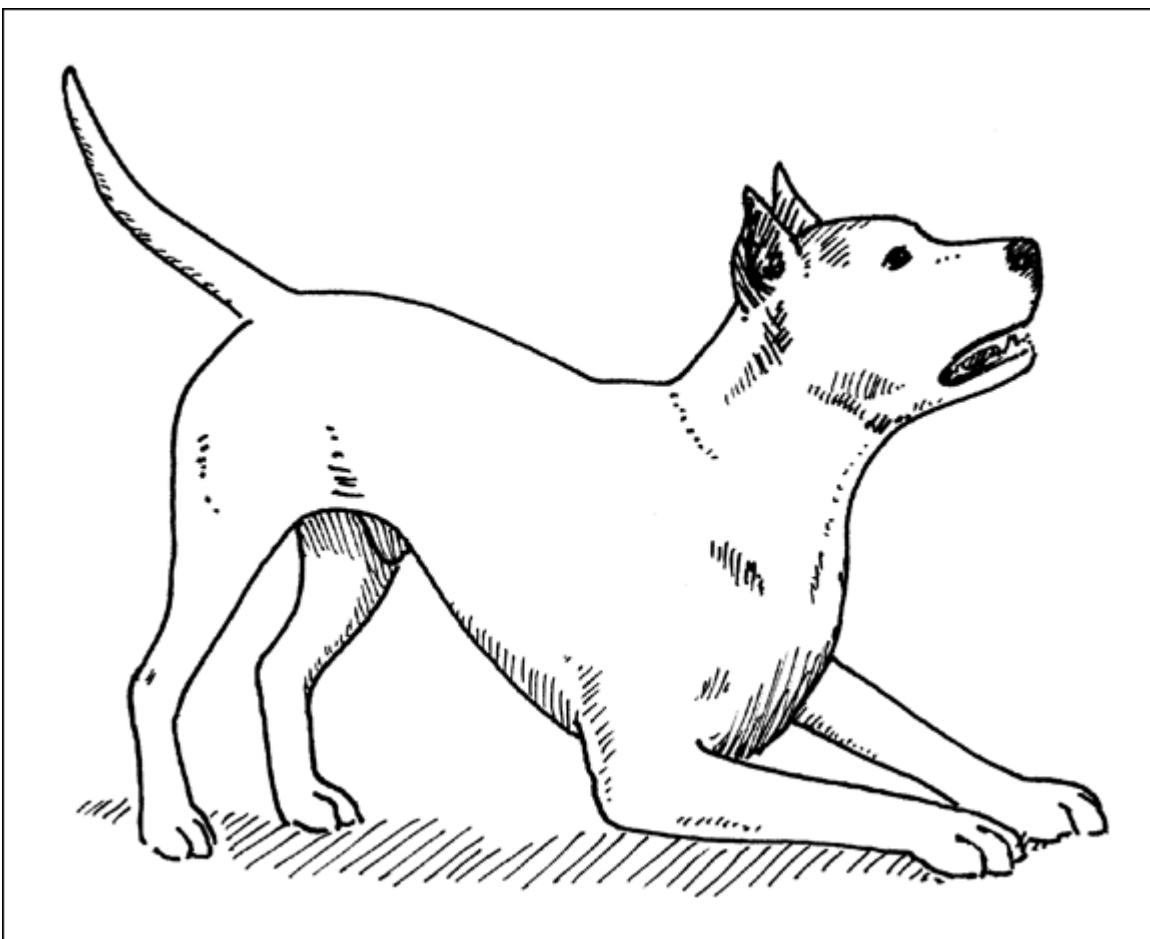


FIGURE 6-3: A playful Pit Bull.

Becoming a Social Animal

As puppies open their eyes and begin to explore the world, they can't afford to be afraid of every new thing they see because everything that they see is new. So when they're very young, up to the age of about 12 weeks, puppies take new experiences right in stride. Totally fearless puppies don't usually survive to become adults, however, so starting at around 12 weeks puppies begin to get a little more suspicious. The suspicious part of their nature continues to become more pronounced as they get older. Pups should be exposed to as many novel experiences as early in puppyhood as possible, while they're still fearless explorers.

Bear in mind that a bad experience is even worse than no experience at all. Puppies are just as likely to learn that new situations are dangerous

as they are that new situations are safe. Be very careful that your pup doesn't get hurt or frightened. Don't think that if a little is good, a lot is better. If you want your pup to enjoy a stroll downtown so that she can meet new people, great. But avoid the Macy's Thanksgiving parade.



WARNING You won't be doing your puppy Pit Bull any favors if you scare her silly. You'll be overwhelming your pup and achieving the opposite of the result you'd planned on. Remember that the idea is not to overwhelm but to expose, and not to merely expose, but to make the exposure a good experience. Stuff a pocket with treats and hand them out liberally. Give some to strangers to feed her. Fortunately, it's a rare Pit Bull who's lacking in the confidence department, at least once you give your pup a fair chance to be out and about. Nonetheless, every Pit Bull is different and you need to go at different paces with different dogs.

You must balance the benefits of early socialization with the threat of communicable disease. Fortunately, it takes only a few exposures to most situations to achieve good socialization. Take your pup a few times to an area in which unvaccinated dogs or puppies are unlikely to have been. If you expose her to other puppies, make sure they have been vaccinated.

Many dedicated Pit Bull owners expose their new pup to *everything* they can think of. The pup may go with them to work, then to class, and so on, with a novel experience every day — and that's great, but sometimes these dedicated owners forget one thing: to expose the pup to being by herself. Part of the fun of having a new pup is spending every moment with her. But because separation anxiety is one of the largest sources of dog behavioral problems, neglecting to teach your Pit Bull to be by herself is a serious omission. Most dogs don't like to be alone, but most dogs have to be alone at one time or another.

If your puppy is crate trained, you can start by placing her in her cage when she is tired and leaving for a few minutes. Even if you don't have a

cage, you can leave her alone in a secure room or yard. Give her a special toy or chew bone so she doesn't feel abandoned and bored. Leave her only for a little while. Don't sneak out, but don't make a big deal of leaving either. Just nonchalantly leave and return. Work up to longer times. If she goes crazy howling and trying to escape, try to wait for a moment when she is quiet and quickly return. You don't want her to think she summoned you back, even though she did. Again, just ignore her when you return. Then take a step backward in your training and leave for a shorter time period.

Has your Pit Bull pup been exposed to all of these?

- » Bathing and grooming procedures
- » Being alone
- » Being in a cage
- » Car rides
- » Cats and other pets
- » Children
- » Games
- » Loud noises
- » Other dogs
- » Strangers, both men and women
- » Swimming
- » Traffic
- » Training commands
- » A variety of surfaces to walk on

Going to Kindergarten

Puppy kindergarten classes provide a great opportunity to expose your pup to nice people and to other pups her own age. Especially if yours is the only dog in your household, she may not have many opportunities to

interact with other dogs. But running amuck with her new buddies isn't necessarily a good thing. If your dog gets beat up or is the bully, you're not teaching her good social behavior. Just as human kindergarten students need to learn how to interact nicely, canine students also need guidance to learn proper canine social skills. At the same time, your pup can start practicing her first simple obedience exercises and learn to control herself in public. You can also get advice about some common puppyhood problems. Good classes and bad classes are out there, so check it out first and don't be shy about complaining or quitting if things don't seem right to you once you're enrolled. Contact your local kennel club, veterinarian, or dog-training classes to find a kindergarten class in your area.

Meeting the Children

Many a devoted Pit Bull owner has been known to get rid of the dog when a new baby comes home, often because of the stories the new parent has heard about what dogs can do to babies. Just as many Pit Bull owners glibly bring the new baby home and hand the babe over to the dog to guard. Neither is the correct response. Dogs can hurt babies. They can also love babies. Sometimes one dog can do both. The way you introduce the dog to the baby may make the difference.



WARNING Strongly reconsider getting any breed that has been involved in human fatalities if you have a child. This includes Pit Bulls, as well as a dozen others. Yes, chances are, yours won't be one of them, but as a responsible parent, why put your child in this position when so many other safer breeds are available? If you already have a Pit Bull, on the other hand, you owe it to your dog to be faithful and keep her, because you made that promise the day you brought her home. But if your Pit Bull breaks her part of the bargain and acts aggressively toward your child, your ultimate responsibility is to your child.



REMEMBER Most Pit Bulls are fun-loving dogs, which is one reason most of them love kids. And most are perfectly safe with kids. However, the myth that Pit Bulls were once used as nanny dogs is just that, a myth, and unfortunately it has compelled too many people to take risks with their Pit Bulls and babies that they should never take. Pit Bulls have killed more babies than any other breed, and too often, the culprit was the family Pit Bull who gave every indication of loving and even protecting the baby. But for whatever reason, something triggered an abnormal response and the Pit Bull attacked. Perhaps the baby's cries sounded like wounded prey, or something startled the dog or rough play got out of hand. The reason doesn't matter because the result can be death or a disfiguring injury for the child, and death or surrender to a shelter for the dog. Your trust can be catastrophic.

For some reason, Pit Bull owners, more than those of other breeds, seem to revel in posting pictures of babies and tots in precarious positions with their Pit Bulls. Placing Pit Bulls in cribs to sleep with babies, letting a toddler walk on the dog's back, encouraging kids to kiss the dog on the nose — as cute as these photo-ops may seem, they aren't worth the chance you take with your child and dog.



TIP Give your Pit Bull a chance to be a good guy, but don't give her a chance to be the bad guy.

A few Pit Bulls may be wary of children, either because they don't understand what they are or because they've had bad experiences with them. In some cases, your Pit Bull may just not be suited for life with kids. But if you do have both, be sure to introduce them carefully, encouraging the child to be gentle and to offer the dog a treat. Keep the dog on-leash and have a helper to keep the child in line, too! Do not allow young children to sit on a dog, fall on her, or pull her hair, ears, or

tail. Instruct children that they are never to run from a dog, scream shrilly around her, stare at her, or hurt her. It's not fair even to the most saintly of dogs to allow her to be picked on. Never take chances with a child's safety, but do give your dog a chance — safely.



REMEMBER And *never* leave a child and any powerful dog unattended, even if it's only a room away.

Things to keep in mind as you prepare to bring a baby and a Pit together:

- » The dog should know how to “Come,” “Sit,” “Stay,” and “Lie Down” on command.
- » Keep the dog on-leash when first introducing her to the baby. If you're uneasy, you can muzzle the dog, but you don't want the dog to associate muzzling with the baby. She should already be familiar with the muzzle before the baby comes home, and she should sometimes wear it when she's not around the baby. Visit the Muzzle Up! Project (www.muzzleupproject.com) for muzzle-fitting and -training tips.
- » When first bringing the baby home from the hospital, keep the dog away. Let her get used to the sound and odor of the new family member. Some dogs may not understand this is a small human and not a prey animal, so be very careful at this time.
- » Have the dog “Sit” and “Stay,” bring the baby in the room, and reward the dog for staying. Gradually move the baby closer, all the while rewarding the dog for her good behavior.
- » Only when you feel confident about the dog's comfort level with the baby should you allow her to sniff the baby.
- » Do not leave the dog and baby alone together. Ever.
- » Always praise and pet the dog when the baby is present. Never shuttle the dog out of the room just as the baby is coming in. You want the dog to associate the baby with good things and not be

jealous or resentful of the baby. Remember that your dog probably used to be the “baby” of the family.



WARNING Teach children not to stare at a strange dog. Staring directly at a dog is interpreted by the dog as a threat. It can cause some dogs, especially fearful ones, to bite.

Going for a Bull Run

One of the great joys of living with a Pit Bull is the chance to watch your dog run and jump with the enthusiasm and gusto that only a Pit Bull can muster. But you can't just open the door and let your Pit Bull run amuck. You need to take precautions to make sure your dog's exercise is both safe and fun. Many Pit Bull owners think that because their dog is so smart and trustworthy, she's reliable off-leash. That may be true 95 percent of the time. But it's what happens in the other 5 percent of the time — when another dog attacks, a cat runs underfoot, or a firecracker pops — that can be deadly. Whatever the reason, the trustworthy dog forgets herself for just a moment — and that's all it takes to run in front of a car, scare a child, or run away.

Never unhook the leash until you know everything about the area. Look out for cliffs, roadways, and drainage culverts. Avoid parks and public areas where your Pit Bull, no matter how friendly, can be a nuisance or perceived as a threat. Avoid wilderness areas during hunting season. Can your dog be tempted into chasing wildlife? What about livestock? Watch for animals and dogs that can chase or attack your dog. Watch for animals and dogs that your dog can chase or attack.

GOING HOG WILD

Catching and holding strong wild game is one of the oldest uses of bulldogs, and Pit Bulls are still used for this activity in some parts of the world. The southern part of the United States is home to huge wild boars that are among the most formidable of

opponents. Hunters employ hounds to track the boar by scent and chase him until they can bring him to bay. The hounds are no match for a wild boar, however, so the hunter needs to bring in reinforcements to bring down the hog — enter the Pit Bull. Usually, the hunter keeps the Pit Bull — who may be wearing an armored vest — on-leash and unleashes him only when the hog has turned to face the hounds.

Hog-catching Pit Bulls have to be tough and courageous; they also must discriminate between the hog and the other dogs. Some inexperienced Pit Bulls may attack a baying hound instead of the hog, harming the dog and allowing the hog to escape. Hog catching can be dangerous; many dogs are injured or killed.

I know how you feel: “Because my dog so loves to run free, she should have that right!” No matter how trustworthy your dog is, you’re breaking the law in many places when you allow her to be off-leash. If your Pit Bull is off of her leash and somebody trips over her, or she causes a bicyclist to fall or a car to swerve and crash, or if she harms a child or another animal, you are legally — and morally — responsible. You will almost certainly be sued, and you will almost certainly lose. You’ll also have put dogs one step closer to being banned altogether from public places. You will have endangered your dog’s life and possibly endangered human lives. And you will have given Pit Bulls an even worse name.

In some areas, no safe or legal place exists to let your dog run loose. You can still do a good job of exercising her on-leash, however. Taking the dog for a walk is an excellent low-impact exercise for both of you, and is especially good for dogs who aren’t quite in prime physical condition. Retractable leashes are great for walks, but you must be especially vigilant when using them. Dogs can still dart out into the path of traffic and can still snap the lines if they run to the end hard enough. Keep an eye out for loose dogs and cats, and hold your dog close around stray animals and passing pedestrians.



TIP

Never hold a leash with just your hand or fingers around the loop because your dog can pull the leash right out of your hands. The best way to hold a leash securely is to insert your entire hand through the loop and grasp the leash just above the loop handle. Just as crucial, never wrap the leash around your fingers; people have had fingers broken or even wrung off when their strong dogs decided to take off.

Start with a short walk and gradually work up to longer distances. An adult Pit Bull should walk at the very (very) least a half mile daily, and would be better off walking several miles. On the other hand, puppies should never be walked long distances or encouraged to jump repeatedly or run on hard surfaces, because their developing bones can be damaged if they're overtaxed. The growth plates at the ends of the long bones stay soft until around 18 months of age in large dogs and can be permanently damaged if too much stress is put on them. Older or obese dogs must not be asked to walk farther than they can comfortably manage.

Jogging can also be fun for your dog, but you must work up to longer distances gradually and avoid jogging with your dog in hot weather. A quick look at one should confirm that Pit Bulls weren't built to be marathon runners. Dogs in general can't cool themselves as well as humans can, and heatstroke has taken the lives of far too many jogging dogs. Pit Bulls cool themselves better than English Bulldogs do, but their compact bodies don't dissipate heat well, and their game attitude means they often keep on running without complaint until they're overcome by heat. Avoid jogging your dog on hard surfaces, which are jarring to the joints. Check her footpads regularly for abrasions, gravel, tearing, or blistering from hot pavement. Place your hand on pavement in hot weather to check the temperature before walking your dog over it. In the winter, check between the pads for balls of ice and rinse the feet when returning from walking on rock salt.

THE DOG PARK DILEMMA

Dog parks are a mixed blessing. In many communities, there simply isn't a fenced area where dogs can run around off lead, so people allowed their dogs to run on hiking trails or in parks. Most people didn't clean up after their dogs, and too many dogs ran amuck and caused trouble, to the point that dogs were banned. The dog park, a special place where dogs can be free to be dogs, sounds like the ideal answer. The problem is that not every dog is cut out for dog parks, and that includes most Pit Bulls.

The truth is that dogs of every breed get in skirmishes and brawls at dog parks, some serious. Better dog parks have separate yards for large and small dogs, but even so, they tend to be crowded. Letting all these strange dogs loose together is asking for trouble.

Your young Pit Bull will probably do just fine at the dog park as long as you don't let any of the older dogs chase, scare, and bully him. Don't get complacent, though. Most Pit Bulls are fairly amicable with other dogs until they hit the age of sexual maturity, at around 18 months. Your previously happy-go-lucky puppy may suddenly wake up and decide he's not gonna take it anymore! And the next time one of the other dogs tries to bully him, he may stand up to him and maybe even fight back. All may be fine, but he's learned that being a tough guy pays off, and maybe even feels good, and you've just given him his first fighting lesson. The next time he may be the one to start it, but no matter who starts it, he's a Pit Bull, and he's not backing down. But he'll get the blame for whatever happens. And no matter who gets the blame, you don't want anything potentially deadly to happen to any dog.

Bottom line: Dog parks usually just aren't worth the risk for mature Pit Bulls.



WARNING Beware of walkin' in a winter wonderland. Don't let your dog walk on thin ice over water. Check between her pads for ice balls when your dog walks on any ice or snow. And rinse her feet if she's been walking on salt-treated surfaces.

Making a Splash

A body of water is great for keeping your dog's body exercised, yet cool. Swimming is ideal exercise for dogs with joint disorders, dogs who are recovering from injuries, or any dog in hot weather.

CLEANING UP YOUR ACT

It never fails. Your dog has been denying that she has any bodily functions for the past day. Now she decides that the ideal time to defecate is when you're in the middle of a crowd of people. Should you smile nonchalantly and drag your dog along as though you don't notice, leaving behind an implicating trail? Do you kick the evidence off into the gutter? Do you let go of the leash and pretend she's somebody else's dog? While each of these ideas is tempting, you will no doubt get caught and look even worse than you already do; besides, it's people who don't clean up after their dogs who have caused dogs to be banned from so many public places. The biggest dog lover in the world doesn't love stepping in dog excrement. In fact, it's illegal in many places to not clean up dog feces.

But what to do with doo-doo? If you regularly walk your dog in a city, you may have one of those fancy poop picker-uppers. Just as easy to use, though, is a sandwich bag or plastic bag, or better, the thin poop bags made just for this purpose. Put your hand in it and use it as a glove to pick up the pieces, and then turn it inside out and dispose of it.

If your Pit Bull is hesitant about swimming, you need to entice her into the water a little at a time. Get right in the water yourself. The first time your dog goes in over her head, she may splash and become frightened. Her front feet will usually be too high to swim effectively, reaching above the water surface with each stroke. You can help by elevating her rear so that her front feet stay under the water's surface. Most Pit Bulls take only a few practice sessions before they get the drift. Many Pits become especially excited at the opportunity to retrieve a favorite toy from the water. But be careful that you don't send an exhausted dog out into deep water or into water with an undertow. Dogs do drown.

Your Pit will take to the water faster, and be safer, if you fit him with a doggy life vest available at most large pet supply stores. And no, his friends won't make fun of him.

Hitting the Road

Pit Bulls make excellent road buddies. They agree with everything you say, they're always up for a side trip, they give you a good excuse to stop and enjoy the scenery, and they scare away all the bad guys.

Traveling with your Pit pal can be fun. But if you don't plan ahead, traveling with your Pit Bull can be a mistake.

If you're traveling by car, consider whether you have enough room for your dog, or better, your dog in her kennel. Does she behave when she's left in a crate? What will you do with your dog when you need to stop to eat, use the restroom, shop, visit friends, or sightsee? If the weather is hot, you can't leave her in the car. You can't leave her tied next to the car. And in many cases, you can't take her with you.

Why can't you leave her in the car with the windows down? If your dog is sufficiently suspicious and tough looking, this may work — but even the toughest dog can be a target for dognappers or weirdos. If you have a crate, you can place your dog in it, then padlock the crate door and padlock the crate to the car for security. Even then, it's best to park where nobody can take their time trying to break in. Never leave your dog tied to your car. Many a dead dog has been found hanging out the car window after being tied inside. One other warning: In this litigation-crazed society, it's not unheard of for somebody whose *own dog* has bitten him to seek out an unsupervised dog and claim “dog bite!”

Because you own a Pit Bull, your dog is an especially tempting target for someone who's seeking compensation for a dog attack that never happened. The moral: You never know what may happen if your dog sticks her head out of the window of your car while you're shopping.

What about leaving her in a running car with the windows shut and air-conditioner on? Of course, you'll need a second set of keys to lock the door. And your dog will need to be crated so she doesn't somehow take it out of park and go cruising around town. The main danger is that a running car is a tempting target for car thieves who only need to break your window or jimmy your door to get in and drive away — with your dog!



WARNING Every year, dogs die from being left in cars while their owners run inside the store for “just a minute.” If it's at all warm outside,

the car acts like a hothouse and the temperature rises quickly. Meanwhile, the dog's owner is inside an air-conditioned store and forgets how hot it is outside. The owner decides to shop for just a few more minutes. Then the checkout line is long. The temperature in the car rises to well over 100 degrees F, to 120 degrees F or more. The dog pants, then drools, and then finally goes into convulsions. The owner returns to the car and rushes the dog to the emergency clinic, where she requires days of intensive care for liver, heart, and brain damage — or dies. The shopping excursion ends up costing thousands of dollars, if it doesn't cost the life of a beloved pet. A remote temperature alarm is a help, but never put all your trust in *any* automated device. Air-conditioners fail, batteries fail, signals are lost, calls are dropped... .

Consider where you'll be staying when you think about going on a road trip with your Pit pal. Your friends may not appreciate having a strange dog in their home, and your dog may not get along with their pets or children. Many motels do not accept dogs. Several websites list establishments that accept pets, so if you're traveling with a pet, plan ahead. If you do find a dog-friendly motel, keep your dog in her crate or on your own clean sheets from home. Don't be tempted to leave your dog alone in your motel room. The dog's perception is that you've left her in a strange place and forgotten her; she either barks or tries to dig her way out through the doors and windows in an effort to find you. The odds are pretty good, too, that she becomes upset and relieves herself on the carpet. Not only will you be left holding a sizable bill, but you'll also have helped to ban dogs from yet another establishment.

If you're staying at a campground, keep your dog on-leash or in an X-pen at all times. Other campers may have tiny dogs that your dog may chase, and many campgrounds have wild animals wandering through that can prove too tempting for your Pit Bull. Walk your dog away from campsites and always clean up after her.

THE FAKE SERVICE DOG

Recently, everyone seems to have a service dog or emotional support dog. The laws are very different when it comes to service dogs, emotional support dogs, and therapy dogs. Service dogs are allowed almost everywhere, including public transportation, all hotels and housing, and all restaurants and stores. Emotional support dogs are allowed only in some of these places. Therapy dogs are not given any special privileges compared to other dogs.

Some emotional support and service dogs, including Pit Bulls, are legit, but sadly, many are fakes. Of course, you want your precious pal to come with you everywhere, but it's not fair to real service dogs who have been attacked by fakes, or who are now looked at suspiciously because everyone has seen so many poorly behaved fake service dogs that they now resent any so-called service dog.

Here's a hint: A true service dog walks quietly alongside his owner, never pulling, barking, or sniffing. Service dogs are at work, not on a stroll.

Because so many people have abused this law, the federal government is now examining ways to certify real service dogs, which will cost legitimate owners time and money. They'll also begin to fine owners caught with fake service dogs. And beware: Pit Bulls will be among the first to be suspected, in part because several have already been caught when they attacked fellow dogs or passengers on public transportation.

Finally, before you leave home check to see if there is breed-specific legislation at your destination or anywhere you'll be stopping along the way. If so, you may be turned away from motels even if other dogs are allowed. Worse, if your dog were to escape, you may have a difficult time getting her back unless you can prove you were just visiting or passing through. Proper identification tags are always important, but even more so in these cases.

Always walk your Pit Bull on-leash when away from home. If she's frightened or distracted, your dog can become disoriented and lost. Retractable leads are perfect for traveling, but only when away from crowds.

Your Pit Bull will need her own suitcase full of supplies. Pack with your dog's health and safety in mind, and consider packing:

- » Bedding
- » Bottled water or water from home — many dogs are very sensitive to changes in water and can develop diarrhea

- » Bowls for her food and water — paper food bowls may be an easy solution to washing
- » Dog-safe bug spray
- » A crate
- » Chewies and toys
- » A collar with license tags listing the phone number of somebody who can be reached while you're on your trip (even better, a GPS)
- » Dog biscuits and other treats (in addition to plenty of her regular food)
- » A flashlight for night walks
- » A flea comb and brush
- » Health and rabies certificates
- » Medications, especially anti-diarrhea and an antihistamine
- » Moist towelettes, paper towels, and self-rinse shampoo
- » Plastic bags or other poop disposal means
- » A recent color photo in case your Pit Bull somehow gets lost
- » Short and long leashes
- » In hot weather, battery-operated fans for when you stop or if you have car trouble

KEEP YOUR HEAD AND PAWS IN THE CAR AT ALL TIMES ...

For a dog, bliss is a ride in the car, with the wind in her fur and bugs in her teeth, as she hangs her head out of the window and enjoys!

It's fun while it lasts. But it may not be long before your dog is thrown from the car, gets her nose stung by a bee, or gets her eye put out by a rock. Human children would also love to run around the car and hang their heads out of the windows, but you wouldn't dream of letting a child do that. People who let their Pit Bulls ride in the back of a pickup truck may think they look cool, but they may as well have a Pit Bull-sized bumper sticker that reads "Moron at the Wheel." No matter how well balanced your Pit Bull may

seem to be, she can't stay in the pickup bed if you slam on your brakes, swerve suddenly, or get in an accident. She'll be thrown from the truck and is likely to be killed.

Doggy seatbelts are available at pet stores and through pet catalogs. Many Pit Bulls have learned to wear them. Don't think tying your dog in place by her collar will do just as well — that's a good way for your Pit Bull to get a broken neck. You can improvise by fitting your dog with a harness and attaching the harness to the seatbelt. The back seat is safer than the front, and the front seat is absolutely off-limits if your car has passenger-side airbags.

You can also keep a sturdy crate in your car. Crates have saved many a dog's life. Crates can go flying, too, so remember that the crate should be securely fastened to the car for human as well as canine safety. A sticker or tag should be on the crate that reads "In case of an accident: Take this dog to a veterinarian, then contact the following persons (list names and phone numbers), who guarantee payment of all expenses incurred." Remember that you may not be able to speak for your dog in the event of a serious accident, so have a document attached to the crate that speaks for you.

Finding a Pit-Sitter

You may have gathered by now that sometimes you and your dog are both better off if you take your trip alone. Should you leave your dog with just a giant pile of food, hire a dog sitter, or use a boarding kennel?

If you're traveling and can't take your dog, consider a pet-sitter service. Your dog will be more comfortable in her own home. You need a pet-sitter who isn't afraid of Pit Bulls and a dog who accepts strangers in the home. Good pet-sitters will want to make friends with the dog *before* you leave home. Hire a bonded, professional pet-sitter. The kid next door is seldom a good choice for this important responsibility.

Your Pit Bull may be safer if you board her at a kennel. The ideal kennel is approved by the American Boarding Kennel Association, has climate-controlled accommodations, and keeps your Pit Bull either indoors or in a combination indoor/outdoor run. The run should be covered so that a climbing or jumping dog cannot escape, and an extra security fence should surround the entire kennel area. Someone should be on the grounds 24 hours a day. Dogs should not be allowed to co-mingle. Boarding in somebody's home is also not recommended. Your dog may be a friendly sort, but what if one of the other boarders isn't?



TIP

Whatever you decide to do with your Pit Bull, always leave emergency numbers and your veterinarian's name. Make arrangements with your veterinarian to treat your dog for any problems that may arise. This means leaving a written agreement stating that you give permission for treatment and accept responsibility for charges.

Finding a Lost Love

Pit Bulls usually stick pretty close to their owners. But sometimes the unforeseeable happens, and you and your dog are suddenly separated. The best time to find a dog is right after she's lost. Too many people take too long to realize their dog is really not coming back on her own, time in which they probably could have found their dog.

GPS tracking collars are the best way to find your dog, but only if the dog is wearing it and the battery is charged.

If your Pit Bull gets lost:

- » Start your search at the very worst place you can imagine your dog being, usually the nearest road.
- » As soon as possible get friends to help. If you haven't found your dog in the first hour or so (depending on his escape and roaming history), your best bet is to get help. Just driving around will be less and less likely to work.
- » Post large neon posters with a picture of your dog or a similar looking Pit Bull. Post them at every stop light, intersection, school bus stop, or business that will allow it. Use the word *REWARD* in large letters. Mention whether your dog is friendly or can be approached or caught.
- » Distribute fliers with her picture at the local animal control and police department, parking lots, veterinary clinics, and in your

neighborhood. Assuming she's friendly, impress upon them that she is *not* aggressive and please just catch her or call you.

- » Take out an ad in the local paper.
- » Post on local animal lost and found pages, as well as community pages, on Facebook.
- » Some services print fliers and mail them to all addresses within a certain radius; others call all landline phone numbers near you. Here are a few worth looking into:
 - FindToto: www.findtoto.com
 - Lost and Found Pets 941: www.lostfoundpets941.com
 - Lost My Doggies: www.lostmydoggie.com
 - PawBoost: www.pawboost.com
- » If your dog is gone overnight, consider camping out where she was last seen. If you must leave the area in which your dog was lost, try to leave her cage, blanket, some of your personal belongings, or even your open car in case the dog returns while you're gone.
- » Personally go to every animal shelter within at least 50 miles; talk to as many employees as you can, leave photos with them, and impress upon them that this is your *beloved* pet. Some animal shelters have rules discriminating against Pit Bulls. You must make sure that yours receives fair treatment if she's picked up.
- » Call every Pit Bull breeder you know, even unsavory sorts who are involved in dog fighting. Get the word out to them that you are offering a large reward, just in case somebody has taken your dog with the idea of using her for breeding, fighting, or training another dog to fight.

PROPER I.D.

Your dog should always wear identification tags, as well as being microchipped. A microchip contains information about the dog and is placed under the dog's skin with a simple injection. Some early microchips could migrate several inches from their original site, but changes in their design have made them relatively immobile. Their shortcoming

is that they require a special scanner to be read. The number is registered with one of the microchip dog-recovery agencies, which contact you if your dog is reported.

Part 3

**Training and Having Fun with
Your Pit**

IN THIS PART ...

Solve Pit Bull behavior problems.

Train your Pit Bull to be a welcome guest wherever he goes.

Have fun with your Pit Bull in games and competitions.

Chapter 7

Coping with a Pit Bull Terrorist

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Loving your dog but hating what he does
 - » Explaining why what you're doing isn't working
 - » Biting, barking, digging, peeing, pooping, jumping, and escaping — all in a day's work!
-

Misbehavior is the most serious disease among dogs in this country. It accounts for more dog deaths than any sickness. This disease thrives on misinformation — and it is indeed thriving. Recent decades have seen significant advances in applied animal behavior. At the same time, the ready availability of instant experts on websites and social media has dispersed a plethora of unsupported training advice. Veterinarians or behaviorists specializing in canine behavior problems can offer the best advice when dealing with many serious behavioral problems.

Saving Your Home

Pit Bulls are talented home destroyers. How many times have you seen posts on social media showing an innocent-looking Pit Bull surrounded by stuffing and the remnants of a sofa with the caption “Honestly, it just exploded without warning!”

Pit Bulls are no more likely to engage in destructive behavior than any other breed, but they do happen to be very good at it. Shredded sofas, emptied trash cans, chewed shoes, and plowed flowerpots are signs of a dog just having dog fun. It's expected behavior for puppies, and it's also seen in bored dogs. The best cure is to take everything you need to save out of reach of your dog, and replace it with a variety of Pit Bull-proof toys. The other way to prevent such behavior is to make sure your dog is

too tired to go crazy when you don't want him to. Exercise his body and mind regularly so he's content to rest when inside.



TIP

Not all home destruction stems from wanton misbehavior. The most serious cases more often stem from separation anxiety, which can occur when you leave your dog alone. Pit Bulls love to be with their people; as social animals, they can become anxious if left alone. They try to escape — after all, you must have left them by mistake! So, loyal dogs that they are, they try to chew their way out of the doors and windows. Unlike the dog who is having a blast ripping your garbage to shreds, the dog with separation anxiety is often panting and drooling with nervousness. He may be so nervous that he urinates and defecates on the floor. If you set up a video camera to spy on a dog with separation anxiety while his owner is away, you can see he isn't having fun. Dogs with separation anxiety pace, whine, howl, and basically act like caged animals. Putting them in a crate can help save your home, but they can also destroy the crate and its contents.



WARNING

Dogs with separation anxiety only tend to get worse without intervention. You need to teach your dog that being left alone is no big deal. Make sure your partings and reunions are low key, and leave your dog with a special treat like a long-lasting chew toy or treat. Start by leaving your dog alone for only a few minutes and gradually increase the time when your dog is calm for a short duration. Your veterinarian can help with drug therapy that can help you calm your dog's fears and facilitate training. Separation anxiety is a major reason that dogs of any breed are relinquished to shelters, so take it seriously.

Fighting Like Cats and Dogs

Can you have more than one Pit Bull? It depends. Can you have a Pit Bull and a dog of another breed? It depends. Can you have a Pit Bull and a cat? It depends. It depends on the individual dog involved, her early exposure, and your commitment to keeping peace in the family.

Cats

Pit Bulls are generally no more aggressive toward cats and other pets than any other breed of dog would be. Aggression toward other pets is usually associated with a high *prey drive*. All dogs have a certain amount of prey drive, with hunting breeds generally having the highest. Pit Bulls have been used as hunting dogs in their past history; some are still used as hog-catching dogs. But they were never used to catch small mammals, and cats hold no special allure for them. Nonetheless, any dog that hasn't been raised around members of other species may fail to identify them as fellow pets and give chase. If you want your Pit Bull to live peacefully with your other pets, your best bet is to make the introductions when your dog is still young. Introduce your Pit Bull and your cat inside or in some place where a high-speed chase can not occur. The cat should have an escape route or start out on a high perch or in a cage. Feed them in the presence of one another so they associate each other with special treats. If you're still uneasy about how your Pit Bull will act, consider using a muzzle for the first face to face meeting. Be just as careful that your cat doesn't scratch your Pit Bull! Don't leave the animals together and unsupervised until you're absolutely sure that they're getting along; even then, it's seldom a good idea.



WARNING If a shelter Pit is advertised as needing a non-cat household, believe it — don't put your cat's life at risk thinking you can change the dog's anti-cat attitude. If your Chihuahua snaps at your cat, your cat will be fine. In fact, that's the case for most small and medium-size dogs. But if your Pit Bull snaps at your cat, your cat probably won't be fine. Even if your Pit is good with your cat inside, he may not be able to resist chasing, and perhaps catching, her if your cat starts running outside. This goes double for unfamiliar cats. A dog has only so much self-control!



REMEMBER If your Pit catches a cat, whether it's your cat or a neighborhood cat, she can easily kill the cat. Pit Bulls are estimated to kill more than 10,000 cats in the United States every year. You have no control over whether a stray cat wanders into your yard, but you do have control over whether your dog roams the neighborhood.

Dogs

Aggression toward strange dogs is a normal trait of canines. It's in their blood. This trait was accentuated in the early breeding of fighting Pit Bulls. Unfortunately, it is a difficult trait to have in today's world. Pit Bulls were bred for generations to be fighting dogs. This doesn't mean that they're vicious. It does mean that they're inclined to enjoy a good brawl. Most Pits are naturally inclined to behave confidently and many behave aggressively toward other dogs. And no matter who starts it, Pit Bulls have been genetically selected to finish it. Pit Bulls from lines that recently were producing fighters may have this tendency more than Pit Bulls from lines that have not been selected for fighting in recent generations. No matter how long it's been since your dog's ancestors were used for fighting, the ability to fight another dog is one of the Pit Bull's original reasons for existence. Remember, also, that Pit Bulls were bred for *gameness*. The mellowest Pit Bull, who would never even

dream of starting a fight, may also never dream of backing down from one that another dog's started.

Denying that the Pit Bull's heritage creates game and tough dogs is like denying that a retriever has a tendency to retrieve. Retrievers aren't the only breed with an inclination for retrieving, nor are Pit Bulls the only breed with an inclination for fighting. But taken as a whole, each breed has a tendency to do what its genes tell it to do. Why? Dogs chase, retrieve, herd and fight because they've been bred to consider these activities fun, and because they're intrinsically rewarding. Doing them releases a chemical called dopamine in the brain that makes anyone feel fantastic. Pit Bulls don't attack because they hate other dogs; they do it because they enjoy the activity. They've been bred to have a low threshold to activate their "go-to" response, which is aggression.

A retriever's go-to response is picking things up. If you get a retriever excited, he'll be looking for a stick or a shoe or your hand to hold in his jaws. If you're vehemently opposed to owning a dog who carries sticks around, you would be ill-advised to get a retriever; similarly, if you're vehemently opposed to the possibility of dogfights in your home, you would be ill-advised to get more than one Pit Bull.

As in any breed, there's a good deal of variation; some Pit Bulls have a lower aggression threshold and some have a higher one. Although dogs raised in fighting environments and from fighting lines are most likely to be dog-aggressive, even dogs raised in the best of homes and from the gentlest of lines may not tolerate other dogs.

The chances of dogs getting along are better if they're of opposite sexes. Two males are most likely to fight, but two females can also be antagonistic. Neutered males are less likely to fight, but spaying females doesn't have the same effect — although many females are particularly aggressive during their estrus season.

Having two dogs also works best if one dog is older than the other, so that the older dog is clearly the leader of the pack. Puppies tend to get along well with their elders. Seniority counts for a lot in the dog world, and a young pup will usually grow up respecting his elders. Sometimes,

a youngster gets aspirations to be top dog, however, or two dogs of about the same age never quite decide which one is leadership material. Then the trouble starts. Remember to first decide whether this is natural rough play behavior between the two.

An occasional disagreement is normal. A disagreement that draws blood, leaves one dog screaming, or in which the two dogs cannot be separated, is a potential problem. Such disagreements, if repeated, spell trouble. If you have an adult dog who's never been around other dogs, you need to test your Pit Bull to see how she reacts to being around another dog. Make sure that both dogs are securely restrained, not just the Pit Bull. Test the dogs on neutral territory. You can place your Pit Bull in a kennel or on a short, secure chain and walk the strange dog into view. Some dogs are actually somewhat more aggressive when in a kennel or on a chain, so if your Pit allows the other dog to approach and still acts friendly, this is a very good sign.

The next step is to put both dogs on sturdy leashes and walk them alongside each other, letting them focus on a lot of diversions. If you are at all unsure, muzzle one or both dogs. If possible, hand out plenty of treats, but don't make them compete for them. If you're introducing a new dog into your home, ignore the newcomer around the resident dog, and praise and show affection for the resident dog whenever the new dog comes around. You need to reinforce the resident dog's feelings of leadership by always petting her and feeding her first, and letting her know that she's still the special one.



REMEMBER Pit Bulls are people dogs. They really don't need another dog in the house to be happy. They just need you. So consider limiting your household to just one dog if your Pit Bull is at all dog-aggressive.

Avoiding DogFights

Even if you have two bosom-buddy dogs, you're well advised to separate them when you're not around to supervise. Little spats can arise over possession of a toy or one dog can accidentally irritate the other, leading to an escalating fight. Pit Bulls are known for having a short escalation time — they go from 0 to 60 in about two seconds when it comes to an all-out brawl. Stories abound of a piece of dropped food landing on the kitchen floor between buddies, both dogs going for it at the same time, and the dogs ending up going for each other! Two dogs may chase the same squirrel up a tree, barely bump one another, and start fighting out of excitement and frustration. They may race back and forth barking at a passing dog and get so worked up that they turn on each other instead. A knock on the door can send both dogs jumping in excitement at the door until one lands on the other and the fight is on. You leave the house with each dog contentedly gnawing on a chew toy, but one dog finishes first and sets out to see how much the other has left — and the other dog doesn't believe in sharing.



WARNING Don't set up high-energy situations, especially over limited high-value resources! Experienced Pit Bull owners set their dogs up for success, not failure. They discourage fence fighting the neighbor's dog, rushing to the door, standing underfoot when food is around, or leaving multiple dogs loose home alone. Unlike human friends, dogs can't be trusted to back off and be polite. Every dog has the potential to get into a fight. The difference is that Pit Bulls were bred for generations to win them.

Aggression toward strange dogs can be more difficult to work with. The most basic "cure" is to avoid other dogs and always walk your dog on a secure leash. Train your dog so that he knows the basic obedience cues, including "Come," "Sit," and "Stay." Bring treats, and when your dog sees another dog, have him perform these exercises and reward him for paying attention to you rather than the new dog. Don't wait until he acts aggressively to give the cues, as this only rewards the dog for his aggressive actions.

Many people pet and speak soothingly to their dog when he begins to act aggressively, but this only gives the dog the message that he's doing the right thing and encourages him to be aggressive. Similarly, don't yell and scream. To the dog, these actions indicate that you're entering the fray and are attacking the other dog as well. Don't run toward the other dog for the same reason; your dog will interpret your behavior as an attack and will be only too happy to help.

Shelters are full of Pit Bulls who come with a warning of dog aggression. The better shelters don't place these dogs, even in one-dog households. That may seem like a heartless verdict, but dog-aggressive dogs are difficult if not impossible to change. **Remember:** This is the Pit Bull's original reason for being; it's what his genes tell him is fun. He's not angry at other dogs, just as a Greyhound isn't angry at a rabbit. He's just having a good time. You can teach a Greyhound not to chase a rabbit in your home, or even to resist chasing one outside, but if the rabbit bolts, the chase is on and there's no calling the Greyhound off. The same is true of a dog-aggressive Pit Bull. You may be able to train him to resist temptation under normal circumstances, but if a loose dog runs up to him, or he sees a skirmish break out at the dog park, or if another dog challenges him, or if he gets out of his yard and sees a dog being walked down the street, his genes may override his training and, like the Greyhound in full pursuit, there's no calling him off.



REMEMBER If you have a dog-aggressive Pit Bull, you can't take that dog anywhere he may confront other dogs, and you must make 100 percent sure, with no possibility of slip-ups, that your dog cannot get out of your house and yard. As much as you love your dog, other people also love their dogs. Pit Bulls are estimated to kill more than 20,000 dogs in the United States every year. Even if your Pit is a teddy bear, many dog walkers are now arming themselves against loose dogs, and they can injure or even kill what they perceive as an attacking Pit Bull — even if he was just prancing over to say “Whazzup?” with the friendliest of intentions.



REMEMBER Prevention is worth 50 pounds of cure when it comes to dog aggression. Whether your dog is a potential victim or aggressor remember:

- » Give your dog plenty of exercise so he's not full of pent-up energy.
- » Train your dog to come on command and to walk quietly beside you when asked, no matter what's going on around him.
- » Avoid walking in areas where there are loose dogs.
- » Avoid dog parks as much as possible.
- » Avoid walking in unknown neighborhoods. Drive around several times beforehand to see if dogs are loose or trying to escape from yards.
- » If you see a loose dog, turn around and slowly walk away. If he follows you, face the dog and stand your ground or slowly back away. Never run from a menacing dog. Never scream. Speak in a low-pitched authoritative calm voice. If the other dog is menacing toward you or your dog, get back to a safe place, such as your car, something elevated, or anything with a fence or door between you.
- » Don't allow your dog to escalate the situation by barking and lunging.
- » Carry an umbrella and suddenly open it toward the other dog if it continues to approach. The surprise is sometimes enough to dissuade the dog from approaching further.



REMEMBER Aggression toward other animals doesn't mean a dog will be aggressive toward people. Remember that Pit Bulls were developed to be dog-aggressive but people-passive.

Breaking Up a Dog Fight

Sometimes the unthinkable happens and your Pit Bull is involved in a fight, whether as the aggressor or the victim. Or maybe the fight will be between two of your own dogs. Any dogfight, even between Chihuahuas, can leave you feeling helpless because they can move so fast, be difficult to separate, and once separated, go back at one another. And of course, you don't want to get hurt in the process!

Most dogs fight with a fast-paced series of bites to the face, ears, and body of the other dog. If you grab the dog, she's likely to twirl around and nail you without thinking. Pit Bulls fight by grabbing, holding on, and shaking as though they were playing a game of tug. Trying to pull the other dog from her grip only reinforces the tug game and is seldom effective.

If you search the web for dog attack videos, you can see how ineffective most people are at stopping an attack. Most people freeze with indecision and are weak with fear. They don't know what to do and they're afraid of hurting either dog.



TIP

Here are some tips for breaking up a dogfight:

- » **Tell children to quietly and calmly (walking slowly, not running) leave the area and get in a safe place such as in your car, a safe room, or an elevated place.** Although the dogs' focus will probably stay on each other, don't take chances by letting kids run away screaming.
- » **Don't scream or do anything unnecessary to further raise the excitement level.** Don't panic. Moving slowly but effectively is better than moving quickly but ineffectively.
- » **Get help if possible.** Breaking up a dogfight is hard to do single-handed. Even if it takes extra seconds, try to get help. Many people

are scared to touch fighting dogs, so send them for more help or to get any items below that you may need.

- » **Get other dogs secured and away.** Dogfights can escalate and packing-on behavior can ensue. Get any other potential aggressors or victims out of sight. If other dogs do pack on, get the latecomers off first if possible, because they're usually less committed than the instigators are.
- » **Use a break stick if you have one.** Carrying a break stick is one of the main pieces of advice experienced Pit Bull owners will tell you. Many keep a break stick in every room of their home and with them when walking. Pit Bulls have extremely strong jaws that you can't pry open with your hands. You can buy break sticks (also called parting sticks) online. They're wedge-shaped sticks made of wood, metal, or plastic that you place between the jaws as far back as possible, then rotate (as you would a motorcycle throttle) to pry the jaws open. This won't hurt your dog — in fact, you can practice it when playing tug.
- » **Keep a collar on your dog.** Using the collars to pull the dogs apart won't work. But using the collars to lift both combatants up so they're standing on their hind legs *may* work, especially if the collars are making it hard for them to breathe. Eventually, one will try to rearrange his bite and, at that point, hopefully the other dog won't be as committed and you can pull them apart. This is why you want your dog to wear a strong collar with a metal buckle. Collars with the quick-release plastic fasteners will break under pressure.
- » **Keep a leash handy.** Attach a leash as quickly as possible, even while the dogs are still fighting, so you can lead your dog away as soon as they're separated. A leather police leash is the best choice because it has two different rings to attach two different snaps to, allowing you to pass the lead under the dog and snap it shut. You can pass it around the neck or around the abdomen and pull the aggressor away, using the other end to attach him to a tree or post — or if indoors, shut a door on the leash to hold it. This second set of hands is essential if you're alone and trying to break up two dogs.

- » **Try an air horn.** Blast it right in the dog's face. It may or may not cause the dog to let loose for a second.
- » **Lift the rear.** This tactic often works with non-Pit Bulls, who usually spin around and see what's grabbed them. Unfortunately, they sometimes bite whoever is holding them before they realize it's a person. The person holding the dog's rear should continue turning the dog in a quick tight circle until the dog realizes it's a person holding him. The lifted rear tactic works less often with Pit Bulls, who consider this just another challenge.
- » **Use a spray.** Water from a hose, especially if sprayed into the nose and throat, may convince the aggressor to let go. But it's hard to have a hose handy. Spray from a fire extinguisher can also work, but again, not always handy. Pepper spray can be effective in discouraging some dogs. Bear spray is more effective. But you need to buy these ahead of time, either online or at a hunting store, and have them with you.
- » **Use a stun gun.** In some states, a license may be needed to carry a stun gun or taser. A taser shoots out from a distance, but you'll probably be so distraught that you'll have a high probability of missing or of even hitting the wrong dog. A stun gun requires actually pressing the gun to the dog. They're easy to carry and you seldom need a permit. You can even buy models that are on the end of a stick. The shock won't transfer to you or your dog. And the stunned dog will live.
- » **Overcome your inhibitions.** If you're reading this book, odds are you're a dog lover and you would never consider injuring a dog. But if that dog is killing *your* dog, you need to push those inhibitions aside. The least damaging thing you can do is to choke the aggressor until he passes out. You can twist his collar, put a leash or belt around his neck and twist, or kneel on his neck with all your force. This won't be easy, physically or mentally, and it also places you too close for comfort to the attacking dog, but if you aren't prepared with the aforementioned tools, it may be the only choice you have available to save your dog's life. **Remember:** The next steps won't

be as innocuous, and they include jabbing your fingers hard and deep into the dog's eyes, hitting the dog on the head with a heavy object, or even stabbing or shooting. The stun gun is sounding better, isn't it?

» **Protect yourself.** As tragic, horrific, and heartbreaking as it is for any dog to be killed by another, don't take chances with your own life in an effort to save a dog. Far too many deaths and disfigurements have occurred to people who were gallantly trying to save their own dogs from an attack by another, only to have things go even worse.

Most dog owners will never be faced with such a harrowing situation, but far too many are, and few know how to protect their dogs. Knowing what to do beforehand can enable you and your dog to walk away.

Calming the Raging Bull

Let's face it — many people are afraid of Pit Bulls. Some Pit Bull owners derive immense (if perverse) enjoyment from this, but most protest that their puppy dogs are just big pussycats. They're usually right. Nonetheless, some Pit Bulls can be aggressive, and their large size and powerful jaws make this sort of behavior too dangerous to take lightly. The first step in understanding aggression is distinguishing between play biting and real biting.

All in good fun?

Puppies and dogs play by growling and biting. Young puppies play with their littermates this way, but once a dog has left the litter, you're the next best thing. So many people have seen horror stories about Pit Bulls that if the dog growls and bites they immediately overreact and label him as vicious. You need to know the difference between dangerous aggression and playful aggression. Look for these clues that tell you it's all in good fun:

- » Down on elbows in front, with the rump in the air (the *play-bow* position)
- » Barks intermingled with growls
- » Lying down or rolling over
- » Bounding leaps or running in circles
- » Holding your hand or arm gently in his mouth

What about a wagging tail? Contrary to popular belief, a wagging tail doesn't necessarily mean a dog is friendly. Instead, it means a dog is aroused. That can be good, as with play, or bad, as with fighting.



WARNING Look for these clues to know whether you'd better watch out:

- » A low growl combined with a direct stare
- » Tail held stiffly
- » Sudden, unpredictable bites or attacks
- » Growling or biting in defense of food, toys, or his bed
- » Growling or biting in response to punishment (But beware: Growling is used by dogs to warn off others, but Pit Bulls may skip the growling and go right to the biting.)

Just because your dog is gnawing at you in fun doesn't mean you should let him use you as a chewie. Pit Bulls are a zero-tolerance breed when it comes to biting, even play biting. When your pup bites you, simply say "Ouch! No!" and remove your limb from his mouth. Replace it with a toy that's not made of flesh and bone. Hitting your dog is uncalled for — your dog was just trying to play and meant no harm. Hitting is also a form of aggression that can give your dog the idea that he had better try (bite) harder next time because you're playing the game a lot rougher. You don't want to encourage playful aggression, but you don't want to

punish it, either. You want to redirect it to inanimate objects. Take your dog out to play with his toys or let him burn off some energy running.

Biting the hand that feeds

Aggression toward humans is one of the most severe behavioral problems any dog can have, and it's especially dangerous in Pit Bulls. The potential for human endangerment often leads to the dog's demise. Many times, the dog is dearly loved, and is a loving companion 99 percent of the time, but the owner can no longer cope with the threat to the safety of humans that other 1 percent.

Dog aggression toward humans can be roughly divided into aggression toward family members and aggression toward strangers. Because of the gravity of this problem, the best advice is to seek the counsel of a certified companion animal behaviorist if your dog displays any aggression toward humans.



REMEMBER It bears repeating: If you think that your dog displays any signs of being people-aggressive, take action. Go and see an expert behaviorist. If no behaviorists practice in your area, seek help from a veterinarian experienced in behavior or from an experienced dog trainer. You can often do phone or video conferences if none is in your area. Take no chances.

You can locate a board-certified veterinary behaviorist through the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists (www.dacvb.org) or the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (www.avsab.org).

You can locate certified dog trainers through the Association of Professional Dog Trainers (www.apdt.com), the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (www.ccpdt.org), or the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants (www.iaabc.org).

A few decades ago it became the fad to train dogs as though they were puppies and to establish dominance over them using what were claimed to be the same methods a wolf parent would use. Such methods included

rolling the dog on its back and pinning it there until it gave up, grabbing it by the neck and shaking it, and even biting it. These methods have since been discredited — in fact, they've been credited with causing dog bites in many cases. If anyone suggests using these outdated methods, find somebody else for training advice. The technique has probably been responsible for more dog bites to adult family members than any other.

True, it's important to be the leader of your pair, but bullying your way to leadership is not the answer. Dogs tend to naturally elect you as their leader, not be forced into it.

Dealing with Pit Bull Aggression

Pit Bulls, like any dogs, may occasionally bite out of fear or food guarding, but these instances probably result in comparatively minor bites. Why do some Pit Bulls either escalate from there or start out in full attack mode? The truth is, nobody knows, but there is conjecture.

If you watch videos of attacks, you'll see several factors that may play a role. In some cases, the dog starts out playing, often with a family child. The child is also playing and may run or hide from the dog. The child has just set himself up as prey. The game continues as far as the Pit Bull is concerned, but the child gets scared and now seriously tries to escape — and the game takes a step into the danger zone. A parent may step in and try to shield the child or pick him up, but these actions just make the game more challenging. Most Pit Bulls will respond to the parent's commands at this point, but some are too excited to back down — sometimes with tragic results. So, in some cases, it seems that Pit Bull attacks are just the result of Pit Bulls considering chasing, biting, and tugging, whether a dog or a human, to be great fun, just as they were bred to think of it. Perhaps this is also the case of Pit Bulls that jump up and grab babies from their caretakers' arms.

In other cases the attack occurs in response to possible “triggers” such as a baby crying, a person tripping, being in a car in which the driver has slammed on the brakes, a person having a seizure, a person jumping on a trampoline, a person walking a dog, a person having a swinging ponytail

— in short, so many possible triggers that there's no way you can anticipate them all. In these cases, normal occurrences may be sufficient to push the dog over a threshold the owner never suspected he had. In still other cases, the person did something that she thought was sweet, such as repeatedly kissing the dog, but the dog obviously didn't share that sentiment. Perhaps the dog showed subtle signs of irritation that went unnoticed, but he never showed them overtly enough to warn anyone away. We'll never know what sets some dogs off.

Obviously, there are certain things that anyone, children especially, should avoid with any powerful dog. Don't run and scream, don't push yourself on the dog, don't try to make a photo opportunity by placing the dog in an uncomfortable situation, and don't take food or toys away from the dog.

If, by some very unlikely circumstance, you or a child were to be attacked, here's what to do:

- » **If a child is attacked**, insert yourself between the child and the dog. Holding the child will not help because the dog will be enticed to jump up for the child. Try to get the child up high on something (like a car or a refrigerator), behind a closed door, in a dog crate or car, or even *under* a car. If you have any of the items used to break up a dogfight (see "[Breaking Up a DogFight](#)," earlier in this chapter), use them.
- » **If you're attacked**, try to get to the same places you would put a child. If you're riding a bike, keep it between you and the dog and back away. If no shelter is available, stay on your feet as much as possible. Don't scream or run. Any noises you make should be low-pitched and commanding. If the attack continues and you're pulled down and can't get up, cover your face by touching your elbows in front and grasping your hands behind your head, covering your ears as well. Curl into a ball and play dead.

**REMEMBER**

Most Pit Bull owners will spend their lives never seeing a bit of aggression from their dogs, but that's not true for all. Unfortunately, a Pit Bull who is aggressive toward people is not safe to keep. Whether he's the product of abuse or he was raised with only love, there may be reasons but there are no excuses. You can try contacting dog behaviorists, but they may not have the answer you want to hear. There is no magic cure for a human-aggressive dog.

So, what are your choices? You can work with a behaviorist, some of whom charge thousands of dollars to try to rehab aggressive dogs. But even they can't give guarantees. You can attribute it to a fluke or some trigger and take pains not to let anything trigger your dog again, but this is a very dangerous path to take. Was it really a trigger? And what other unknown triggers could there be? Can you be sure to keep him away from any other person for the rest of his life? Maybe you could keep him muzzled and caged at all times, but what kind of life is that? How long do you think it will be before the memory fades and the threat lessens in your mind, and you open the door and give him another (possibly disastrous) chance? You can get on social media and ask advice, whereupon every "dog expert" will give you an armchair opinion. You can surrender him to a shelter where he may be adopted out to an unsuspecting family. You may be able to get him into a Pit Bull rehab facility or a sanctuary where he can live out his life. Or you may have no choice but to euthanize him surrounded by his family. This is an incredibly gut-wrenching choice, but at times it may be the only safe one. It's also a very personal choice that nobody else has a right to criticize. They aren't in your shoes.

Plucking Up Courage

Pit Bulls may have a tough-guy image, but even they can be shy of people or afraid of other dogs. Every so often a particularly imaginative Pit Bull comes up with a bizarre fear all his own, but the phobia can

usually be treated using the same general concepts that I present in this section.

Pit Bulls are characteristically gregarious with strangers, but once in a while a shy Pit Bull comes along. Some owners assume shyness in an adult is due to former abuse, but in most cases it's simply the dog's nature. Shy dogs aren't so much afraid of people as they're afraid of being the center of people's attention. Unfortunately, the most common advice given to cure shyness in dogs is to have a lot of strange people pay attention to the dog. This usually does little except petrify the dog and further convince him to be afraid of strangers. The shy dog is learning that, for some reason, strangers seem alarmingly interested in him!

Never force a dog who's afraid of people to be petted by somebody he doesn't know; this contact in no way helps the dog overcome his fear, and is a good way for the stranger to get bitten. Strangers should be asked to ignore shy dogs, even when approached by the dog. When the dog gets braver, have the stranger offer him a treat — at first, while not even looking at the dog.

In any case of fear, your objective is to introduce only as much of the fearful situation as the dog can adjust to by the time the session is over. Think of it this way: If you were scared of heights, leaning out a 20th-story window every day for an hour would never help you feel less fearful. But if you instead leaned out from the first floor first, and never moved to a higher floor until you felt at ease at the lower one, you might eventually be able to cope with heights. Slow and gradual is the way to get over fears.

In the worst-case scenario, the dog is petrified at even the lowest level of exposure to whatever he's scared of. You may have to use anti-anxiety drugs, in conjunction with training, to calm your dog enough to make progress. You need the advice of a behaviorist if you think your dog may need medication.

Fear of thunder or gunshots is a common problem in older dogs. To see a normally courageous Pit Bull quivering and panting in the closet at the

slight rumblings of a distant thunderstorm is a sad sight, and the fear only gets worse with time. The time to do something about this fear is at the first sign of trouble. Try to avoid fostering these fears by acting cheerful when a thunderstorm strikes and playing with your dog or giving him a treat. You can even try this using a thunderstorm recording. Noise phobias can be hard to beat, and you may have to resort to just helping get your dog through a storm using short-acting anti-anxiety medications obtainable through your veterinarian. A tight-fitting ThunderShirt (www.thundershirt.com) may help, and some dogs do well if you drive them around in the car!

Corralling the Escape Artist

How would you teach a dog to climb over, tunnel under, or gnaw through fences? You'd start gradually, with short fences, fences with little gaps under them, and fences with weak spots. Once your Pit Bull mastered getting through these fences, you would gradually make the fence taller, snugger, and stronger, and keep improving it step by step. You'd make sure the dog had a lot of motivation to get to the other side, maybe by leaving him there all alone with nothing to do, or by making sure that all sorts of activity was visible on the other side of the fence. Being a Pit Bull, your dog would catch on fast and would be a well-educated escape artist in no time. The funny thing is, the process I just outlined is basically what many people do who *don't* want their dog to escape from the yard. If you want your dog to stay in the yard, make your yard escape-proof from the very beginning.



TIP

If your dog is a digger, try burying a wire mesh fence under the ground for a foot or two inside the fence's perimeter. As a last ditch effort for an incorrigible fence jumper or digger, you may have to string electric wire just inside your fence.

Digging Up Some Dirt

I hope you took a picture of your manicured yard before your Pit Bull came along. Most Pit Bulls consider it their mission to turn a yard into a wasteland with all the charm of a toxic dumpsite. Be grateful that your yard will have personality, unlike the neighbor's cookie-cutter, boring green lawns. In case you haven't gotten the hint yet, you may as well give up on keeping your yard pristine.

Curing digging is almost impossible, but the damage is confinable. Encourage your dog to dig in a sandbox or other area of the yard shielded from the neighbors' judgmental stares. You can bury dog bones in the sand box to teach him that's where the buried treasure is. The best cure is lots of exercise. With age, most Pit Bulls seem to realize that all that digging never gets them anywhere and they lose their ardor for tunneling.

Tales from the Bark Side

The surest way to make your neighbors hate your dog is to let him bark and bark day and night. There's a big difference between a dog who warns you of a suspicious stranger and one who warns you of the presence of clouds in the sky. You may worry that you'll ruin your dog's watchdog ability by discouraging barking. But the opposite is true: A watchdog who cries wolf is useless.

Allow your Pit Bull to bark momentarily at strangers, and then call him to you and praise him for quiet behavior, distracting him with an obedience exercise if need be. If your dog won't stop barking when you tell him to, distract him with a loud noise of your own. Begin to anticipate when your dog will start barking, distract him, and reward him for quiet behavior.

Isolated dogs often bark from frustration and loneliness. Even if the attention gained includes punishment, the dog will continue to bark in order to obtain the temporary presence of the owner. A dog stuck in a pen or tied to a chain in the backyard *will* bark. What else is there to do?

The simplest solution is to move the dog's quarters to a less-isolated location. Let the dog in your house or fence him in your entire yard. If

your dog barks when you put him to bed, move his bed into your bedroom. If this isn't possible, the dog's quiet behavior must be rewarded by your presence, working up to gradually longer and longer periods of quiet separation. The distraction of a special chew toy, given only at bedtime, may help alleviate barking. Remember too, a sleeping dog can't bark, so exercise can be a big help. Overall, however, Pit Bulls are pretty quiet dogs.

Chapter 8

Training the Teacher's Pit

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Learning why fun training works
 - » Exploring why timing is everything
 - » Teaching your new dog old tricks
-

Dog training is an area filled with misinformation, myth, and mystery. The very thought of it so intimidates some people that they give up before they start. Don't despair! Dog training now is easier, more effective, and more fun than ever.

You're one of the lucky ones. Pit Bulls love to please people and they're eager pupils. Most cases of Pit Bull misbehavior stem not from dumb dogs but from dumb — no, make that misinformed — trainers.

Some Pit Bull owners get a perverse pleasure in how poorly trained their dog is, as though the dog's wildness were a sign of machismo. Others think training involves dominating the dog into submitting to their will. Both methods are great recipes for creating Pit Bulls who are nuisances — and even potential dangers — to others. I feel like a broken record, but: Training your Pit Bull is even more important than training most dogs, because you have to make sure that your dog never gives people the idea that Pit Bulls are bad dogs.

Besides, training's fun!

Training Your Pit to Wag Her Tail

Look at the best obedience dogs, the best drug-detection dogs, the best weight-pulling dogs — even the best fighting dogs. They all have one thing in common when they're at work: Their tails are wagging. Were

they dragged, slapped, and choked until their tails just couldn't stop wagging? Of course not!

These animals enjoy every minute, not only because the work itself has been made pleasurable, but because the reward following it is also fun. Their trainers knew how to make training into a *game*. Sometimes the game may be challenging, but it's always winnable. After all, they don't describe Pit Bulls as game for nothing! Pit Bulls love a game and they love to win. Just like people, they may go through the motions of a job they're forced to do, but they'll never do it well unless it's fun.

In the old days, dog training consisted of pulling, jerking, and praising. But these old-fashioned dog-training methods based on force were difficult, ineffective, and no fun for either the dog or the trainer.

Punishment may tell a dog what not to do, but it can't tell a dog what it should do. Punishment definitely can't make a dog *want* to do anything. Besides, since when has a Pit Bull been bothered by a little distraction like punishment? Pit Bulls were bred to continue on in the face of adversity; punishment is just as likely to result in them setting about doing whatever it was they were doing wrong with even more dogged determination.

That's why I don't like the word *punishment*. To too many people, punishment evokes images of hitting, choking, kicking, shocking, and other cruelties. Some people feel that in order for punishment to be effective, it has to be drastic. In fact, the opposite is true, because it merely teaches the dog to be afraid of you — he's long since forgotten why you went crazy. The more modern term *aversive* is better; basically an aversive is anything your dog would prefer not to happen. It could be your giving him a stern look, a loud "No!," or even a tap on the nose. Or it could be you withholding that treat you were about to give him.

That said, too many people have gone too far in the anti-aversive direction, believing that you can't use *any* aversive training methods for fear it will scar the dog's delicate psyche for life. It won't. Your life, as a human, is directed by both rewarding and aversive reinforcement. You go to work for the reward of being paid and because you're averse to being homeless. You obey the speed limit (sort of) not because

somebody will give you a reward for doing so, but because somebody will give you a ticket (an aversive) for speeding. Your dog is the same way. He'll do many things for a reward — sit, stay, come, and so on — as long as there isn't something else more rewarding. Let's say he knows he gets a treat for coming when called, but on his way a squirrel pops up. Do you think he'll choose the treat over chasing the squirrel? Probably not. The squirrel chase is more rewarding. So, you must either promise him a reward that's even *better* than a squirrel, or let him know that chasing the squirrel, though tempting, will get him an aversive.



REMEMBER It's not really fair to introduce an aversive before your dog knows what you want from him, so always start with reward-based techniques. And if you do have to use something aversive, do it sparingly and lightly. Your Pit Bull is surprisingly sensitive, and a disapproving word or tone is sometimes ample to get the point across.



REMEMBER Giving an aversive doesn't mean losing your temper. It doesn't mean being rough, or even physical. It can mean a time-out, a disappointed tone of voice, or a disapproving look. It can mean the treat he was going to have gets put away, the leash goes back on the rack, the car door closes. To be effective, it should be slightly more aversive than the pleasure of the thing he wanted to do. Just as you might punish a child for running into traffic, punishing a dog for dangerous behavior can save his life.

For most things, reward-based training will suffice. Rewards can be praise, treats, games, or anything your Pit Bull loves. Praise alone is generally not as good as more tangible rewards, such as treats and toys. Praise can become more rewarding if you always praise immediately before you give an even stronger reward (like a treat). This way, praise signals a reward and gains strength as a secondary motivator.

Working for food

For centuries, dog training was done only with force and aversives. Old-time trainers criticized the use of food or fun as rewards. Fortunately, that opinion is largely obsolete. Reward-motivated dogs learn faster, work more eagerly, and have a more trusting partnership.

You can incorporate rewards into training in many ways. In the old days, we were told to basically cram our dogs into position. The problem with this approach is that your dog focuses so much on what *you're* doing that he doesn't actually learn. It's better to let him put *himself* into position. Once in a while, some gentle physical guidance may be called for, but you should be guiding, not forcing.

You can avoid a potential wrestling match by using a treat to lure or guide your dog into position and then as a reward when she's in place. To use *luring* to teach your dog to sit, for example, move the treat just above and behind her nose so she has to bend her knees to reach it, and gradually require her to squat more and more until she's sitting. After your dog knows what's expected, hold the food out of sight and only give it as a reward.



TIP

If she keeps backing up, try placing her on a raised surface or with her butt in a corner so she can't keep going backward.

Another method, called *capturing*, works best for behaviors that would be difficult for you to get your dog to do, such as barking. To teach your dog to bark on cue, wait for her to bark, and quickly add a cue word and a treat. You “capture” this behavior by first rewarding it every time, and then when she's freely offering it, only rewarding it when it follows your cue word.

If you plan to teach a lot of behaviors, it's easier to teach *targeting* first. In targeting, you teach the dog to touch a target, such as the end of a stick, with her nose. You can do this either by luring or capturing her behaviors. When she reliably nose-touches the target, you can essentially lead her around by the nose. This makes it easier to teach behaviors such

as heeling, spinning in a circle, or bowing. Use the target to lead her around, and then reward her. Add the cue word, reward some more, and then gradually fade out the target by having her do a little bit more of the behavior on her own.

In most training cases, you use some sort of *shaping*, in which you reward successively closer approximations to what you ultimately want. Think of it as the dog version of the kid game of “you’re getting warmer.” To teach your dog to shake hands, every time she lifts her foot off the ground just an inch, she gets a treat. Then she has to get warmer still, so you only reward if she lifts her foot 2 inches. Then you reward for 3 inches; then for touching your hand an inch away; then for reaching to touch your hand several inches away; then for laying her foot in your hand; then for keeping it there. You constantly but gradually change what gets rewarded until you’re only rewarding the final behavior you want.



REMEMBER The first behavior you teach your dog will be the hardest. That’s because your dog has to learn to learn. A dog who understands she gets a treat for following a target, and then for learning a new behavior, will come to eagerly follow a target and try to guess and perform what behavior you want. A dog who understands she gets rewarded for new behaviors she comes up with on her own will start offering new and innovative behaviors to see if you reward them as well. So, don’t be discouraged by a slow start. As your Pit comes to understand the training process, she’ll start to learn faster and faster.

Making ideas click quick

When it comes to training, timing is everything. Let’s say you’re trying to teach your dog to heel. You want to reward her when she’s in heel position, with her head next to your left leg. You start your walk, and eventually she ambles into the correct place. You fumble around in your pocket for the treat, but by now she’s meandered over to sniff a tree, or

lunged after a squirrel, or slammed on the brakes to check out a dog across the street. It's too late to give her the reward now — you needed to do it when she was in heel position. The truth is, it's not always easy to offer a treat in time, which is why you can use other cues to signal she's performed correctly and a treat is on the way.

Many trainers use a clicker, which you can buy at any pet supply store or online. A clicker makes a distinct noise to instantly tell the dog when she's performed correctly. The signal is then followed by a food reward. A clicker signal is used because it's fast, noticeable, and something the dog otherwise does not encounter in everyday life.

Here's an example of how to use a clicker. First, teach your dog that the clicker signals a reward. Do this by clicking and then rewarding her several times, until when she hears the click she looks expectantly at you for her treat or toy. Now instead of trying to get the food or toy reward to your dog at just the right moment, click the clicker and then follow with a reward.

Getting the Timing Right

The crux of training is anticipation: A dog comes to anticipate that after hearing a cue, she'll be rewarded if she performs some action. She will eventually perform this action without assistance from you. A properly issued cue has four parts:

- » **Your dog's name.** You probably spend a good deal of your day talking, with very few words intended as cues for your dog. So you need to alert your dog that these words are directed toward her.
- » **The cue.** Make sure you use consistent terms for the desired action. For example, don't alternate "Sit" and "Down" to mean the same thing, or use "Down" to mean two different things (like lie down and quit jumping up on you).



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Some schools of training say that you shouldn't add the cue until after you've taught the behavior, but I'll stay traditional here.

- » **The reaction by the dog.** Many trainers make the mistake of simultaneously saying the cue word and at *the same time* placing the dog into position. *This is incorrect.* The cue comes immediately before the desired action or position. When the cue and action come at the same time, not only does the dog tend to pay more attention to your action of placing her in position, and less attention to the cue word, but the command word loses its predictive value for the dog.
- » **The reward.** This should be presented as soon as possible after the dog has performed correctly.



REMEMBER **Remember:** Name, cue, action, reward!

Following the Ten Commandments

You'll do well to keep the following guidelines in mind as you train your Pit Bull.

1. Thou shalt not live in the past

Dogs live in the present; if you punish or reward them, they can only assume it's for their behavior at the time of the punishment or reward. So if you discover a mess, drag your dog to it from her nap in the other room, and scold her, the dog thinks that she's being scolded for napping or that her owner is mentally unstable.

2. Thou shalt not train your dog to be bad

Dogs repeat actions that bring them rewards, whether or not you intend for them to. Letting your Pit Bull out of her crate to make her quit whining may work momentarily, but in the long run you end up with a

dog who whines incessantly every time you crate her. Make sure that you reward only those behaviors you want to see more often. When your dog misbehaves, sometimes the best thing for you to do is to stop for a second and ask yourself how you would train your dog to beg at the table, run away, jump up on you, bark to get out, or whatever bad thing she's doing. Often you will see you've been inadvertently using exactly that same method. You may have been teaching your dog to be bad.

3. Thou shalt not confuse

Lapses in consistency are unfair to the dog. If you feed your dog from the table "just this one time" because she begs, you've taught her that, even though begging may not always result in a handout, it just may pay off tonight. And this intermittent payoff produces behavior that's very resistant to change — just like the occasional slot machine jackpot keeps gamblers coming back time and time again. You could hardly have done a better job of training your dog to beg if you tried.

4. Thou shalt not speak in tongues

Your Pit Bull takes commands literally. If you've taught her that "Down" means to lie down, what must the dog think when you yell "Down" to tell her to get off the sofa — where she was already lying down!

5. Thou shalt not use excessive force

Dogs already want to please you; your job is simply to show them the way. Forcing them can distract or intimidate them, actually slowing down learning. That's not to say you can't guide your dog, but there's a difference between being helpful and manhandling. Always ask yourself if what you're doing will help your dog understand rather than overwhelm his attention.

6. Thou shalt not hurt thy friend

Striking, shaking, choking, and hanging are extremely dangerous, counterproductive and cruel; they have no place in the training of a beloved family member. Plus, they are the hallmarks of a dumb trainer because they don't work. Owners sometimes try to make "a correction the dog will remember" by ignoring or chastising the dog for the rest of

the day. The dog may indeed realize that her owner is upset, but she won't know why. Besides, chances are that you're the one who's doing things the wrong way, not your dog.

7. Thou shalt not beat a dead horse

Your Pit Bull will work better if her stomach isn't full and will be more responsive to food rewards. Never try to train a sleepy, tired, or hot dog. You, and your dog, have good days and bad days. On bad days, quit. It makes no sense to continue when one or the other is not in the mood. Do one simple exercise and then go do something else. Never train your dog when you're irritable or impatient. If your dog just doesn't seem to catch on to something after several days of trying, give up that method and think of another way to teach her.

8. Thou shalt not end on a low note

Begin and end each training session with something the dog can do well. Keep sessions short and fun — no longer than 10 to 15 minutes. Dogs have short attention spans, and you'll notice that after about 15 minutes your dog's performance begins to suffer unless a lot of play is involved. Training a dog who's tired or bored encourages bad habits and resentment in the dog and frustration for the trainer. Quit while you're ahead — especially when training a young puppy or when you only have one or two different exercises to practice. Keep your Pit Bull wanting more and you'll have a happy, willing, and obedient partner.

9. Thou shalt not go crazy

Repeating a command over and over, or shouting it louder and louder, never helped anyone, dog or human, understand what's expected of them. Your Pit Bull isn't hard of hearing. If she acts like she is, you need to guide her toward the correct behavior, and probably need to back up a step in your training.

10. Thou shalt not lose your patience

Remember that nothing will ever go as smoothly as all the training instructions predict. Although there may be setbacks, you *can* train your

dog. Just be consistent, firm, gentle, realistic, patient — and have a good sense of humor.

Going to School

Most of your training will be done in your home or yard, where your dog can concentrate on the lessons instead of new surroundings. But obedience is pretty useless if it only works at home. Once your dog learns a task, you can take her to slightly more distracting places. One of the most distracting, but useful, places to go is training classes.

Training classes are filled with people who share many of your same interests. They're a great place to learn about dogs, share your dog's latest cute story with people who actually think it's cute, and meet a lot of really nice people. If you take the plunge into competition, classes are a place to celebrate wins and to laugh about failures.

A class, with its many distractions, is no place to teach your dog something new. Your dog's training should always be done at home. Use the class to practice, perfect, and troubleshoot. Class is also the place where your dog gets to show all her new friends just how smart she is.

Sometimes, your Pit will be the star pupil. Other times, you'll feel like your dog is the class dunce. If you have a particularly unruly dog, your goal may be to have your dog stand calmly beside you at the end of the course. Each dog will progress at her own pace; every dog will improve. Many dogs profit from repeating the same class, using the first time through as a warm-up.

Not all training classes are created equal, and some should never have been created at all. To find a good one, ask someone with a well-trained dog — preferably a Pit Bull — where they attend class. Talk to the instructor and get an idea about his or her experience with Pit Bulls. Will your dog be discriminated against? Most experienced instructors are careful about safety, so some safety precautions should be applauded. Just make sure they apply to all the dogs equally. Most experienced instructors also know how good Pit Bulls can be at obedience with the right training. Ask what techniques are used in class. If possible, sit in on

the class. If the class is still using outdated yank and jerk methods, look elsewhere. If you are ever in a class and you're asked to do something to your dog that you don't feel comfortable doing, just say no. Your friend's well-being is worth too much.

Getting the Right Stuff

You can go out and spend a few hundred dollars on a radio-controlled collar, but your dog won't learn any more than if you used an old rope. The secret isn't the tools; it's the trainer. Still, having the right tools can make things go a bit easier. Besides, they make you look like you know what you're doing.

Basic training equipment usually includes a short (6-foot) *lead* (another term for a leash), a long (about 20-foot) lightweight lead, and a collar. Traditionally, a slip collar has been used; most trainers now prefer a buckle collar and many are finding that the halter-type collars are best for Pit Bulls. Your choice will depend on how well you can control your dog — not on what collars your friends are using. If you can control your dog on a buckle collar, great. But if your dog is pulling you around, you're better off using a slip collar instead.



REMEMBER A slip collar is not for choking! It has two advantages over a buckle collar:

- » It can't slip over your dog's head.
- » If your dog is pulling, you may gain some control by allowing her to pull ahead momentarily and then correct her with a *very* gentle snap and immediate release. **Note:** This is an aversive technique, and as I mention earlier, it's not fair to use it before you've used rewards to show your dog what you want.



REMEMBER If you're pulling the collar tight for more than a second, you're using it wrong. It's not for you to get in a pulling contest with your dog (because your dog will win). A Pit Bull's neck muscles are thick enough that all they need do is tense up and the slip collar will have little effect. If you place the collar just behind the ears, in that little notch where the head and neck join, it'll have more of an effect. Place the slip collar on the dog so that the ring that has the lead attached to it comes up around the left side of the dog's neck and through the other ring. If the collar is put on backward, it won't release itself after being tightened (because you'll be on the right side of your dog for most training).

Many trainers object to the use of slip collars because they feel they're punitive. Used correctly, a slip collar should be considered a safety item that allows you a little more control if needed. It should never be considered a means to punish your dog, but it *is* an aversive that comes into play if the dog continues to pull or is otherwise out of control.



WARNING Never leave a slip collar on a dog! They can get caught on doorknobs, fence posts, branches, and even other dogs' jaws while playing, with dire consequences.

Starting Basic Training

It's never too early or too late to start the education of your Pit Bull. If you're training a very young Pit Bull, train her for even shorter time periods than you would an adult. By the time your Pit Bull reaches six months of age, she should know "Sit," "Down," "Stay," "Come," and "Heel."

I demonstrate how easy training can be by training an imaginary pup named Sweetlips.



TIP

A common problem when training any dog is that the dog's attention is elsewhere. You can teach your dog to pay attention to you by teaching her the "Watch me" command. Say "Sweetlips, watch me," and when she looks in your direction, give her a treat or other reward. Gradually require Sweetlips to look at you for longer and longer periods before rewarding her. Teach "Watch me" before going on to the other commands.

Coming to terms

If your dog knows only one command, that command should be to come to you when called. Coming when called is more than a cute trick; it can save your dog's life. You never know when your dog can slip out of the door or escape from her collar. Being able to call her back to you is imperative.

Sweetlips probably already knows how to come; after all, she comes when she sees you with the food bowl, the leash, or a favorite toy. You may have even used the word "Come" to get her attention; if so, you have a head start. You want her to respond to "Sweetlips, come" with the same enthusiasm she has for her supper. In other words, "Come" should always be associated with good things. That means *never*, no matter what, call your dog to you in order to reprimand her.

Think about what excites your Pit Bull and makes her run to you. For most young Pit Bulls, chasing after you is one of the grandest games ever invented. Tugging on a toy is another. And, of course, most young Pit Bulls jump at the chance to gobble up a special treat. Use these urges to your advantage when you teach your Pit Bull to respond to "Come."

The best time to start training is when your Pit Bull is a young puppy, but it's never too late. You will need a helper and an enclosed area — a hallway is perfect for a very young pup. Have your helper gently restrain the puppy, while you back away and entice her. Do whatever it takes to make Sweetlips come to you: Ask Sweetlips if she wants a cookie, wave a treat or a favorite toy, even crawl on your hands and knees. The point

is to get her attention and to get her struggling to get away from your helper so that she can get to you. Only at this point should you call out “Sweetlips, come!” with great enthusiasm, at the same time turning around and running away. Your helper immediately releases Sweetlips. Allow her to catch up to you. Reward her by playing for a second, then kneel down and give her the special treat. Repeat this exercise several times a day, gradually increasing the distance that the puppy has to travel and taking care never to practice past the time when your pup begins to tire of the game. Always keep up a jolly attitude and make the pup feel lucky to be part of such wonderful fun.

Once your puppy has learned the meaning of “Come,” move your training outdoors. With the pup on a six-foot leash, enthusiastically call “Sweetlips, come!” Quickly run away. When she reaches you, praise and reward. If she ignores you for more than a second, gently tug on the lead to get her attention. Don’t snap the lead or drag her — that doesn’t teach her anything positive. A simple reminder should suffice.

Your dog should understand that responding to “Come” can’t be put off until she feels like coming. The longer you separate the tug from the command, the harder it is for your pup to relate the two, and, in the long run, the harder the training is on the youngster. After the tug, be sure to run backward and make the pup think that it’s all part of a grand game.

Next, attach a longer line to Sweetlips. Allow her to meander about, and in the midst of her investigations, call, run backward, and reward. After a few repetitions, drop the long line, let her mosey around a bit, and then call. If she begins to come, run away and let her chase you as part of the game. If she doesn’t come, pick up the line and give a tug, and then run away and reward as usual.



TIP

If, at any time, Sweetlips runs the *other* way, don’t chase her. The only game a Pit Bull likes more than chasing you is being chased by you. She will always win. Chase the line (not the dog), grab it, give it a tug, then run the other way.

As your dog becomes more reliable, you should begin to practice (still using the long line) in the presence of distractions such as other leashed dogs, unfamiliar people, cats, and cars. Don't let the dog drag the line the way you've been practicing. Hold on just in case the distractions prove too enticing.

Some dogs develop a habit of dancing around just out of reach, considering your futile grabs to be another part of this wonderful game. You can prevent this habit by requiring your dog to allow you to hold her by the collar before you reward her. Eventually, you may even want to have her sit in front of you before you reward her — just remember to keep it fun.

This may seem like a lot of work to teach a simple command that your dog can almost teach herself, but following this system, in the long run, saves you a lot of wasted time and perhaps a lot of grief. Besides, it should be fun for you too, not just your dog!



WARNING Never have your dog come to you and then scold her for something she's done. In her mind, she's being scolded for coming, not for any earlier misdeed. Talk about mixed messages! Nor should you call your dog to you only at the end of an off-leash walk. You don't want her to associate coming to you with relinquishing her freedom. Call her to you several times during the walk, reward and praise her, and then send her back out to play. (Always keep in mind that your dog shouldn't be off-leash anywhere that's not completely safe.)

Sitting bull

“Sit” is the mother of all dog commands, and with good reason. It's a simple way of controlling your dog. It's easy to teach. Plus, a Pit looks so cute and innocent when she sits.

The easiest way to teach “Sit” is to stand in front of your pup and hold a treat just above her eye level. Say “Sit” and then move the treat toward

her until it is slightly behind and above her eyes. You may have to keep a hand on her rump to prevent her from jumping up. If she backs up instead of sitting down, place her rear against a wall. When she begins to look up and bend her hind legs, say “Good!” (or click the clicker) then offer the treat. Repeat this, requiring her to bend her legs more and more until she must be sitting before receiving the “Good!” and the grub.



TIP Teach stationary exercises, like “Sit,” “Down,” and “Stay,” on a raised surface. Using a raised surface allows you to have eye contact with your dog and gives you a better view point from which to help your dog learn. It also helps keep your little one from being distracted and taking off to go play. One other tip for these stationary commands: Don’t precede them with your dog’s name. When your dog hears her name, she has a tendency to jump up in anticipation — defeating the whole purpose of the command!

Staying power

You may be able to get your dog to sit — but then she bounces back up once you’ve rewarded her. Require her to remain sitting for increasingly longer times before giving the reward. You can also teach “Stay,” which is another very handy command for your dog to know.

A dangerous habit that many dogs have is to bolt through open doors, whether from the house into the outdoors or from a car. Teach your dog to sit and stay until you give the release signal. Only then can she walk through the door or exit the car.

Have your dog sit and then say “Stay” in a soothing voice. If your dog attempts to get up or lie down, gently but instantly place her back into position. Work up to a few seconds, praise and give a treat, and then give a release word (“Okay!”).

Work up to longer times, but don’t ask a young puppy to stay longer than 30 seconds. The object is not to push your dog to the limit, but to let her succeed. To do this, you must be very patient and you must increase your

times and distances in very small increments. Finally, practice, with the dog on-leash, by the front door or in the car. For a reward, take your dog for a walk!



WARNING Staring into your dog's eyes as if hypnotizing her to stay is tempting, but this really will have the opposite effect! Staring is perceived by the dog as a threat and can be intimidating. The dog may squirm out of position and come to you, her leader!

Learning ups and downs

When you need your Pit Bull to stay in one place for a long time, you can't expect her to sit or stand. This situation is when "Down" really comes in handy.

Begin teaching "Down" with the dog in the sitting position. Say "Down" and then show her a treat and move it below her nose toward the ground. If she's on a raised surface, you can move it below paw level. If she reaches down to get it, give it to her. Repeat, requiring her to reach farther down (without lifting her rear from the ground) until she eventually has to lower her elbows to the ground. Practice "Down-Stay" just as you did "Sit-Stay."

Walking well-heeled

Walking nicely beside you on a leash is another essential skill your Pit Bull will need. If walking on a leash is a new experience for Sweetlips, she may freeze in her tracks once she discovers her freedom is being violated. In this case, don't simply drag her along. Instead, coax her a few steps at a time with food. When she follows you, praise and reward. Doing so helps her to realize that following you while walking on-leash pays off.

When your pup is prancing alongside, it's time to ask a little more of her. Even if you have no intention of teaching a perfect competition "Heel," you need to teach the cue as a way of letting your Pit Bull know it's your turn to be the leader.

Have your Pit Bull sit in the heel position; that is, on your left side with her neck next to and parallel with your leg. Lining up your feet and your dog's front feet is close enough. Say "Sweetlips, heel," step off with your left foot first, and lure her into walking beside you. During your first few practice sessions, keep her on a short lead, praising and occasionally rewarding her with treats for walking in heel position. The traditional method of letting the dog lunge to the end of the lead and then snapping her back is unfair and no way to nurture a trusting relationship, much less a happy heeler!

If your Pit Bull still forges ahead after you've shown her what's expected, just stop. Stand like a tree until she isn't pulling; then start off again, quickly rewarding her when she hits heel position and, of course, isn't pulling. She'll eventually figure out that the only way she gets to go where she wants is to quit pulling!

As you progress, you'll want to add some right, left, and about-faces to your walks. Also try walking at all different speeds. Then practice in different areas (still always on-leash) and around different distractions. You can teach your Pit Bull to sit every time you stop, but unless you want a competition-quality heel, just stopping by your side is good enough. Vary your routine to combat boredom, and keep training sessions short. Make your turns and speed changes a bit less predictable to keep her interested. Pit Bulls love a challenge! Be sure to give the "Okay" before allowing your dog to sniff, forge ahead, and meander on-leash.



TIP

Keep up a pace that requires your Pit Bull to walk fairly briskly. Too slow a pace gives your dog time to sniff, look around, and in general become distracted; a brisk pace focuses the dog's attention upon you and generally aids training.

One of the many nice things about having a dog is taking her out in public. You know that you and your Pit Bull cut a sharp image as you stroll along with the dog at your side. That image is none too sharp if

your dog is dragging you along behind her as she visits every fire hydrant in sight. Not only that, but your dog will be perceived as a menace and you will be exhausted by the end of what should have been a pleasurable walk if you don't teach your dog "Heel." Walking alongside of you on-leash may not come naturally to your Pit Bull, but it can come easily.

Trying Every Trick in the Book

The only problem with basic training skills is that they don't exactly astound your friends. For that, you need something flashy — some incredible feat of intelligence and dexterity. You need a dog trick. Try the standards: "Roll over," "Play dead," "Catch," "Shake hands," and "Speak." All these tricks are easy to teach, with the help of the same training concepts outlined in the basic training section.

- » **"Roll over":** Teach your dog to roll over by telling Sweetlips to lie down, and then saying "Roll Over" and luring the dog over on her side with a treat. Once she's reliably rolling on her side, use the treat to guide her onto her back. Then guide her the rest of the way, eventually giving the treat only when she's rolled all the way over.
- » **"Play dead":** Teach your dog to play dead by teaching your dog to lie down from a standing position. You can do this by guiding her with a treat. Require her to drop quickly in order to get the reward. Then lure her over on her side, requiring her to stay down for longer periods before getting the reward. Getting the head down is the hard part. You can try placing the reward on the floor and not giving it unless she places her head down, but you may have to use your hand for a little extra guidance.



WARNING Do not try this teaching technique with a dog who tends to be possessive of her food or toys!

- » **“Shake hands”:** Teach the shake hands trick by having your dog sit. Say “Shake” and hold a treat in your closed hand in front of your dog. Many dogs will pick up a foot to paw at your hand. These are the naturals! With other dogs, you have to give a little nudge on the leg or lure her head far to one side so that she has to lift the leg up on the opposite side. As soon as the paw leaves the ground, reward! Then require the dog to lift the leg higher and longer.
- » **“Speak”:** Teach this trick by giving your dog a treat when she barks. Then when she’s barking on her own and looking to you for a treat, say “Speak” and only reward her when she barks after the cue.
- » **“Touch”:** The Touch command is one of the most useful ones you can teach, because you can use it as the basis of many other tricks. You can teach your dog to touch with either her paw or nose, or both — just use different cues for each. Show your dog an object and place a treat under or behind the object. When your dog has to touch the object trying to reach it, reward her with the treat! Next, hold another treat in your hand and reward her with that treat instead of the “bait” treat. Finally, remove the bait treat and be ready to reward her for touching the object. You may have to point to it a few times. When your dog can “touch,” you can place the target object anywhere to create a new trick. For example, tape it to the wall above the light switch, or place it on the ground under a tap light, and use it to teach your dog to turn a light switch on and off.



REMEMBER If your dog can physically do it, you can teach your dog to do it on demand. Just use your imagination (and your patience). And have fun!



TIP

The first few things you teach your dog will be the hardest because she doesn't yet understand the game. After she's got a few commands under her belt, she'll figure out that her behaviors lead to treats, and you'll find her offering new behaviors in an effort to give you what you want. And when it's clear, she'll start adding tricks and learning commands at an amazing pace! So, don't give up just because the first ones are going slowly.



TIP

Your Pit Bull can earn titles and diplomas for the tricks she knows. The American Kennel Club (AKC), as well as an organization called Do More With Your Dog!, offer several levels of trick dog titles, some of which can be earned by submitting a video of your dog doing her stuff. Find out more at www.akc.org/sports/trick-dog and www.domorewithyourdog.com/trickdog.

Chapter 9

Going Out to the Bull Games

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Testing your dog's gameness the legal way
 - » Evaluating your dog's genius
 - » Competing in all the games that Pit Bulls play
-

Pit Bull competitions probably got their start when early butchers tried to prove to one another that their bulldog was the best. The breed was developed to its fullest when owners let their Pit Bulls fight it out in the pits. Pit Bull people, like their dogs, can be a competitive bunch. Although bull-baiting and pit fighting are no longer legal, there are plenty of humane ways of proving your Pit Bull's mettle. A few, such as most conformation shows, require your dog to be registered. Others, such as obedience, Rally, and agility, require that you register your dog but he doesn't need papers and he doesn't have to be purebred. Still others allow you to compete with no registration.

Entering competitions, winning ribbons, and earning titles gives you bragging rights, but the real worth is in the time spent with your dog, as well as the memories of those times. Make sure you don't lose sight of the real value of competition as a bonding and fun activity above all.

Pulling His Weight ... and More

Weight pulling is a favorite of Pit Bulls because they love putting their muscle power to work. The sport is becoming accepted as the best substitute for dog fighting, as it provides a legal alternative for testing gameness. *Gameness does not mean aggressiveness*. Gameness refers to the ability to continue in the face of adversity, to continue trying no

matter how difficult the task becomes. Not only is weight pulling a test of gameness, but it also tests your Pit's strength.

The dog is attached by a harness to a cart with wheels. Weight is added to the cart and the dog is asked to pull the cart a short distance. Weight pulling competitions are sponsored by several organizations, including the American Dog Breeders Association (ADBA).

Training to pull

Chances are, you've spent a good deal of time training your Pit Bull not to pull when he's on-leash. And if he's spent any time tied out (although I don't advise the practice, I acknowledge that a lot of Pit Bull owners chain their dogs), he's taught himself that pulling is useless — so the first step in training your dog to be a champion weight puller is convincing him that sometimes it's good to pull. You'll need to buy a harness for your dog. One is shown in [Figure 9-1](#). He will soon learn that when he's in harness, he's not only allowed, but also expected, to pull. You can get a custom fitted harness from one of the harness makers linked to the website of the International Weight Pull Association (IWPA; www.iwpa.net). A custom fit enables your dog to pull harder with greater comfort. You can also buy or build a cart if you want to go whole hog, but you don't have to.

As with most training and conditioning paradigms, the secret to weight training is to start slowly and avoid letting your dog fail. A dog who's used to succeeding tries to succeed. A dog who's used to failing gives up. Even if your Pit Bull is a strong dog capable of pulling you down the street, start him off with a light load. A cinderblock or tire works well. Your goal at this point is to teach him the concept of pulling when asked to do so, not to test his strength. If your dog already knows how to "Stay" and "Come" you're ahead of the game. Attach his harness to the tire, tell him to stay, walk in front of him, and say "Pull!" Encourage him to come to you. When he does, praise him lavishly. Continue to practice until you can call him from 15 feet away.



REMEMBER

Why all this attention to training? A well-trained dog understands what's being asked of him and pulls more decisively. He is less likely to injure himself because he isn't lunging against his harness. He's learned how to use his body effectively, pulling slowly, steadily, and strongly. He's developed the confidence that he's doing what is expected and that he can succeed in what you've asked him to do.



FIGURE 9-1: A Pit Bull and his weight-pulling harness.

Careful training, however, is only half the equation for producing a successful pulling dog. Your dog needs to develop his strength and stamina before tackling higher weights. Take your dog for a brisk walk while he drags a tire. Work up to a longer distance of about a mile. Once he's strutting along easily, add slightly more weight. Your dog should be conditioned using long walks with light loads before you ask him to try his first heavyweight pulls.

Add extra weight by adding additional tires or packing tires with bricks. When working with heavy weights, build up gradually. Remember: The heavier the weight, the shorter the distance you should ask your dog to walk. Make your dog quit while he still feels like a winner. Start with only a couple of pulls per day, and don't weight train every day. Muscles need a chance to recuperate after weight training; challenging them every day tends to break them down, not build them up.

Feed your dog a well-balanced diet that's slightly higher in protein than you would feed him if he were not working. Weight pulling is an athletic event; treat your competitor like the athlete he is.



WARNING One more type of training is in order. Your dog will have to wait for his turn in a holding area along with other dogs. He must wait politely, neither growling nor behaving aggressively toward the other dogs. And no pulling! If you cannot control him, he may be asked to leave.

The ADBA, United Kennel Club (UKC), and the IWPA all offer weight-pulling competitions your Pit Bull can enter. They separate the contestants into classes determined by weight — your featherweight has as good a chance as a heavyweight. The organizations have slightly different rules, so know what they are before you enter. Those run by the ADBA, for example, are more forgiving for novice teams that may need more encouragement in the form of treats or toys.

An IWPA weight pull differs from an ADBA weight pull in several respects. The handler can't entice the dog with toys or even stand right in front of the dog. Instead, the handler must stay behind the front of the cart or behind the finish line. Whereas two handlers are allowed at an ADBA pull, only one is allowed at an IWPA pull. The dog may begin a pull with as much as one foot of slack in the line at an ADBA pull; at an IWPA pull only enough slack is allowed to prevent the dog from accidentally moving the cart before the start. The dog must pull the weight 16 feet in 60 seconds.

Becoming a S.T.A.R.

Of course your puppy is a star! Cute, talented, and photogenic! But can she take direction? The American Kennel Club (AKC) S.T.A.R. Puppy program rewards young stars. (S.T.A.R stands for socialization, training, activity, and responsibility, and you may notice these traits are as much about you as they are about your starlet.) You'll be asked to maintain your puppy's health records, attend at least six puppy classes, have identification for your puppy, give your puppy exercise and play, and report other responsible activities. Your puppy will demonstrate the following:

- » He's not aggressive toward people or other puppies.
- » He'll tolerate a collar or harness.
- » He'll let you hold or hug him.
- » He'll let you take a treat or toy away from him.
- » He'll let somebody else pet him.
- » He'll walk on a leash for a short distance.
- » He'll come when called from a short distance
- » He'll perform other simple puppy exercises.

You can find more information at www.akc.org/products-services/training-programs/canine-good-citizen/akc-star-puppy/.

Being a Good Citizen

Maybe your dog doesn't have a future in politics, but you never know ... and regardless, the first step is to become a good citizen. The AKC offers the Canine Good Citizen (CGC) title for dogs who demonstrate that they can behave in public. To earn the title, your dog will need to:

- » Walk nicely on-leash.

- » Behave in a calm, non-aggressive manner when walking through a crowd or when somebody greets you.
- » Allow a stranger to touch him.
- » Behave himself when you go out of sight.
- » Sit or lie down on command, and then stay and come on command, all while on a long line.

More advanced versions of this title, such as the Canine Good Citizen Advanced (CGCA) and Canine Good Citizen Urban (CGCU), are available, in which he'll need to ignore food or work in an urban environment. You can find out more at www.akc.org/products-services/training-programs/canine-good-citizen/.

The AKC also offers a Farm Dog Certified (FDC) title, which basically asks your dog to be a good citizen around livestock and to accept all the sights and sounds of farm life. You can find out more at www.akc.org/expert-advice/news/farm-dog-certified-test/.

Staying in Step with Obedience and Rally

Think your Pit Bull's gifted? What to prove it? You don't have to send your dog to graduate school to adorn his name with degrees. Rally and Obedience trials are your chance to earn titles that attest to your dog's genius. You just need to teach your dog some simple exercises (and then teach him some really hard ones).

I suggest starting with Rally. Obedience is pretty regimented and only allows you to talk to your dog between exercises, or to give one command, with no extra cues from your hands or body. Rally is a more realistic version of how you interact with your dog in everyday life. You can pat your leg, use your hand (but not treats) to lure him around, repeat commands, and praise him throughout. You'll follow a preset course with signs telling you to heel, go fast, lie down, about-turn, sit, come,

circle, and so on. The lowest level is on-leash, but higher levels have harder exercises and are done off-leash.

When your Pit Bull has proven he's a brainiac, you may want to move on to Obedience. The lowest level, Beginner Novice, is a little harder than Rally Novice, but the next level requires your dog to heel off-leash, among other things. Even higher levels include retrieving over jumps, signal exercises, and scent discrimination.

You can teach the exercises at home, but you should also enroll in a good competition-centered Obedience class. Although most classes are aimed at AKC trials, just a few modifications are needed to train your dog for United Kennel Club (UKC) trials. Classes are a valuable source of training advice and encouragement from people who are experienced Obedience competitors. They provide an environment filled with distractions — similar to the environment that you'll encounter at an actual trial. And perhaps most of all, they provide a ready source of shoulders to cry on for the all those trials you should have passed but somehow didn't!



REMEMBER The purpose of Obedience and Rally trials is not to show how you can dominate your dog and have him obey your every word. Rather, it's to demonstrate teamwork while performing certain progressively more difficult exercises. A happy Pit Bull who makes a few errors should be preferred to a cringing dog who goes through the exercises error-free.

Unless both you and your Pit Bull are prodigies, expect to fail a few trials. Failing a trial, in the grand scheme, is an insignificant event. Your dog will forgive you for the times it was your fault; be sure that you can do the same. Don't let a ribbon or a few points become more important than a trusting relationship with your companion. The UKC awards four Obedience titles: Companion Dog (U-CD), Companion Dog Excellent (U-CDX), Utility Dog (U-UD), and Obedience Champion (U-OCH). Titles are awarded after a dog qualifies at three trials, which means

passing each exercise while getting at least 170 total points out of 200 possible points.

Pit Bulls may not seem like obedience whiz dogs at first glance, but once you see a good one in action you'll stand in awe at their ability.

Unfortunately, too many Pit Bulls are never given the chance to prove that their brains equal their brawn. Most dogs kept for fighting purposes were trained only for fighting, and otherwise spent their time chained away from the family. Pit Bulls are portrayed as mindless fighting machines by the media, to the extent that even Pit Bull owners didn't bother to try training them. Even some obedience classes, where they should know better, discriminate against Pit Bull students. Yet those Pit Bulls who have taken the obedience challenge have demonstrated that they can compete with the best of them. Their happy, attentive attitude makes them eager to learn the most challenging exercises. Their gameness gives them the fortitude to keep on trying, even when the lessons become frustrating. Their physique gives them the stamina to keep practicing when other dogs have fallen by the wayside. The truth is, Pit Bulls almost have an unfair advantage in Obedience trials.

What are you waiting for? Even if you turn up your nose at the idea of pursuing titles with your dog, the competitions are fun and the training brings you and your Pit Bull even closer together.

Overcoming Obstacles

For all of their brawn, Pit Bulls are amazingly agile. Not surprisingly, they excel at the sport of agility! Agility (the sport, not the attribute) also puts to good use the Pit Bull's never-ending quest for a challenging game. In the sport, dogs face an obstacle course they run through as fast as possible, while jumping, balancing, climbing, weaving, running through tunnels, and having lots of fun.

In competition, various obstacles are arranged in various configurations that vary from trial to trial. Handlers can give unlimited commands, but they can't touch the obstacles or the dog. Points are lost for refusing an

obstacle, knocking down a jump, missing a contact zone, taking obstacles out of sequence, and exceeding the allotted time limit.

The obstacles vary depending on the type of agility competition you and your dog enter, but can include jumping over high and broad jumps, going through tunnels, walking over a teeter totter, traversing bridges, and weaving through poles. The height of the jumps are adjusted according to the height of your dog at the withers.

Optimally you should go to agility classes, because this sport takes a lot of coaching and expertise to do really well. But you can start working on some of the fundamentals at home. Entice your dog to walk through a tunnel made of sheets draped over chairs; guide him with treats so that he walks through two parallel lines of plungers (you'll gradually move the two lines closer to being just one line so he has to weave between them); get your dog comfortable with walking on a wide, raised board; teach him to jump through a tire and over a hurdle. Do these things with him working both on your right and left side. Make sure that he knows the basic obedience commands ("Sit," "Down," "Come," and "Stay") and make sure that he's comfortable and controllable around other dogs.

Remember that agility training is for agile dogs, and agile dogs are athletic dogs! Don't think you can have your Pit Bull waddle into an agility competition. You don't want to hold your breath as he walks on a plank, hoping that it won't break. You need to condition your Pit Bull like the athlete he is. You also need to have a vet check his health beforehand, to make sure that your dog isn't dysplastic, arthritic, or visually impaired.



WARNING High jumping and vigorous weaving can impose undue stress on immature bones. These activities should be left until adulthood.

Several organizations, including the UKC, AKC, United States Dog Agility Association (USDAA), Canine Performance Events (CPE), and North American Dog Agility Council (NADAC), offer agility competitions.

Following His Nose

Have you ever thought your dog could be a man trailer? Tracking trials give him the chance to follow your scent. The AKC offers several levels of tracking trials and titles.

The younger your Pit is when you teach him to follow his nose, the easier your training is. One way to train your Pit Bull to track is to drop little treats along your trail as you walk, and then let the dog follow along your trail and find them. The dog will soon learn that he can find treats simply by following your trail. As training progresses, the treats get dropped farther and farther apart, until eventually only one big reward waits at the end of the trail. Another way to train is to hide from your dog and have a helper release him to go find you. Once you've taught your dog to follow his nose, you're on the right track to a tracking title. Your dog should wear a harness when tracking — he's expected to pull you along behind him without guidance from you.

Maybe playing detective is more your Pit's calling. After all, several Pit Bulls are now working as narcotics and contraband detection dogs for various police agencies. You can train your dog to detect various hidden scents and demonstrate his talent in nosework competitions. The UKC, National Association of Canine Scent Work (NACSW), Sporting Detection Dogs Association, and United States Canine Scent Sports (USCSS) all offer slightly different nosework competitions.

Yet another sport that relies on your dog's scenting ability is Barn Hunt, in which your dog searches out hidden rats (protected in a tube) amongst piled hay bales. Check out the Barn Hunt Association at

www.barnhunt.com.

Getting a Grip on Schutzhund

Although Pit Bulls aren't the first breed that comes to mind when the topic of Schutzhund training comes up, they are capable of doing well in Schutzhund. Schutzhund (which means *protection dog* in German) was

developed primarily to test German protection breeds in tracking, obedience, and protection.

A Schutzhund dog must show courage — holding his grip on the subject even when the subject deals him a few blows with a stick. Pit Bulls define courageous, so they seldom have problems with this. A Schutzhund dog must also have gripping power, enabling him to hold on despite the subject's attempts to be freed. Pit Bulls are known for their grip. A Schutzhund dog must be obedient. Pit Bulls are intelligent and eager to please.

The importance of finding an experienced instructor — who emphasizes obedience and dog control — cannot be overemphasized. It's best if the instructor has experience training Pit Bulls, as the techniques that work with the more popular Schutzhund breeds often don't work with Pit Bulls. For example, compared to other Schutzhund breeds, many Pit Bulls are more reluctant to bite a human. (Don't worry: The people being bitten wear a special padded sleeve that teeth can't go through.)

Several levels of Schutzhund competition are offered, progressing in difficulty from Schutzhund One (SCH I) on to Schutzhund Two (SCH II) and Three (SCH III). Several organizations offer Schutzhund competition, but some only allow American Staffordshire Terriers (or require that you label your APBT as an AmStaff), and some don't allow Pit Bulls to compete.

The sport of Schutzhund is controversial in America because many people perceive it as attack dog training. Training a controversial breed, such as the Pit Bull, in this controversial sport is something to be wary of. Many Pit Bull owners worry that the image of a Pit Bull biting a person in protective garb will further the image of the Pit Bull as a vicious dog. Those who train their Pit Bulls in Schutzhund contend that the high degree of responsiveness necessary for these dogs to compete should give the opposite impression: that of a highly trained dog who can be called off an attack. This is not a sport you tackle halfway, or because you think it would be macho to have an attack-trained Pit Bull.



WARNING One important fact: Attack or protection training without obedience training is not Schutzhund! It's a dangerous imitation, and you're better off not to train your Pit Bull at all than to train him only partially in Schutzhund.

Rounding Up a Herding Title

The idea of a Pit Bull working as a herding dog may seem odd at first, but recall that one of the Pit Bull's first jobs was as a stock dog, assigned the task of keeping unruly bulls marching to slaughter. Still, don't expect to see a Pit Bull at one of the Scottish herding trials, where Border Collies put sheep through a complex series of maneuvers. Pit Bulls work best when confronted with unruly stock. However, some Pit Bulls have earned herding titles with a variety of animals, including cattle, sheep, and even ducks.

Training a dog to herd takes a lot of work. If you think your Pit Bull may have potential, find somebody with stock who can show you the ropes. See if your Pit Bull can earn the entry-level title of Herding Certified, which means the dog moves to gather or drive the stock without attempting to attack or scatter them. A variety of more advanced titles are available from the American Herding Breed Association.

Taking a Flying Leap

The sport of dock diving requires a dog to barrel down a platform, leap off the end, and fly through the air with reckless abandon after a thrown or hanging toy, landing with a splash in the pool below. Sound like any breed you know?

Dogs are judged by how far they leap, and although Pit Bulls aren't the biggest jumpers, they *are* among the most determined. Ideally, you teach this sport by having your dog run into the water after a toy by way of a ramp that enters the water, and then gradually raise the end of the ramp

so he's jumping gradually greater distances to the water level. Have your dog wear a swim vest so he's not concerned about sinking.

Several organizations hold dock-diving events. Events include both distance and height competitions. Check out the North American Diving Dogs (NADD), Splash Dogs, Dock Dogs, and Ultimate Air Dogs.

Racing the Clock

Is your Pit Bull a closet Greyhound? If so, he can chase a lure zigzagging around a field at Coursing Ability Tests (CATs), or he can run a timed 100-yard sprint at a FastCAT, both sponsored by the AKC. The UKC and the American Sighthound Field Association also offer events where Pit Bulls can chase the plastic "bunny" (a white plastic garbage bag on the end of a very long string). You can practice at home by attaching a toy or garbage bag to a string and then to the end of a horse lunge whip. Jerk it around in an erratic circle and try to keep it away from your dog. This is also a great way to exercise your dog while on a trip.

Part 4

Keeping Your Pit Bull Healthy

IN THIS PART ...

Find out what to feed your Pit to keep her healthy for the long haul.

Help your Pit Bull look his best.

Prevent common diseases and parasites and know when to call the vet.

Know what to do if your dog's symptoms are worrisome.

Be prepared for emergencies.

Help your Pit Bull age gracefully.

Chapter 10

Feeding a Bottomless Pit

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Walking down the pet food aisle
 - » Avoiding foods that are bad for dogs
 - » Getting the scoop on natural diets
 - » Reading the label
 - » Deciding when to feed your dog
 - » Making sure your dog has enough water
-

The Pit Bull can be a great animal. Potentially, she has a powerful physique, an energetic psyche, and surprising longevity. One of the factors that influences whether your Pit Bull can reach her full potential is the food that you place in front of her. The fact that most dogs are usually fed one type of food makes choosing that food even more important and intimidating. All it takes is one dizzying trip through the dog food section of a pet store or an online conversation about the best food to feed to leave you utterly baffled and feeling like the worst dog owner ever created. Are the cheap ones really poisoning your dog? Are the expensive ones really providing better nutrition via bee wings, armadillo milk, or whatever other esoteric ingredients have convinced you to spend money like a drunken sailor on that precious bag of grub?

Before you become paralyzed with indecision, keep in mind that dog nutritionists have done most of the work for you, and that as long as your food passes some basic guidelines it will be adequate to sustain your dog's life. It may not make him bloom with condition, however. For that, you do need to do a little investigating.

Starting with Dry or Moist Foods

Some people assume dogs should eat only meat. But dogs are actually omnivorous, meaning their nutritional needs can best be met by a diet derived from both animals and plants. Most dogs do love meat, but a balanced meal should combine both meat and plant-based nutrients.

Dry food (containing about 10 percent moisture) is the most popular, economical, and possibly healthy form of dog food. It's also the least enticing. Semi-moist foods (with about 30 percent moisture) contain high levels of sugar — used as a preservative. They are tasty, convenient, and very handy for traveling, but are not an optimal nutritional choice as a regular diet. Canned food has a high moisture content (about 75 percent), which helps to make it tasty, but the high moisture content also makes canned food comparatively expensive, because you are, in essence, paying for water as well as nutrients. Frozen foods combine healthy ingredients and great taste, but they may not come from companies able to completely test their foods and they tend to be expensive. Raw and homemade diets are the most labor intensive and the most controversial.

The Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) has recommended minimal nutrient levels for dogs based upon controlled feeding studies. Unless you are a nutritionist, the chance of your cooking up a homemade diet that meets these exacting standards is remote. So the first rule is to select a food that states on the label not only that it meets the requirements set by the AAFCO, but also that it has been tested in feeding trials.

Feed a high-quality food from a name-brand company. Avoid food that's been sitting on the shelf for long periods or that has holes in the bag or grease on the bag. Use your common sense and skip over the dog food that's covered with webs or tiny moths.



REMEMBER Always strive to buy and use only the freshest food available.

Dry food loses nutrients as it sits, and the fat can become rancid.

Good taste counts! Mealtime is a highlight of most dogs' days, so it only seems fair to try and offer Fido a yummy meal as well as a nutritious one. But beware of one phenomenon that I've been burned by too many times: Dogs often seem to love a new food when it's first offered to them. You go to the store, buy a huge bag, and the dog suddenly seems to lose interest — the novelty's worn off! Another reason (freshness is the first) to not buy the largest bags of dog food that you can find.

Although you shouldn't devise your own home-cooked diets, you can prepare nutritious meals at home for your dog if you do some research first. Many balanced diets are available that you can use as guides; just be sure to examine the credentials of the diet's creator.

Avoid feeding the following:

- » Chicken, pork, lamb, or fish bones. These can be swallowed and their sharp ends can pierce the stomach or intestinal walls.
- » Any bone that can be swallowed whole. Swallowing a bone can cause choking or intestinal blockage.
- » Any cooked bone. Cooked bones tend to break and splinter.
- » Mineral supplements (unless advised to do so by your veterinarian).
- » Chocolate. It contains theobromine, which is poisonous to dogs.
- » Onions. Onions can cause red blood cells to break down, sometimes causing serious illness in dogs that eat them.
- » Xylitol. This artificial sweetener is deadly to dogs and can be found in many products you'd never expect to find it in.
- » Alcohol

AVOIDING BLOAT

Bloat is a life-threatening emergency in which gas and fluid become trapped in the stomach. It is most common in large, deep-chested breeds. In the most thorough study of bloat to date, several factors affecting bloat emerged. Dogs who are fearful, eat fast, and eat only one meal a day are more likely to bloat. Stress seems to precipitate a bloating episode. Dogs with stable temperaments and dogs who eat some canned food and table scraps are less likely to bloat. Genetics plays a large factor. Dogs whose close relatives have bloated are more likely to bloat themselves.

To be on the safe side, you should

- Feed a couple of small meals instead of one large meal.
- Include some canned food or table scraps.
- Not allow the dog to gulp food. Special bowls are available to slow down how fast your dog can eat.
- Not allow your dog to be stressed around his mealtime.
- Restrict water for an hour after eating.
- Discourage your dog from running or jumping for an hour after eating.
- Pre-moisten food, especially foods that expand when moistened.



TIP

Some dogs are allergic to certain dog food ingredients, usually one of the protein sources such as chicken. Note, however, that far fewer dogs suffer from food allergies than most people believe. If you suspect an allergy, try switching to a food with a protein source your dog has never had before. Feed the new food for at least two weeks before you can be sure whether it worked or not. Your veterinarian can work with you to suggest various foods, and even foods that are specifically made for allergic dogs.

Considering Raw

Raw food diets have gained a lot of attention and many supporters. These diets advocate feeding dogs whole raw animal carcasses, particularly chicken, in order to simulate the foods that dogs have been eating for thousands of years. To feed raw the right way, you need to follow tested recipes and mix up raw meat, vegetables, vitamins, and

minerals. Unfortunately, many people skip the work and just toss their dogs some raw chicken backs. Analyses have shown that such a diet is not balanced and that, unfortunately, most raw and homemade diets tend to be unbalanced.

Proponents claim good health, clean teeth, and economical food bills follow in the wake of raw diets. But keep in mind that controlled studies on the long-term health of dogs fed a raw diet have yet to be published.

UNDERSTANDING THE DILATED CARDIOMYOPATHY SCARE

Around 2018, many more dogs than usual were being diagnosed with dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM), a disease of the heart muscle. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) investigated and found many of these dogs were being fed grain-free diets from smaller boutique dog food companies. The foods often contained somewhat odd but healthy-sounding ingredients not often found in mainstream foods. One culprit was thought to be a large percentage of legumes without a sufficient level of greater protein to make up for them, but in truth, as of this writing, nobody knows. The advice was to feed foods from larger dog food companies that employed dog testing rather than just ingredient testing. **Remember:** There's nothing wrong with grain, so don't go out of your way to avoid it.

Detractors point out that, even though raw diets are similar to what wolves ate in the wild, dogs are no longer wolves and haven't had to live off the land for thousands of generations. In addition, wolves eat whole carcasses and forage for non-meat foods. Detractors worry that these diets may have safety problems because of the possibility of salmonella and *E. coli* associated with meat processing. (Dogs can get salmonella and *E. coli* poisoning, but they are more resistant to them than are humans.) If you decide to go ahead and feed raw, avoid feeding raw meat to dogs with compromised immune systems and try to find meat that is fresh and locally processed. Searing the outside of it will reduce the number of germs, which tend to be on the outer surface.

Boning Up on Nutrition

A good rule to follow is that three or four of the first six ingredients of a dog food should be animal derived. These tend to be tastier and more highly digestible than plant-based ingredients; more highly digestible foods generally mean less stool volume and less gas problems.

When comparing food labels, keep in mind that differences in moisture content make it difficult to make direct comparisons, unless you first do some calculations to equate the percentage of dry matter food. The components that vary most from one brand to another are protein and fat.

Protein provides the necessary building blocks for the growth and maintenance of bones, muscle, and coat, and for the production of infection-fighting antibodies. The quality of protein is as important as the quantity of protein. Meat-derived protein is more highly digestible than plant-derived protein. Most Pit Bulls do fine on regular adult foods having protein levels of about 20 percent (in a dry food).

Fat is the calorie-rich component of foods, and most dogs prefer the taste of foods with higher fat content. Fat is necessary to good health, aiding in the transport of important vitamins and providing energy. Dogs who don't consume enough fat often have sparse, dry coats.

Choose a food that has a protein and fat content best suited for your dog's life stage, adjusting for any weight or health problems. Remember that prescription diets formulated for specific health problems are available.

- » Puppies, as well as pregnant and nursing mothers, need particularly high protein and somewhat higher fat levels in their diets — such as the levels found in puppy foods.
- » Stressed, highly active, or underweight dogs should be fed food with a high protein level or even puppy food.
- » Obese dogs, dogs with pancreatitis, or dogs with inflammatory bowel disease should be fed a low-fat food.
- » Older dogs, especially those with kidney problems, should be fed moderate levels of food with very high-quality protein. High protein

diets do not cause kidney failure in older dogs; but a high protein diet will do a lot of harm to a dog who's already suffering from kidney stress. So decrease the overall level of protein, but increase the quality of the protein that you offer him. Dogs with kidney disease should be fed differing amounts of protein depending on where in the disease's progression they are. They should also be fed much lower levels of phosphorous.



TIP

Introduce new foods gradually, mixing in more and more of the new food with the old, each day for several days.

One of the great mysteries of life is why the dog, a species renowned for its lead stomach and tendency to eat out of garbage cans, can develop a violently upset stomach from changing from one high-quality dog food to another. But it happens.

Eschewing the fat

The Pit Bull is an athlete and should have an athlete's body: lean and muscular. A Pit Bull in proper weight should have a slightly hourglass figure, whether viewed from above or the side. The stomach should be slightly tucked-up. There should be no roll of fat over the withers or rump. The ribs should be easily felt through a layer of muscle.

Putting your Pit Bull on a diet is hard, but you may have no choice. Obesity predisposes dogs to joint injuries and heart problems and makes many preexisting problems worse. An obese Pit Bull is hardly a Pit Bull at all! After all, she can't run, jump, and frolic with boundless energy.

Overweight Pit Bulls should be fed a high fiber, low-fat, and medium protein diet dog food. Commercially available diet foods, which supply about 15 percent fewer calories per pound, are preferable to just feeding your Pit Bull less of a fattening food. Home prepared diets are available that are both tasty and less fattening — just remember to do very careful research and ask your vet before you cook for your dieting dog.

Many people find that one of the many pleasures of dog ownership is sharing a special treat with their pet. Rather than giving up this bonding activity, substitute a low calorie alternative such as rice cakes or carrots. Keep your dog out of the kitchen or dining area at food preparation or meal times. Schedule a walk immediately following your dinner to get your dog's mind off of your leftovers — going for a walk is good for both of you.

If your dog remains overweight, seek your veterinarian's opinion. Heart disease, some endocrine disorders, such as hypothyroidism or Cushing's disease, or the early stages of diabetes can cause the appearance of obesity. A dog in whom only the stomach is enlarged, without fat around the shoulders or rump, is especially suspect and should be examined by a veterinarian. However, most fat Pit Bulls are simply fat!

Skin and bones

It's more unusual to see a skinny Pit Bull than to see an obese one. A dog that loses weight rapidly or steadily for no apparent reason should be taken to the veterinarian. A few dogs just don't gain weight well, and some are just picky eaters.

Sometimes picky eaters are created when their owners begin to spice up their food with especially tasty treats. The dog then refuses to eat unless the preferred treat is offered, and finally learns that if he refuses even that proffered treat, another even tastier enticement will be offered. Try a couple of dog food brands, but if your Pit Bull still won't eat then you may have to employ some tough love. Give your dog a good, tasty meal, but don't succumb to Pit Bull blackmail or you may be a slave to your dog's gastronomical whims for years to come.

One exception does exist: A sick or recuperating dog may have to be coaxed into eating. Cat food or a baby food with meat in it are relished by dogs and may entice a dog without an appetite to eat. You may also try cooking chicken breasts or other meat and offering that to your dog, but ask your veterinarian first.

Underweight Pit Bulls may gain weight if you feed them puppy food; add water, milk, bouillon, ground beef, or canned food and heat slightly

to increase aroma and palatability. Be cautious if you add milk, as it causes many dogs to have diarrhea. Try only a little bit at first to see how your dog reacts. Of course, once you start this gourmet treatment, you know that you're making your picky eater even pickier.

Impress your friends with this bit of dog food trivia: Dogs have most of the same taste receptors that we do, including similar sugar receptors (which explains why many have a sweet tooth). But their perception of artificial sweeteners isn't like ours — artificial sweeteners taste bitter to them. Research has shown that dogs, in general, prefer meat (not exactly earth-shaking news), and though there are many individual differences, the average dog prefers beef, pork, lamb, chicken, and horsemeat, in that order.

Feeding Time

Some people let the dog decide when to eat by making food available at all times. If you choose to let the dog self-feed, monitor her weight to be sure she's not overindulging. Leave only dry food available. Canned food spoils rapidly and becomes both unsavory and unhealthy. If your dog starts to pack on the pounds, you'll have to intervene before you have a roly-poly Pit Bull on your hands. One other drawback to letting your dog self-feed: You don't get a sense of how her appetite is fluctuating. Dramatic appetite swings may signal illness.

Feeding your dog on a schedule is normally in her best interest. Adult dogs can be fed once a day, but smaller meals twice a day are better. Very young puppies should be fed three or four times a day, on a regular schedule. Feed them as much as they care to eat in 15 minutes. When pups get a little older, from the age of three to six months, they should be fed three times daily.

Keeping Your Dog Hydrated

Water is essential for your Pit Bull's health and comfort. Let your dog drink as much as she wants. Don't just keep your dog's water bowl full

by topping it up every day. Such a habit allows algae to form along the sides of the bowl and gives bacteria a chance to multiply. Empty, scrub, and refill the water bowl daily.

If the water bowl runs dry, your dog may turn to the toilet bowl as an alternative source. In fact, you should make it a practice to keep the lid down, because many dogs view the toilet bowl as an especially deluxe watering hole! It should go without saying that drinking from the toilet is not a healthy practice — and definitely not conducive to dog kisses!

Chapter 11

Primping Your Pit Bull

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Bathing your Pit Bull the easy way
 - » Trimming your dog's nails
 - » Keeping your dog's ears and eyes healthy
 - » Brushing your dog's teeth
-

Pit Bulls don't need much primping to look their best. But good grooming isn't just important for the sake of beauty — it can also help prevent serious health problems and add to your mutual bonding experience. Grooming your Pit Bull involves more than an occasional brushing. Keeping the nails, teeth, eyes, and ears well groomed is probably more important than keeping your dog's coat in top condition. The well-groomed Pit Bull not only looks good, she feels good.

Taking Your Pit to the Cleaners

The Pit Bull beauty kit isn't very big. All you need is a natural bristle brush, which when used properly, distributes the natural oils, is easy on the skin, and feels good to the dog. A rubber nub brush, which will pull out more loose hair, is better for shedding periods. But sometimes your Pit Bull will need more than brushing. Sometimes, she'll need that ultimate of Pit Bull torture devices: a bath!

Don't wait until your Pit Bull is fully mature (and strong enough to give *you* a bath) before you introduce her to the wonders of soap and water. Start when she's little and still thinks that you have good ideas. Start your bath training with semi-baths. Use a tub of warm water, filled only to your dog's ankles. Wash only her feet during the first bath. The next bath, you might wash the rear legs. Bring some treats into the tub with

you. Unless your dog has been sprayed by a skunk or has a skin disease, there's little to be gained by deep cleaning. The trick is to make baths short and sweet.

A few things to keep in mind before you commence with full-scale bathing:

- » If you use your own tub, place a nonskid mat in the bottom of it and help your dog in and out so that she doesn't slip.
- » A hand-held sprayer is essential for indoor bathing.
- » The temperature of the water should never be too hot or too cold — it should be set so that you would be comfortable if you were taking a shower, or maybe just a bit cooler.
- » Make sure a fractious pup can't accidentally hit a knob and turn the hot water up. Keeping one hand under the spray so that you can monitor the water temperature is a good idea.



TIP

Smear peanut butter on the tub wall and allow your dog to lick it off as you bathe her. This will keep her occupied and in place.

Start by wetting the dog to the skin, leaving the head for last. You can try plugging the ears with cotton, but generally all that accomplishes is getting soggy cotton in their ears. **Beware:** Your dog will want to make sure that you, too, enjoy the benefits of the bath by shaking water all over you. Once wet (the dog, not you), apply the shampoo, again leaving the head for last. The shampoo will go a lot farther and be easier to work with if you mix it with water first. Once you've worked up a lather, start rinsing. Rinse from the head first and work your way back and down. Rinsing is a crucial step; shampoo remaining in the coat can cause dryness and itchiness. Most Pit Bulls don't require a crème rinse, but you can add a small amount if you like. It makes the hair a little softer and smoother.



TIP

To keep your dog from shaking, keep one hand clenched around the base of one ear. When you let go, stand back!

If your dog has healthy skin, any shampoo will work. But dog shampoo is the best. Dog skin has a pH of 7.5, while human skin has a pH of 5.5; bathing in a shampoo formulated for the pH of human skin can lead to scaling and irritation. Most shampoos (even people shampoos) kill fleas, but none (including flea shampoos) have any residual killing action on fleas.

No dog owner should be without one of the dog shampoos that requires no water or rinsing. These are wonderful for puppies, spot-baths, emergencies, and bathing when time does not permit a full-scale bath.

If your dog's skin isn't healthy, try a therapeutic shampoo. They are available for various skin problems:

- » Itchy skin: oatmeal-based anti-pruritic shampoos
- » Dry scaly skin: moisturizing shampoos
- » Excessive scale and dandruff: anti-seborrheic shampoos
- » Damaged skin: antimicrobial shampoos

After the bath, let her shake off the excess water and then cover her with a towel. Rub her vigorously. Don't let your dog outside on a chilly day if she's still wet from a bath. You've removed the oils from the coat and saturated her down to the skin, so she's far wetter than she would ever get by going swimming, and thus more likely to become chilled. But regardless, be prepared for a major case of the zoomies as soon as you set her free!



TIP

On hot summer days, an outdoor hose is fine. Don't bathe your dog outside on chilly days and don't bathe her outside until she's used to getting a bath.

Smelling Like a Rose

Pit Bulls tend to have little doggy odor, but many of them help things along by rolling in popular canine perfumes, such as eau de cowpie or essence of carrion. When they smell like they've rolled in something but really haven't, your dog may have a problem. Infection is a common cause of bad odor; check the mouth, ears, feet, anus, and genitals. Impacted anal sacs or other medical problems can contribute to a bad odor. Generalized bad odor can indicate a skin problem, such as seborrhea. Don't exile the dog or hold your breath; find the source and take care of the problem!



TIP

Even dogs don't like smelling like skunks. If you live in an area where your dog could come face to rear with a skunk, be prepared with the following recipe: Mix one pint of 3 percent hydrogen peroxide, $\frac{2}{3}$ cup baking soda, and one teaspoon of liquid soap or citrus-based dog shampoo with one gallon of water. Use immediately — do not store it! Wear gloves and sponge the mixture onto the dog. Leave it on the dog about five minutes, rinse, and repeat if needed. **Note:** This solution will slightly bleach dark coats (but who cares?). Vinegar douche is also reported to work well.

Debugging Your Dog

No matter how often you plead with them, some Pit Bulls are always picking up hitchhikers and bringing them home for dinner. You need to

make sure that your dog isn't providing free room and board for fleas, ticks, and mites.

Making fleas flee

How do you tell if you have a flea-bitten dog? The easiest way is to spot a flea scurrying around under the dog's coat, but that relies on chance. A better way is to use a flea comb, which has extremely fine teeth. Use it to comb your dog all over. Pay special attention to the areas around the rump, neck, and back, because these areas are deluxe flea resorts. Look for fleas caught in the comb or for flea dirt, which is a black, gritty material that is actually flea feces or digested blood. If you have any doubt as to whether you're looking at flea dirt, put some on a white paper towel and add water; flea dirt will create a reddish liquid.



WARNING Fleas crawl, bite, and suck, making your dog scratch and chew herself. They can also cause secondary problems, such as tapeworms, skin problems, and flea allergy dermatitis.

Flea control used to be a never-ending battle, and one that the fleas usually won. Advances in flea and tick control have finally put dog owners on the winning side. In any but the mildest of infestations, more effective products are well worth their higher purchase price. Remember that putting an expensive product on your dog once every month is more cost-effective than reapplying a cheap product every day.

The more effective products come as either a pill (often chewable) or a topical that is applied on the dog's back. The once-popular sprays, which typically contain permethrins, will kill fleas but tend to wear off within a day. The more effective chewables and topicals usually contain imidacloprid, fipronil, selamectin, or fluralaner; are effective for 30 to 60 days; and require a prescription from your veterinarian. For a quick flea kill with less than a day's duration, nitenpyram is the choice. And for ticks, your best bet is a tick collar containing flumethrin and imidacloprid. Avoid products listed as cholinesterase inhibitors.

Ticking off ticks

Ticks are more difficult to keep off your dog than fleas are. Tick prevention collars are available that cause the ticks to die, eventually. Fipronil flea and tick spray or liquid can also help kill the ticks after awhile. Tick collars containing flumethrin and imidacloprid are the most effective chemical warfare. Your best tool, however, is your sense of touch. Feel your dog all over for suspicious lumps; your dog will enjoy it! Ticks can be found anywhere on the dog, but most often burrow around the ears, neck, chest, and between the toes.

To remove a tick, use a tissue or tweezers. Be careful, as some tick-borne diseases can be transmitted to humans. First, soak the tick in rubbing alcohol so that it will loosen its grip. Grasp the tick as close to its head as possible, and pull slowly and steadily without twisting, trying not to leave the head in the dog. Don't yank it out — that's more likely to leave the tick's head behind. Don't squeeze the tick, as this can inject its contents into the dog. Clean the site with alcohol. Often, a bump will remain after the tick is removed, even if you got the head. It will go away with time.



WARNING Ticks can carry Rocky Mountain spotted fever, tick paralysis, Lyme disease, babesiosis, and, most commonly, tick fever (ehrlichiosis) — all very serious diseases.

Managing mange

Mange refers to skin problems caused by mites, which are microscopic parasites that live on or in the skin. These mites can cause two types of mange, both of which can make your dog miserable or unsightly. Sarcoptic mange, also called *canine scabies*, causes intense itching, often characterized by scaling of the ear tips, or by small yellow or red bumps where the mites are living. The mites prefer areas with little hair, such as the ear tips, underside of the body, the elbows, and forelegs. Note that sarcoptic mange is highly contagious and spread by direct

contact, even having a temporary effect on people. Take precautions when dealing with an infested dog.

Treatment traditionally requires repeated shampoos or dips of not only the affected dog, but also other household pets that are in contact with her. Your veterinarian can administer injections or give you daily medication that can help cure the problem faster than if you rely on just the shampoos and dips.

Demodectic mange, also called *red mange* or *demodicosis*, is not usually itchy. The *Demodex canis* mite responsible for the condition lives in the hair follicles. This same mite can be found in the follicles of most dogs; nobody knows why it begins to multiply out of control and cause disease in only some dogs. Affected dogs are often related, however, and the condition seems to be especially prone to being passed from dams to offspring. It is more common in certain breeds, including Pit Bulls. If your Pit Bull develops generalized demodectic mange, she should not be bred.

Demodectic mange is characterized by a moth-eaten appearance, most often around the eyes and lips. Most cases of demodectic mange appear in puppies, and most consist of only a few patches that often go away by themselves. But in those cases that continue to spread, or in adult-onset demodectic mange, aggressive treatment using an amitraz insecticidal dip or daily oral medication is needed. Your veterinarian will need to perform a skin scraping to confirm the diagnosis before prescribing treatment. Demodectic mange affecting the feet is also common, and can be extremely resistant to treatment. Left untreated, secondary infections can develop and the dog can become quite sick.

Cheyletiella mites live on the skin surface. Unlike other mites, they are large enough to be seen with the naked eye (although a magnifying glass is still helpful). They look like small, moving, white specks in the dog's hair near the skin, giving rise to their nickname: walking dandruff. They cause a varied degree of itchiness in their host. Many flea insecticides also kill these mites, but they are better treated by using special shampoos or dips, which must be re-administered at least four times on a

regular schedule. Your veterinarian can also give your dog an injection that can help kill the mites.

Another mite that can make your dog miserable is the ear mite, which is discussed later in this chapter.

Losing those lousy lice

Lice are not terribly common on dogs, but they can be present and cause problems. They cause itching and an unhealthy coat; some types of lice can suck so much blood that the dog can become anemic and even die. You can see lice with a magnifying glass under bright light. Treatment is with an insecticidal shampoo, repeated every few weeks.

Saving Your Dog's Skin

Skin problems make up most of the sick-dog cases a veterinarian sees. Problems can result from parasites, allergies, bacteria, fungus, endocrine disorders, or a long list of other possible causes.

Scratching the surface of allergic itching



REMEMBER Like people, many dogs can have allergic reactions to pollens or other inhaled allergens. Unlike people, they don't manifest these allergies by sneezing or wheezing. Instead, they itch. They itch around their feet, ears, eyes, and bellies. The most common sign of allergies is chewing and licking the paws, often causing the paws to be stained pink from saliva. Allergies usually first appear in young dogs and get progressively worse.

Blood tests for antibodies are much easier and less expensive than the traditional intradermal skin testing. However, blood tests aren't as accurate.



TIP

Adding omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids to the diet can help some dogs. Antihistamines can provide temporary relief. Allergy shots provide the best long-term therapy, but results may not be noticeable for several months.

Some dogs itch from food allergies. Food allergies can be difficult to distinguish from inhalant allergies. Some food allergies manifest as recurrent ear infections. They may not occur until a dog has been eating a particular ingredient for months or years. Blood tests for food allergies are not very accurate. If you suspect that your Pit Bull has food allergies, the best way to investigate is through dietary trials in which the dog is fed only certain ingredients at a time.

Flea allergy dermatitis (FAD) is the most common of all skin problems. Itchy, crusted bumps with hair loss in the region around the rump, especially at the base of the tail, result from a fleabite (actually, the flea's saliva) anywhere on the dog's body. The dog chews at herself as though nibbling on a corn cob, and scratches at her neck and sides. She can damage her skin to the point that it becomes infected. Yet she may have only a single flea on her — or none, since the bite may have occurred over a day before the allergic reaction began. For such dogs, products that require a flea to bite the dog before killing or sterilizing the flea may not be optimal, since even one flea bite can elicit an allergic reaction. Talk to your vet if your dog has ever had FAD about how best to prevent any further allergic reactions.

Pyoderma and impetigo

Pyoderma, characterized by pus-filled bumps and crusting, is another common skin disease. Impetigo is characterized by such bumps and crusting also, most often in the groin area of puppies. Both are treated with antibiotics and antibacterial shampoos.

Cooling down hot spots

A reddened, moist, itchy spot that suddenly appears is most likely a hot spot (pyotraumatic dermatitis), which arises from an itch-scratch-chew cycle that most often is caused by fleas or flea allergy. Wash the area with an oatmeal-based shampoo and prevent the dog from further chewing. Use an Elizabethan collar (otherwise known as the “cone of shame”), an old T-shirt you don’t care if he chews through, or an anti-chew preparation. Your veterinarian can also prescribe anti-inflammatory medication. As a temporary measure, you can give an allergy pill (Benadryl — ask your veterinarian about dosage). It alleviates some itching and causes drowsiness, both of which should decrease chewing.



REMEMBER Hair loss can also be caused by autoimmune or endocrine problems. Hair may be lost in a bilaterally symmetric pattern, without itching, as a result of hypothyroidism, Cushing’s syndrome, or testicular tumors.

Nailing Down Nail Care

Pit Bulls do not catch fish or climb trees with their long claws. Despite this amazing bit of animal information, many pet owners seem determined to get their dog in the record book for having the world’s longest bear claws.

Canine nails evolved to withstand traveling 20 miles or so a day. Unless your dog is a marathon runner, you’re going to need to help out a little. When you can hear the pitter-patter of clicking nails, with every step the nails are hitting the floor. When nails hit the floor, the bones of the foot spread, causing discomfort and, eventually, splayed feet and lameness. If dewclaws (the rudimentary “thumbs” on the wrists) are left untrimmed, they can get caught on things more easily and be ripped out, or actually loop around and grow into the dog’s leg. In other words, you must trim your dog’s nails every week or two to keep her healthy!

Dogs who have no experience with nail cutting assume that you're cutting off their toes and react as you might expect. You need to convince dogs from the time they're puppies that a nail trim won't hurt a bit. Begin by handling the feet and nails daily. Then start cutting the very tips of your puppy's nails every week, taking special care not to cut the quick, which is the central core of blood vessels and nerve endings. After every cut, give your dog a tiny treat. Some dogs are calmer if you hold the foot backwards, much as a horse's hoof is held when being shod. This way, your Pit Bull can't see what's going on and you can see the bottom of the nail. You should see a solid core culminating in a hollow nail. Cut the tip up to the core, but not beyond. On occasion, you will slip up and cause the nail to bleed. Apply styptic powder to the nail to stop the bleeding. If you don't have any styptic powder available, dip the nail in flour or hold it to a wet tea bag. And be more careful next time!

Going in One Ear and Cleaning Out the Other

Many people glance in their dogs' ears and assume that everything's fine if the ears aren't clogged with debris. You need to examine them more closely (see [Figure 11-1](#)). Dog ears aren't like people ears, though. Besides the obvious difference in the pinna (ear flap) shape, the dog's ear canal doesn't travel in a straight line toward the eardrum. Instead, it travels downward and then makes a sharp turn inward. Not only can you not see what's going on beyond the bend, but all sorts of ear infections can flourish in this sheltered environment. The fecund climate inside the ear canal isn't as big a problem in Pit Bulls as it is in other breeds because the ear flap, whether cropped or not, still allows plenty of ventilation to reach the canal, and because most Pit Bulls don't produce copious amounts of wax.



FIGURE 11-1: Examining an ear.

Signs of ear problems include inflammation, discharge, debris, foul odor, pain, scratching, shaking, tilting of the head, or circling to one side. Extreme pain may indicate a ruptured eardrum. Ear problems can be difficult to cure once they have become established, so early veterinary attention is crucial. Bacterial and yeast infections, ear mites or ticks, foreign bodies, inhalant allergies, seborrhea, or hypothyroidism are possible underlying problems.



WARNING Don't stick cotton swabs down in the ear canal, as they can irritate the skin and pack debris into the horizontal canal. Never use powders in the ear, which can cake, or hydrogen peroxide, which leaves the ear moist. The best recipe for disaster is to stick some ear powder in, follow with a little liquid, pack it all down with a cotton swab, allow it all to dry into a solid plug, and then just wait for a full-fledged problem to explode.

If your dog has a buildup of debris but no signs of pain, you can clean the debris out using one of the many products made for that purpose and sold in pet supply catalogs or veterinary clinics. Armed with this potion, take your dog outside. Hold the ear near its base and quickly squeeze in the ear cleaner (the more slowly you let it drip in, the more it will tickle). Now gently massage the liquid downward and squish it all around. When your dog can't stand it anymore (usually after about 15 seconds), jump back and let your dog shake it all out. You'll be glad to be outside, because dissolved earwax is not a great thing to have on your walls. You may have to repeat this step a few times. If the ear is so black with gunk that repeated rinses don't clean it right up, you have a problem that will need veterinary attention. If the ear is red, swollen, or painful do not attempt to clean it yourself. Your dog may need to be sedated for cleaning and may have a serious problem. Cleaning solutions will flush debris but will not kill mites or cure infections.

If your dog is shaking her head, scratching at her ears, and perhaps carrying her head sideways, she may be suffering from ear mites. The ear mite's signature is a dark, dry, waxy buildup resembling coffee grounds in the ear canal, usually of both ears. This material is actually dried blood mixed with earwax. If you place some of this wax on a piece of dark paper, and have very good eyes or use a magnifying glass, you may be able to see the tiny moving culprits. Many people automatically assume any ear problem is due to ear mites, but unless you actually see mites, don't treat the dog for them. You can make another problem worse.

Over-the-counter ear mite preparations can cause worse irritation, so ear mites are best treated by your veterinarian. Your veterinarian will prescribe a product such as selamectin or moxidectin/imidacloprid, which are often used against a variety of parasites. If you must treat your dog yourself, get a pyrethrin and mineral oil ear product. First flush the ear with an ear cleaning solution. Then apply the ear mite drops daily for at least a week, and possibly a month. Because these mites are also found in the dog's fur all over her body, you should also bathe the pet weekly with a pyrethrin-based shampoo, or apply a pyrethrin flea dip, powder, or spray. Separate a dog with ear mites from other pets and

wash your hands after handling her ears. Ideally, every pet in a household should be treated.

Keeping an Eye on the Bull's Eye

Unlike many breeds that are plagued with lid and retinal problems, Pit Bulls have healthy eyes. Like all dogs, however, they can have some eye problems. If these problems are ignored, they can rob your dog of her vision. So check out your dog's eyes once in a while (see [Figure 11-2](#)).



FIGURE 11-2: Giving the eyes a once-over.

Notice if your Pit Bull is squinting, avoiding light, or pawing at her eye. Squinting or tearing can be due to an irritated cornea or foreign body. Examine under the lids and flood the eye with saline solution, or use a moist cotton swab to remove any debris. If no improvement occurs after a day, have your veterinarian examine your Pit Bull.

You also need to be aware of the risk posed by glaucoma. Although avoiding light or pawing at the eyes is behavior most likely caused by a

foreign body, it can also indicate glaucoma. Glaucoma is extremely painful and is an emergency situation. An acute attack of glaucoma can lead to blindness almost overnight.



WARNING Notice if your Pit Bull's pupils react to light. In a dim room, flash a light in each eye and make sure each pupil responds. If a dog has glaucoma or brain damage, the pupils may not respond. This is another reason for a trip to the emergency vet.

Check to see if your Pit Bull has any discharge from her eyes. A watery discharge without squinting can be a symptom of allergies or a tear drainage problem. A clogged tear drainage duct can cause the tears to drain onto the face rather than the normal drainage through the nose. Your veterinarian can diagnose a drainage problem with a simple test. A gooey mucus discharge, especially if it's yellowish or greenish, indicates an infection. Prescription eyedrops are normally needed to cure it.

Notice if your dog's lenses are clear. Do this by looking through her pupils. They should look black. If they are whitish, grayish, or bluish your dog may have cataracts. Some Pit Bulls have juvenile cataracts, in which the lens develops opacities at a young age — usually before the age of six years. In some Pits, the cataracts are present at birth, but aren't visible until dog is a couple of months old. If the cataracts become too severe, they can be removed by a veterinary ophthalmologist.

When in doubt, get eye problems checked out!



TIP For contact with eye irritants, flush the eye for five minutes with water or saline solution. For injuries, cover the eye with clean gauze soaked in water or saline solution. In both cases, get immediate veterinary advice.

Keeping Your Dog Armed to the Teeth



WARNING The notion of brushing a dog's teeth is fairly new to most people. Bear in mind that the notion of people brushing their own teeth was fairly radical until recent times. Now you wouldn't dream of letting your teeth turn brown. Why should you let your dog's teeth get that way? Tooth plaque and tartar are not only unsightly, but contribute to bad breath and health problems. So keep an eye on your dog's teeth (see [Figure 11-3](#)).



FIGURE 11-3: Inspecting the teeth.

Plaque attracts bacteria and minerals, which harden into tartar, which can, in turn, cause an infection to form along the gum line. The infection can gradually work its way down the sides of the tooth until the entire

root is undermined. The tissues and bone around the tooth erode and the tooth finally falls out.

Some people feed their dogs hard dog biscuits as a means of keeping their dog's teeth clean. Dry food and hard dog biscuits, carrots, rawhide (which has its own caveats), and dental chews are helpful, but they can't do the whole job. If they did, don't you think we'd have people biscuits for our teeth?

Brushing your Pit Bull's teeth once or twice weekly (optimally daily) with a child or dog toothbrush and doggy toothpaste is the only really effective way to remove plaque. If you can't brush your Pit's teeth, your veterinarian can supply a cleansing solution for your dog's water that helps to kill plaque-forming bacteria. You may also have to ask your veterinarian to clean your dog's teeth under anesthesia as often as once a year.

Pit Bulls have tougher jaws than most dogs, but they don't have tougher teeth. Their dogged determination to hang tight to tree limbs, ropes, and toys, and to tackle objects they would be better off leaving alone tends to be bad news for their teeth. Examine your dog's teeth regularly to check for cracks and breaks. If the root is exposed, your dog may need a root canal to spare her a good deal of pain. Sometimes immediate capping can spare the tooth's root after a break or crack.

Puppy Pit Bulls require special tooth monitoring. You should check to make sure your puppy is developing correct occlusion. In a correct Pit Bull bite, the top incisors should fit snugly in front of the bottom incisors. Too large a gap between the upper and lower incisors can cause eating difficulties or result in the tongue lolling out of the mouth. In some cases, the lower canine teeth are situated too far toward the middle of the mouth, so the tooth pierces the upper palate or gum line when the mouth is closed. The offending baby teeth must be pulled for the pup's comfort. In fact, pulling some teeth can help occlusion develop properly, so ask a veterinarian's advice if your pup's teeth don't seem right.

Between four and six months of age, Pit Bull puppies will begin to shed their baby teeth and show off new permanent teeth. Often deciduous

(baby) teeth, especially the canines (fangs), are not shed, so that the permanent tooth grows in beside the baby tooth. If this condition persists for over a week, consult your veterinarian. Retained baby teeth can cause misalignment of adult teeth.



REMEMBER *Bite* is the canine term for occlusion, the way the teeth and jaws mesh when the mouth is closed. The correct Pit Bull bite is a scissors bite, in which the incisors (the small front teeth) of the upper jaw just slightly overlap in front of those of the lower jaw. In an overshot bite, the top incisors are so far in front of the lower that a gap exists between them. In an undershot bite, the upper incisors are behind the lower incisors.

You've bathed her, brushed her, debugged her, cleaned her eyes and ears, given her a pedicure, and polished her pearly whites. Now it's time to put on her best collar and leash, fix yourself up, and strut her through the neighborhood for all to admire.

Chapter 12

A Clean Bull of Health

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Recognizing signs of illness
 - » What you need in your medicine cabinet
 - » The vaccinations your dog must have
 - » The wonderful world of worms
-

Your Pit Bull can't tell you where she hurts or, sometimes, even if she hurts at all. After all, part of being a Pit Bull is ignoring pain and never letting anyone know you're hurt. To be a responsible dog owner (without financing your vet's retirement), you have to learn to read your Pit Bull and educate yourself about Pit Bull health. I don't mean learning how to perform Pit Bull brain surgery in your kitchen, but you do need to learn the signs of both a well dog and a sick one, and to practice good preventive medicine. *Preventive medicine* encompasses accident prevention, vaccinations, and parasite control, as well as good hygiene and grooming. It starts with recognizing what's normal and what's not.

Examining Your Pit Bull

Performing a quick health check takes about five minutes — the most important five minutes you spend with your dog each week. You get to know how your dog looks when she's healthy, you get a head start on any problems, and your dog thinks that you just can't resist petting her all over.

Check these areas, and use [Figure 12-1](#) if you don't know where they are:

- » The mouth for loose teeth, ulcers of the tongue or gums, bad breath, or red, bleeding, swollen, or pale gums
- » The eyes for discharge, cloudiness, or discolored whites
- » The ears for foul odor, redness, discharge, or crusted tips
- » The nose for thickened or colored discharge
- » The skin for parasites, hair loss, crusts, red spots, or lumps
- » The feet for cuts, abrasions, split nails, bumps, or misaligned toes
- » The anal region for redness, swelling, or discharge

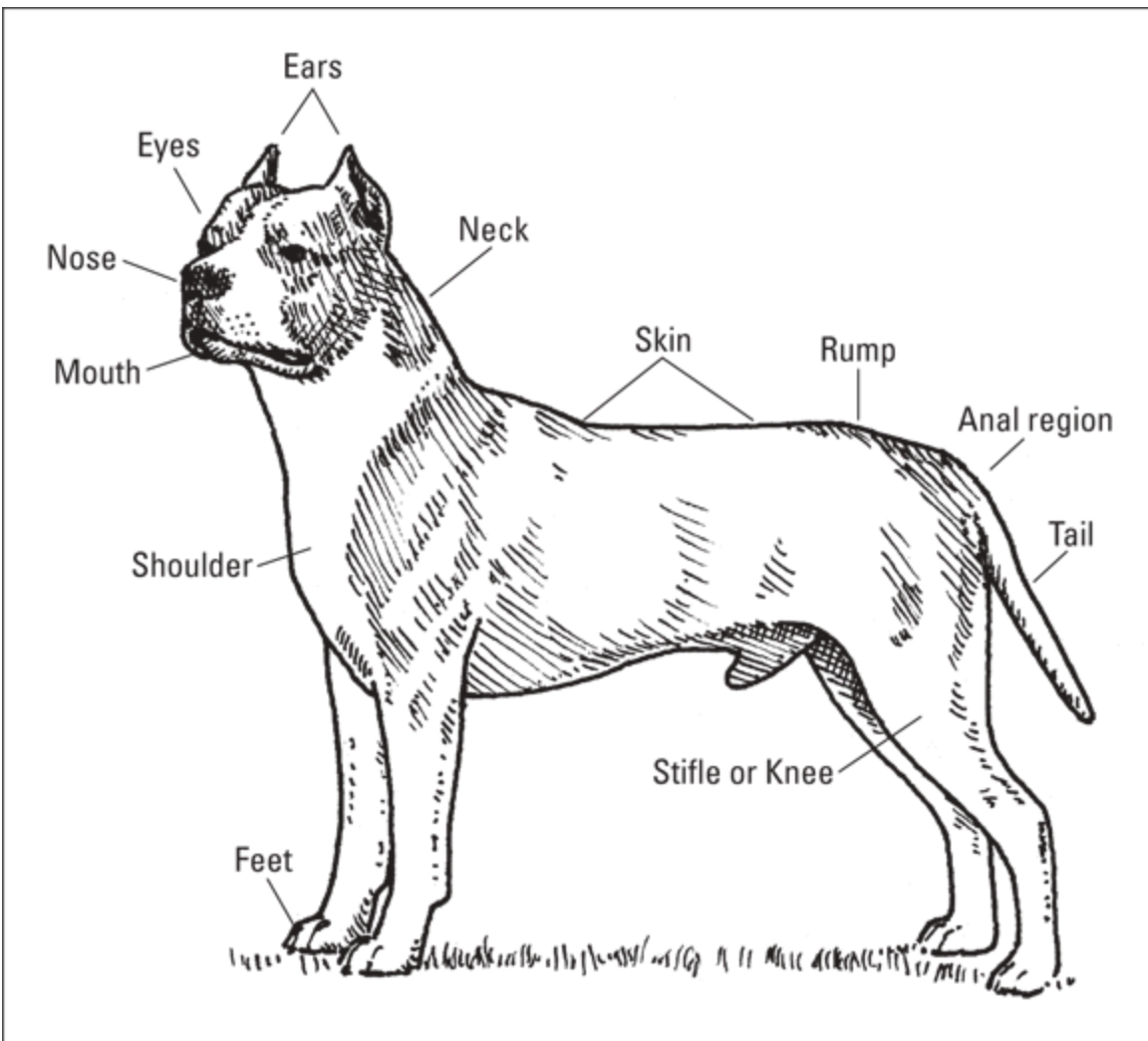


FIGURE 12-1: Pit Bull anatomy.



TIP

To check your dog's hydration, pick up the skin on the back just above the shoulders. It should make a slight tent above the body. The skin should "pop" back into place almost immediately. If it remains tented and separated from the body, your dog is dehydrated.

Watch your dog for signs of lameness or a lack of coordination, a sore neck, circling, loss of muscle, or any behavioral change. Run your hands over the muscles and bones and check that they are symmetrical from one side to the other. Weigh your dog and observe whether she's putting on fat or wasting away. Check for any growths or swellings, which can indicate cancer or a number of less serious problems. A sore that does not heal, or any pigmented lump that begins to grow or bleed, should be checked by a veterinarian immediately. Look out for mammary masses, changes in testicle size, discharge from the vulva or penis, increased or decreased urination, foul smelling or strangely colored urine, incontinence, vomiting, swollen abdomen, black or bloody stool, change in appetite or water consumption, difficulty breathing, lethargy, coughing, gagging, or loss of balance.

Pit Bulls are amazingly stoical, even when you're certain that they must be in pain. Because a dog may not be able (or willing) to express that she's in pain, you must be alert to changes in your Pit Bull's demeanor. A stiff gait, low head carriage, reluctance to get up or to play as normal, loss of appetite, irritability, dilated pupils, whining, or limping can all be indications that your pal is in pain.

Gums

The simplest — yet most overlooked — checkpoint is your dog's gums. The gums are the one place you can actually see your dog's blood without extracting it. The color of a dog's blood says a lot about the health of the animal. Have you ever noticed how a vet looks at your dog's gums before doing anything else?

Get used to looking at your dog's gums — a window to her blood.

- » Normal gum color is a good deep pink.
- » Pale gum color can indicate anemia or poor circulation.
- » White or tan gum color can indicate shock, severe anemia, internal bleeding (most often due to trauma or an internal tumor), or very poor circulation.
- » Bluish gum or tongue color indicates a life-threatening lack of oxygen.
- » Bright red gum color can indicate carbon monoxide poisoning.
- » Yellowish color can indicate jaundice, possibly from liver disease.
- » Little tiny red splotches (called *petechia*) can indicate a blood clotting problem.

Don't confuse a red line around the gum line with healthy gums. A dog with dirty teeth can have gum disease, giving a rosy glow to the gums, especially at the margins around the teeth.



REMEMBER *Capillary refill time*, which is a measure of blood circulation, can be estimated by pressing on the gum with your finger and lifting your finger off. The gum where you pressed will be momentarily white, but will quickly turn pink again as the blood moves back into the area. If the gums take longer than a couple of seconds to turn pink, circulation is poor.

Body temperature

Your dog's body temperature is another clue about what's going on inside. You can't put your hand on your Pit Bull's forehead and get an idea, and you can't have your dog hold a thermometer under her tongue. You can get a very rough idea by feeling your dog's ears, but for an accurate reading you need to take your dog's temperature rectally. Your dog will appreciate it if you lubricate the thermometer first. As in humans, body temperature is slightly lower in the morning and higher in the evening. [Table 12-1](#) is a guide to canine body temperature.

TABLE 12-1 Canine Body Temperature

<i>Temperature (in °F)</i>	<i>What to Do</i>
96.9 or below	Go to the emergency vet!
97.0–99.0	Call the vet and ask for advice.
99.1–102.5	Pat her on the head and give her a treat. Your dog's temperature is normal.
102.6–104.9	Call the vet and ask for advice.
105.0 or higher	Go to the emergency vet!



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Not every reference agrees on the lower range of normal. Some say it's 99.5 degrees; others say it's 101.5 degrees. Larger dogs tend to have lower normal temperatures. In a resting Pit Bull, I wouldn't be concerned about a temperature of 99.1 degrees, as long as the dog seemed otherwise well.

Pulse, heartbeat, and breathing rate

The easiest way to check your dog's pulse is to feel the pulse through the femoral artery. If your dog is standing, cup your hand around the top of her leg and feel around the inside of it, almost where it joins with the torso. If your dog is on her back, you can sometimes even see the pulse in this area. Normal pulse rate for a Pit Bull at rest is about 60 to 120 beats per minute.

You can feel your dog's heartbeat by placing your hand on her lower ribcage just behind her elbow. Don't be alarmed if it seems irregular; the heartbeat of many dogs is irregular compared to a human's heartbeat. Have your vet check the heartbeat out, then get used to how it feels when it is normal.



REMEMBER Normal respiration rate for a Pit Bull at rest is about 10 to 30 breaths per minute.

Establishing a Relationship with a Vet You Trust

No matter how diligent you are, eventually your Pit Bull will need professional medical attention. A good veterinarian is also needed to monitor your dog's internal signs by way of blood tests and other procedures. When choosing your veterinarian, consider availability, emergency arrangements, costs, facilities, and how well you communicate.

Some veterinarians include fairly sophisticated tests as part of their regular checkups. Such tests, while desirable, add to the cost of a visit. Unless money is no object, don't be embarrassed to ask about fees and reach an understanding about procedures before having them performed. Veterinarians know that clients want the best for their pets — but don't have bottomless pockets.

Dog health insurance can be a literal lifesaver. As with human insurance, the premium you pay depends on your deductible and copay, as well as your dog's age and breed.



REMEMBER You and your veterinarian should form a team that works together to protect your Pit Bull's health, so your rapport with your dog's veterinarian is very important. The veterinarian should listen to your observations and should explain to you exactly what is happening with your dog.

The clinic should be clean and have safe, sanitary overnight accommodations. Trained veterinary technicians are a valuable asset to

any clinic, but not all clinics have them. A clinic staffed by several veterinarians is usually better than a clinic with only one vet, because the vets can confer about tough cases and at least one of them is likely to be available for emergencies. Remember that your veterinarian should be reachable in cases of extreme emergency, even if your vet's clinic normally refers customers to an emergency clinic for after-hours crises.

Most veterinarians are general practitioners. Their days are filled with routine cases: checkups, vaccinations, skin allergies, spaying and neutering, and some of the more common illnesses. A good veterinarian will not hesitate to utter the phrases, "I don't know" and, "Perhaps you would like to be referred to a specialist." If your dog has a serious disease, you should ask whether a specialist's opinion would be helpful.

Most specialists are at university veterinary teaching hospitals, although some can be found in private practices in larger cities. As with human doctors, expect to pay more for a specialist's opinion. Sometimes, even a specialist can do nothing for your Pit Bull, but many owners find peace in knowing that they did everything they could and left no stone unturned while trying to find a cure for their beloved Pit.



TIP

Veterinarians aren't always right. Don't hesitate to question your veterinarian's diagnosis or treatment or seek a second opinion. Be informed about Pit Bull health issues so that you can take part in conversations with a vet, instead of just nodding your head and automatically trusting the veterinarian's judgment.



TIP

Even the bravest of dogs can be reduced to a quivering mess in the veterinary waiting room. And why not? If every time a dog has visited the vet, she's been poked and prodded and stuck with needles, why wouldn't she be afraid? You can immunize your dog against veterinary fear by having her visit when she's well. Call ahead and see if you can bring her in for a few minutes a couple times a week. Bring treats for the staff to give her, and make sure she has a great time!

Making Sense of Blood Tests

Your Pit Bull's blood can provide valuable clues about her health. In fact, it's a good idea to have blood values for your Pit Bull when she's well so that you have a benchmark against which to compare later results. You should insist on blood tests before your pet undergoes surgery, to ensure that she is healthy enough for the procedure. The time to find out that your dog has a clotting problem isn't when she's on the operating table, bleeding.

The most common tests are the Complete Blood Count (CBC) and the Blood Chemistry Test (also known as *Chem panel*). Many other specialized tests are also fairly common.

The CBC reports:

- » Red blood cells — the cells responsible for carrying oxygen throughout the body
- » White blood cells — infection-fighting cells
- » Platelets — components responsible for clotting blood to stop bleeding

A Blood Chemistry Test reports:

- » Albumin (ALB) — reduced levels are suggestive of liver or kidney disease or parasites
- » Alanine aminotransferase (ALT) — elevated levels suggest liver disease
- » Alkaline phosphatase (ALKP) — elevated levels can indicate liver disease or Cushing's syndrome
- » Amylase (AMYL) — elevated levels suggest pancreatic or kidney disease
- » Blood urea nitrogen (BUN) — elevated levels suggest kidney disease
- » Calcium (CA) — elevated levels suggest kidney or parathyroid disease or some types of tumors
- » Cholesterol (CHOL) — elevated levels suggest liver or kidney disease or several other disorders
- » Creatinine (CREA) — elevated levels suggest kidney disease or urinary obstruction
- » Blood Glucose (GLU) — low levels can suggest liver disease
- » Phosphorous (PHOS) — elevated levels can suggest kidney disease
- » Total bilirubin (TBIL) — level can indicate problems in the bile ducts
- » Total protein (TP) — level can indicate problems of the liver, kidney, or gastrointestinal tract

Giving Your Dog Medicine

Your Pit will often have to take medicine at home. Most dogs have no problems with pills. Cover the pill with cream cheese, peanut butter, or anything spreadable, and your dog will likely swallow the pill without even chewing.



TIP

Try the game of three if your dog is suspicious of pills:

- » Give him a bite of cream cheese with no pill.
- » Give him the cream-cheese-covered pill.
- » Before he can swallow, hand him a third hunk of cheese so he has to swallow the second one without checking it for a pill!

If covering the pill with something spreadable is too messy for you, you can buy Pill Pockets at pet stores and veterinary clinics. Just insert the pill in the pocket, smoosh the Pill Pocket closed, and give it to your dog — she'll likely gobble it up like it's a treat.

If your dog refuses to fall for the hidden pill trick, follow these steps:

- 1. Open your dog's mouth and place the pill well to the back, in the middle of the tongue.**
- 2. Hold your dog's mouth closed and gently stroke her throat until she swallows.**

For liquid medicine, tilt the head back, keep the dog's mouth almost (but not tightly) closed, and place the liquid in the pouch of the cheek. The medicine is easier to give if you put it in a syringe (without the needle!). Hold the mouth almost closed until the dog swallows.

For eye medications, first clean any goop out of your dog's eye — the goop can prevent the medication from contacting the eye. Do your best to pry the eye partially open. Place the drops or ointment in the inner corner of the eye. Because dogs have an extra eyelid and an extra muscle that pulls the eye back into the eye socket, they can do a good job of appearing to be eyeless and of making your job as difficult as possible.

For ear medication, first clean any heavy debris from the ear, if possible. Place the medicine as deep into the canal as you can. The ear canal goes down vertically and then turns abruptly toward the center of the dog's

head — this means that you should hold the head vertically at first, so that the medicine can drop down to the curve, and then try to turn the dog's head so that the ear you're medicating is turned upward. Since most dogs aren't cooperative as you turn their head this way and that, you may have to massage the base of the ear, hoping to squish the medicine inward. Medicating ears outside of the house is a good idea, because as soon as you let go your Pit will shake her head and medicine will fly in every direction.

Always give the full course of medications prescribed by your veterinarian. If a medicine is worth giving, it's worth giving a full course of. Don't give human medications unless you've been directed to do so by your veterinarian. Some medications for humans have no effect upon dogs and some can have a very detrimental effect.



WARNING Aspirin or prescription medications may alleviate some of the discomfort of injuries, but never give them if your dog is on her way to surgery. If you administer pain medication, you must confine your dog; a lack of pain can encourage her to use an injured limb, for example, ultimately resulting in further injury.

Keep these items in your doggie medicine chest at home:

- » Anti-diarrhea medication (metronidazole)
- » Allergy medication (diphenhydramine)
- » Pain medication
- » Antiseptic skin ointment
- » Instant cold compress
- » Ophthalmic ointment
- » Pen light
- » Poison control center number
- » Rectal thermometer

- » Self-adhesive bandage (such as Vetrap bandaging tape)
- » Sterile gauze dressings
- » Syringe
- » Tweezers
- » Veterinarian and emergency clinic numbers

Staying Up to Date on Your Dog's Vaccinations

Vaccinations save lives. Although some disagreement exists over whether too many vaccinations can have detrimental effects in some dogs, the fact that they are absolutely essential to your Pit's health is beyond dispute. Because some questions exist about vaccinations, you need to be informed. By understanding vaccinations, you can make the best choice about your dog's vaccination schedule.

Puppy vaccinations

Puppy vaccinations are the most vital, but most confusing, of all the vaccinations that your Pit will receive. Puppies receive their dam's immunity from *colostrum*, the special type of milk the dam produces in the first days of life. Colostrum is why it's important that the dam is properly immunized long before breeding, and that her pups are able to nurse from her. The immunity gained from the dam wears off after several weeks, however, and then the pup is susceptible to disease unless you provide immunity through vaccinations. The problem is that there's no way to know exactly when the second-hand immunity gained from colostrum will wear off, and vaccinations given before that time are ineffective. You must revaccinate over a period of weeks so that your pup will not be unprotected and will receive effective immunity — which is why puppies get a series of shots instead of just one or two.

Your pup's breeder should have given the first vaccinations to your pup before she was old enough to go home with you. Bring all the information you have about your pup's vaccination history to your

veterinarian on your first visit, so that the pup's vaccination schedule can be maintained. Meanwhile, not letting your pup mingle with strange dogs is a good idea — wait until you know that her immune system is a-okay.

Vaccinations are available for several diseases. Some vaccinations are mandatory from a legal standpoint, some are mandatory from a good sense standpoint, and some are optional.



REMEMBER Proof of current vaccination is often needed to transport your dog by air, cross international lines with your Pit, attend training classes with your Pit, board your Pit at a kennel, or have your Pit work as a therapy dog.

Rabies

Rabies is inevitably fatal once symptoms have appeared, and unvaccinated dogs remain the principal host for the disease in undeveloped countries. It's passed mostly through the saliva of carnivores and bats. Because of its deadly consequences (to humans as well as dogs), state laws mandate that all dogs must be vaccinated. The initial rabies vaccination should be given at around three to four months of age, again one year from the first vaccination, and then every three years (although to comply with local law, you may have to give a booster every year).

Distemper

Distemper has killed dogs, broken hearts, and ravaged kennels for centuries. The production of a vaccine was one of the greatest developments in the progress of canine health. Today, distemper is seen almost exclusively in unvaccinated puppies. Initial symptoms are upper respiratory problems and fever, followed by vomiting, diarrhea, and neurological signs. It's not always fatal, but curing distemper is definitely a lot more expensive than getting a simple vaccination! Very young puppies (about 6 weeks old) usually get a distemper/measles

vaccination, because the measles fraction can give temporary immunity even in the presence of maternal antibodies. Subsequent distemper inoculations are given every 3 to 4 weeks until the pup is about 16 weeks old. Annual boosters are normally recommended.

Hepatitis

Infectious canine hepatitis type 1 is highly contagious and incurable. Often fatal, it is most often seen in puppies. It's caused by an adenovirus (called *CAV-1*) found mostly in foxes and dogs, but also in coyotes, wolves, skunks, and bears. Vaccination with CAV-2 (which works just as well but doesn't result in the "blue-eye" reaction that CAV-1 caused when it was used years ago) is usually done along with distemper vaccination.

Leptospirosis

Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease that causes serious liver, kidney, and blood abnormalities. It was traditionally thought to be more prevalent in rural areas, but recently it has been found in urban dogs just as frequently. Vaccination for leptospirosis is not particularly satisfying, because a vaccination only protects for about 3 to 6 months, and does not protect against all strains of leptospirosis. In addition, a small percentage of puppies have a transient adverse reaction to the vaccination. Thus, some people prefer not to include leptospirosis in their vaccination regime, at least for puppies, although most veterinarians include it as part of a combination vaccine.



TIP

Because leptospirosis is a very serious disease, spread in the urine of a variety of other animals including rodents, follow your veterinarian's advice when it comes to getting this vaccination.

Parvovirus

Parvovirus causes severe intestinal bleeding and is very often fatal to puppies. It is extremely contagious and can remain in the environment for years. Vaccination for parvo is often interfered with by maternal

antibodies; for this reason, three vaccinations by the age of 16 weeks are recommended, with an optional fourth vaccination at around 18 to 20 weeks. Annual boosters are normally recommended.

Coronavirus

Canine coronavirus (not to be confused with the coronaviruses that affect humans) causes extreme diarrhea, in rare cases resulting in death. Younger dogs are most adversely affected. A vaccination is available, but it's considered optional.

Tracheobronchitis (kennel cough)

Kennel cough is highly contagious and tends to spread when dogs share closed spaces. Its name comes from its tendency to occur in dogs about a week after they've been in a kennel. However, kennel cough can also be acquired at dog shows or even in a vet's waiting room. Kennel cough is characterized by a dry, honking cough that can last for weeks.

Vaccinations are available, but are imperfect because kennel cough can be caused by many different infectious agents. The vaccines protect against only the most common causes of kennel cough (CPIV, CAV-2, and *Bordetella*). The vaccines' effects also do not last for very long. For these reasons, and because kennel cough is not fatal, some people prefer not to vaccinate for it. Nonetheless, kennel cough vaccination can be a good idea for dogs who are boarded or shown. The vaccine should be given a week before exposure or administered through annual boosters.

CALLING THE SHOTS

Recent studies have implicated repeated vaccinations with combinations of vaccines with some *autoimmune* problems (meaning the body's immune system turns against other parts of the body). With vaccination, more is not better. Annual vaccinations used to be the norm, but studies have shown that most vaccinations are effective for years, perhaps even a dog's entire lifetime. The current recommendation is to give a three-shot series for puppies, each shot containing parvovirus, adenovirus 2 (CAV-2), parainfluenza (CPIV), and distemper, with one rabies vaccination at 16 weeks. Following this regimen, a booster is given one year later, and then subsequent boosters are given every three years. When in doubt, talk with your vet about what she recommends.

Lyme disease

Lyme disease is known to cause severe problems in humans, but its effects on dogs are less clear. A vaccination is available, but it's not universally considered necessary. Only dogs living in endemic areas should be considered candidates for Lyme disease vaccination. Consult with your veterinarian about the prevalence of Lyme disease in your area of the country.

Keeping Your Pit Free of Worms

Hookworms, whipworms, ascarids, threadworms, and lungworms can infect dogs of all ages, but have the most devastating effect on puppies. Left untreated, worms can cause vomiting, diarrhea, dull coat, listlessness, anemia, and death. Have your puppy tested for internal parasites regularly. Many heartworm preventives also prevent most types of intestinal worms (but not tapeworms).

The classic wormy puppy has a dull coat, skinny body, and distended belly, but many pups with worms don't show all these symptoms. Because you can buy worming medication over the counter, many people figure this is their chance to save a little money and skip a trip to the vet. Others have been taught that in order to be good dog owners, they should "worm" their dog once a month. But over-the-counter wormers are largely ineffective, and are often more dangerous than those available through your veterinarian. Further, no dog should be wormed unless she actually has worms. When you take your dog to be vaccinated, bring along a stool specimen so that your veterinarian can check for these parasites.

Don't think that only puppies from bad homes have worms. Most puppies do have worms at some point, even pups from the most fastidious breeders. This is because some types of larval worms become encysted in the dam's body long before she ever becomes pregnant — perhaps even when she herself was a pup. They lie dormant and immune from worming, until hormonal changes caused by her pregnancy activate them. Then they infect her fetuses or her newborns through her milk.

Ascarids

Toxocara canis (more commonly known as *ascarids*) are found in virtually every puppy. Most puppies are infested with the larvae before birth, and eggs can be found in the pups' feces by the time they are three weeks old. Adult worms can sometimes be seen in vomit or feces.

Toxocara can also be spread by ingesting the eggs — and they can be spread to people as well as dogs. Infected puppies can become quite ill, with heavy infestations leading to convulsions or death. Most mortalities occur around two to three weeks of age. Children playing in sandboxes or playgrounds can contract *Toxocara* and can become very dangerously ill from it if *Toxocara*-infested feces are on the premises.

Programs that control *Toxocara* in puppies come from the Centers for Disease Control and were developed for the purpose of controlling *Toxocara* in humans. Puppies should be wormed at least twice for *Toxocara*, and many protocols advocate more frequent worming, with worming at age 2, 4, 6, and 8 weeks of age. Further control the threat by picking up feces regularly and not allowing dogs to defecate where children play (both of which are good ideas for other reasons, come to think of it).

Hookworms

Hookworms are especially prevalent in warm, humid climates. They can be acquired before birth, through penetration of the larvae through the skin, or by eating the larva. Puppies with heavy infestations can become anemic and have bloody, black, or tarry diarrhea. Without prompt treatment, these puppies usually die.

Treatment consists of deworming, blood transfusions, and follow-up prevention. After the intestinal tract has been cleared of worms, larva in the muscle tissue migrate to the intestines and repopulate them, so another deworming treatment is needed two weeks following the first. Adult dogs usually build up an immunity to hookworms, although some dogs have chronic hookworm disease. Chronic cases occur most often in dogs with compromised immune systems or dogs who live in the midst of feces. Removing feces from the backyard (or whatever area your dog

uses) at least twice a week is the most cost-effective means of hookworm control.

Whipworms

Whipworms inhabit the large intestine, where they puncture blood vessels and have a feast at your dog's expense. A heavy infestation can cause diarrhea, anemia, and weight loss. Dogs get whipworms by ingesting the eggs. Eggs can live in the environment for up to five years, especially in cold climates. Unlike some other types of internal parasites, dogs do not develop an immunity to whipworms. Treatment consists of repeated deworming, often every other month for a year. Properly disposing of feces is an essential part of controlling whipworms.

Tapeworms

Tapeworms plague some Pits throughout the dog's entire life. Several species exist, by far the most common being *Dipylidium caninum*. No preventive exists, except to diligently rid your Pit Bull of fleas, because fleas transmit this kind of tapeworm to dogs. Some other types of tapeworms are obtained by eating raw rabbits or fish.

Tapeworms look like moving, white, flat worms on fresh stools, or may dry up and look like rice grains around the dog's anus. Tapeworms are one of the least debilitating of all the worms, but their segments can be irritating to the dog's anal region and are certainly unsightly.

Tapeworms are in the cestode family, and do not respond to the same dewormers as those in the nematode family. This means that the heartworm preventives that also prevent several nematodes will not affect tapeworms.

More worms

Two more types of nematodes that occasionally infect dogs are threadworms and lungworms. Neither is particularly common. Threadworms live in the small intestine and can cause bloody diarrhea and coughing. They are more common in warm weather, and are treated with high doses of deworming medicine.

Lungworms are found in the respiratory tract, lung tissue, and blood vessels. They can cause large, wart-like nodules on the bronchi of the lungs, leading to bronchitis, coughing, and lack of appetite. The condition is difficult to treat and has a high mortality rate in puppies.

Another uncommon worm is actually carried by earthworms. *Capillaria* is a type of lungworm that lives in the nasal passages, trachea, and bronchi. Heavy infestations can cause sneezing and coughing. The worms themselves resemble whipworms and are often misdiagnosed as them. The worms are susceptible to regular deworming medication. Dogs get *Capillaria* from eating earthworms (yet another reason not to eat worms!).

Even more rare and exotic worms can be found on the insides of dogs. The giant kidney worm, for example, must be removed surgically. Dogs get them from eating earthworms or by eating fish or frogs that have eaten an infected worm. In southern climates, *Spirocerca lupi* causes thickened nodules in the esophagus or stomach and causes narrowing of the aorta or trachea. Dogs get them from eating dung beetles or from eating something that ate an infected dung beetle. Treatment is with deworming medication. *Physaloptera* are found in the stomach or small intestine and can cause anemia, gastritis, and vomiting. Dogs get this parasite by eating infected beetles, crickets, cockroaches, or animals that ate infected beetles, crickets, or cockroaches. Seems like nothing's safe to eat anymore!

Dealing with Intestinal Parasites

Puppies and dogs also suffer from protozoan intestinal parasites, such as coccidia and, especially, *Giardia*. Your veterinarian can prescribe appropriate medication.

Coccidia

Coccidia are often associated with diarrhea, but many infected dogs show no apparent symptoms. Thus, the dangers of coccidia infection in dogs are still being debated. A stool sample is needed for diagnosis.

Affected dogs respond well to supportive treatment and drugs. The most important preventive measure is removal of feces.

Giardia

Giardia, also called *beaver fever*, is found fairly commonly in puppies and dogs. It can cause chronic or intermittent diarrhea, but may also have no symptoms. It can be diagnosed with a stool sample, and is more likely to be found in loose or light-colored stool. Many dogs carry *Giardia* and have no symptoms, so the presence of *Giardia* in the stool may not necessarily account for any illness a dog may be showing. *Giardia* is treated with drug therapy.

Preventing Heartworm

Heartworms are deadly parasites carried by mosquitoes. Wherever mosquitoes are present, dogs should be on heartworm prevention. Several effective types of heartworm preventive are available, and some also prevent many other types of worms. Most require monthly administration.



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The medication doesn't stay in the dog's system for a month; instead, it acts on a particular stage in the heartworm's development. Giving the drug each month prevents any heartworms from maturing.

In most areas, your dog may need to be on a preventive year-round, but in colder climates your dog may only need to use a preventive during the warmer months. Your veterinarian can advise you about when your puppy should start and whether year-round prevention is necessary in your area.

The most common way of checking for heartworms is to check the blood for circulating *microfilariae* (the immature form of heartworms), but this method may fail to detect the presence of adult heartworms in as many

as 20 percent of all tested dogs. An *occult* heartworm test, though slightly more expensive, tests for the presence of antigens to heartworms in the blood and is more accurate. With either test, the presence of heartworms will not be detectable until nearly seven months after infection. Heartworms are treatable in their early stages, but the treatment is expensive and is not without risks. But left untreated, heartworms can kill your Pit Bull.

Chapter 13

Sick as a Dog

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Looking out for behaviors that can indicate disease
 - » Stopping vomiting and diarrhea
 - » Taking care of a lame dog
-

Maybe you think that your Pit Bull's just not quite right — he seems a little down, his habits have changed, or you just have a feeling. Or maybe your dog is definitely sick — he's losing hair, for example. But what could the problem be? You have to be part detective and part veterinarian to try to get to the bottom of the matter. By knowing what to look for, you can give your veterinarian a head start in diagnosing your dog's problem and, hopefully, give your Pit Bull a head start on the road to recovery.

When Your Dog Just Isn't Himself

We all have mood swings. So do Pit Bulls. We (and our dogs) change behavior as we mature and age. So sometimes knowing whether a change in behavior is a symptom of a problem is hard. Maybe your dog's just behaving differently because he's a bit older. Maybe he's just acting a bit differently for no reason at all.

Some behavioral changes are natural consequences of hormonal states. Sexually intact males may become more excited and unmanageable if they are around females in estrus (heat). Females in estrus may be aggressive toward males making unwanted advances.

Dogs tend to calm down as they age. They can also get tired from stress and exercise. But being calm or tired isn't the same thing as being

lethargic. A lethargic dog tends to show little interest in his surroundings. He could be sick, and the possible causes include

- » Anemia (check gum color)
- » Cancer
- » Circulatory problems (check gum color and pulse)
- » Infection (check for fever)
- » Metabolic diseases
- » Pain (check limbs, neck, and vertebrae for signs of discomfort upon movement; check mouth, ears, and eyes for signs of pain; check abdomen for pain — pain in the abdomen often causes dogs to stand in a hunched position)
- » Poisoning (check gum color and pupillary reaction; look for signs of vomiting or abdominal pain)
- » Sudden loss of vision



WARNING Extreme lethargy, lethargy that lasts for more than one day or is accompanied by a fever, pain, vomiting, coughing, diarrhea, or signs of circulatory problems all probably mean that a trip to the vet is a good idea.

Aggressive behavior is usually not a sign of disease unless it's totally unprecedented. It can, however, be a sign of pain, an endocrine problem, or a brain problem. A Pit Bull may be good at hiding his pain, until you try to move him or do something that hurts, and then your normally mild-mannered dog may bite. Any case of sudden aggression toward people merits a veterinary examination to look for possible causes. If no physical cause can be found and the aggression continues, you may need the help of a neurologist or a veterinarian specializing in behavior.

In general, unprecedented behavior of any kind means that you should take your Pit to the veterinarian. Be particularly alert to persistent

circling or pacing, disorientation, loss of balance, head-pressing, hiding, tremors, seizures, lack of bowel or urine control, and dramatic changes in appetite or energy.

Dealing with Diarrhea

Dogs get diarrhea — it's almost unavoidable. You may not realize that your dog is sick unless your dog gets locked inside and is forced to have diarrhea in the house. Being on the lookout for diarrhea is one reason you need to keep an eye on your dog's bowel movements when he answers the call of nature.

Diarrhea can result from excitement, nervousness, a change in diet or water, sensitivity to certain foods, overeating, intestinal parasites, viral or bacterial infections, or ingestion of toxic substances. The appearance of the diarrhea can provide important information to your vet, so even though your neighbors will think you're a bit strange, take a good look at your dog's diarrhea. What is the consistency? Does it contain blood or mucous? If so, how much? Can you identify foreign objects or parasites? What color is it? These are all clues to the severity and possible causes of your dog's problem. You may even want to take a picture or a sample for your veterinarian.

Bloody diarrhea, diarrhea with vomiting, fever, or other signs of toxicity, or a diarrhea that lasts for more than a day should not be allowed to continue without veterinary advice. Some of these can be symptomatic of potentially fatal disorders.

You can treat mild diarrhea by withholding or severely restricting food and water for 24 hours. Ice cubes can be given to satisfy thirst. Your veterinarian can prescribe medications such as metronidazole that will curtail diarrhea, or you can use some human diarrhea medications such as loperamide. A bland diet consisting of rice, tapioca, or cooked macaroni, along with skinless chicken breast for protein, should be given for several days. Feed nothing else. **Note:** Dogs with some other illness in addition to diarrhea may not be candidates for food or water restriction.

Saying Vamoose to Vomiting

In addition to the occasional bout of diarrhea, dogs vomit fairly often. A typical vomit episode begins with retching, followed by vomiting on your best rug, and then, within a minute, another bout of retching and vomiting (hopefully, by now not on your best rug). Following the episode the dog usually appears to be just fine.

When people vomit, it usually means they feel sick. When dogs vomit, it's hard to tell how they feel. Some dogs almost seem to like to vomit, and will eat grass to ensure that they have the opportunity to puke.

Vomiting after eating grass is common and is usually of no great concern. If the vomiting continues, it's not typical "recreational" vomiting and is cause for concern.

- » Overeating is a common cause of occasional vomiting in puppies, especially if they follow eating with playing. This problem is easily solved by feeding your Pit smaller meals more frequently and waiting after eating before encouraging play.
- » Regurgitation immediately after meals can indicate an obstruction of the esophagus.
- » Repeated vomiting can indicate that the dog has eaten spoiled food, indigestible objects, or may have a stomach illness.
- » Sporadic vomiting with poor appetite and generally poor overall condition can indicate internal parasites or a more serious internal disease.



WARNING Consult your veterinarian immediately if your dog vomits a foul substance resembling fecal matter (indicating a blockage in the intestinal tract), blood (partially digested blood resembles coffee grounds), or if there is projectile or repeated vomiting. Repeated vomiting can result in dehydration, so if your dog can't hold anything down for a prolonged period, he may have to get intravenous fluids.

Coping with Coughing

You know how miserable you feel when you have a cough; having a cough makes your Pit Bull feel just as miserable. An occasional cough is one thing, but a persistent cough should be checked by your veterinarian. Allergies, foreign bodies, pneumonia, parasites, tracheal collapse, tumors, and especially kennel cough and heart disease, can cause coughing.

Kennel cough (canine infectious tracheobronchitis) is a highly communicable air-borne disease caused by several different infectious agents. It's characterized by a gagging cough arising about a week after exposure. After a few days, the cough takes on a honking sound. Inoculations are available and are an especially good idea if you plan to have your dog around other dogs at training classes or while being boarded. Treatment consists of resting the dog and avoiding situations that may lead to coughing. Cough suppressants may break the coughing cycle. Left untreated, coughing can irritate a dog's throat and eventually cause more serious problems. Antibiotics may be needed if secondary infections arise from prolonged irritation.

Heart disease commonly results in coughing, most often following exercise or at night. Affected dogs will often lie down with their front legs spread and point their nose in the air in order to breathe better. Veterinary treatment is essential. Anti-coughing medicines are not

recommended for dogs with heart disease. A low-sodium diet and drug therapy can help alleviate the symptoms.



WARNING One of the most common of all congenital heart defects in dogs is patent ductus arteriosus. It is seen occasionally in Pit Bulls. During fetal life, the lungs are not functional, so a vessel (the ductus arteriosus) allows blood to bypass the lungs. This vessel normally closes shortly after birth. In some dogs, however, it remains open, allowing blood to leak through it and placing a strain on the heart. Affected dogs have a heart murmur, and can be diagnosed with an ultrasound. Surgical correction is necessary to cure the condition. Left untreated, heart failure can result.

Helping Your Dog with Urinary Problems

Dogs can have a variety of urinary problems. Too often, the symptoms go unnoticed until the dog starts urinating in the house. Even then, many owners don't understand the cause and ban the dog from the house rather than get him the medical treatment he needs.

Increased urination can be an early sign of kidney disease. Although the excessive urination may cause problems in keeping your house clean or your night's sleep intact, never try to restrict the water intake of a dog with kidney disease. A low-protein and low-sodium diet can slow the progression of the disease.

Increased urination can also be a sign of diabetes or a urinary tract infection. Your veterinarian can discover the cause with some simple tests. These conditions can be treated.

If your dog has difficulty or pain in urination, urinates suddenly and often but in small amounts, or passes cloudy or bloody urine, he may be suffering from a problem of the bladder, urethra, or prostate. Bladder

infections must be treated promptly to prevent the infection from reaching the kidneys.

Dribbling of urine during sleep can indicate a hormonal problem; it is not uncommon in spayed females, especially those spayed as young puppies. In males, infections of the prostate gland can lead to intense pain, repeated urinary tract infections, often with blood or pus in the urine, as well as possible painful defecation. Castration and long-term antibiotic therapy is required for improvement.



WARNING Blockage of urine can result in death. Inability to urinate requires immediate emergency veterinary attention.

Understanding Endocrine Disorders

The most widespread hormone-related disorders in dogs are diabetes, hypothyroidism, and Cushing's syndrome. The most common of these is hypothyroidism.

Hypothyroidism

Hypothyroidism is one of the most commonly diagnosed (and misdiagnosed) conditions in purebred dogs. Symptoms may include weight gain, lethargy, and coat problems such as oiliness, dullness, symmetrical hair loss, and hair that is easily pulled out. Hypothyroidism has been implicated in everything from behavioral problems to infertility to a lack of energy. Diagnosis is with a blood test; initial screening tests may indicate more blood tests to confirm the diagnosis. Treatment is with daily thyroid replacement drugs.

Cushing's syndrome

Cushing's syndrome (hyperadrenocorticism) is seen mostly in older dogs and is characterized by increased drinking and urination, pot-bellied appearance, symmetrical hair loss, darkened skin, and susceptibility to infections. Diagnosis is with a blood test. Treatment is with drug therapy.

Investigating Immunological Problems

The immune system is your dog's defense against microscopic intruders. Autoimmune diseases occur when the body's immune system turns against parts of itself. Specific types of autoimmunity include autoimmune hemolytic anemia, autoimmune thrombocytopenia, systemic lupus erythematosus, and discoid lupus erythematosus, as well as many others. Treatment is with drugs that suppress the immune system.

In autoimmune hemolytic anemia, the body destroys its own red blood cells, leading to severe anemia. Affected dogs may be feverish, lethargic, and have whitish gums. In autoimmune thrombocytopenia, the body destroys its own platelets, leading to spontaneous bleeding. Signs may include petechia (small red spots on the surface of the gums and skin and also within the eye). Autoimmune hemolytic anemia and thrombocytopenia often occur together. Symptoms can be confused for several other problems, including pyometra (infection of the uterus) and tick-borne diseases such as ehrlichiosis.

In systemic lupus erythematosus, many organ systems are affected. Symptoms may include a recurring fever, as well as arthritis in several joints, small ulcers of the skin on the face or toes, and some other less common symptoms.

In discoid lupus erythematosus, ulcers arise on the nose and face. They are aggravated by exposure to ultraviolet light.

Banishing Blood Parasites

Blood parasites? The name doesn't sound pleasant, and neither are the conditions that can affect your dog.

Ehrlichiosis

Ehrlichiosis is a potentially serious disease spread by ticks. Symptoms are varied, and may include lack of energy, dullness of coat, occasional vomiting, sporadic lameness, and occasional loss of appetite. But aside from a fever in the initial phases of the disease, no strong signs of disease are present. Owners may complain that the dog just doesn't seem as playful or is just not quite right. Other less common symptoms may include coughing, arthritis, muscle wasting, seizures, spontaneous bleeding, anemia, and a host of others. No one or two symptoms, of themselves, suggest ehrlichiosis. Definitive diagnosis requires getting a blood titer, but many dogs have a positive titer yet never seem affected. It's currently debatable whether to treat asymptomatic dogs.

Babesia

Potentially fatal parasites, protozoa of the genus *Babesia* are transmitted by ticks and parasitize the red blood cells. This causes the dog to become anemic and may also precipitate an autoimmune response in which the dog's immune system begins to destroy its own red blood cells. Platelets may also be destroyed. Symptoms include a fever, lethargy, loss of appetite, and, in severe cases, darkened urine. Affected dogs can die within a week of the first appearance of these symptoms. Diagnosis is with blood tests.



REMEMBER

The symptoms of a *Babesia* infestation are similar to those of autoimmune hemolytic anemia. If your dog is diagnosed with either of these conditions, make sure that your veterinarian tests to rule out the other condition.

Coping with Cancer

Cancers occur relatively frequently in all breeds of dogs. Among the more common cancers are

- » **Mammary gland tumors:** These tumors occur mostly in females who weren't spayed early in life. Approximately half of all

mammary tumors are malignant. Therapy may include surgical excision and chemotherapy. **Note:** Spaying after the age of two years doesn't impart the protection from mammary cancer that earlier spaying does.

- » **Lymphosarcoma:** This cancer affects the blood and lymph systems. Symptoms may include swelling of the lymph nodes, especially those of lower neck area and behind the knees. Chemotherapy extends the life of many affected dogs.
- » **Osteosarcoma (bone cancer):** This cancer occurs more frequently in large breeds. It normally develops on a long bone of a leg and can sometimes be seen as a lump. More often, though, owners first become aware that something's wrong when the dog starts to limp — osteosarcoma is very painful. Owners face the terrible decision of amputation that must be made quickly, as time is of the essence to prevent the spread to other parts of the body. Most dogs adjust to the loss of a limb fairly easily, but factors such as age, weight, arthritis, and the presence of other joint problems all can slow down, or even prevent, a dog's transition to having only three legs. Even with the best of therapy, survival time for dogs with osteosarcoma is usually only a few months.
- » **Hemangiosarcoma:** Hemangiosarcoma, a cancer of the blood vessel lining, occurs more often in larger breeds. It causes tumors to form mostly on the spleen, heart base, and liver, or less commonly, anywhere in the body that has a blood supply. The tumors bleed, resulting in internal bleeding, which can cause hypovolemic shock, the signs of which are lethargy, inability to stand, and extremely pale gums. Treatment seldom is effective for more than a few months.

Looking into Lameness

Pit Bulls play hard and they have a high pain threshold. This combination can lead them to keep right on playing even after they've hurt themselves — often creating a major injury out of a minor one.

Even mild lameness requires complete rest. If the lameness persists after three days, your dog will need to be examined by her veterinarian.



TIP

Sometimes, Pit Bulls mysteriously become gimpy. You come home from work, and your pet is dragging a paw. But if you're lucky enough to be present when your dog hurts himself, immediately applying an ice pack can reduce the amount of swelling.

If your dog is lame and also exhibits swelling or deformation in the affected leg, extreme pain, or the leg makes grinding or popping sounds, she can have a break or another serious problem. It's imperative that any possible fractured area not be further traumatized by attempts to immobilize it. Immediate veterinary attention is required.

If a toe is swollen, does not match its fellow on the opposite foot in shape and position, or makes a grinding sound when moved, the toe should be immobilized and checked by your veterinarian. Meanwhile, minimize swelling by applying cold packs or placing the foot in a bucket of cold water.



REMEMBER Complete rest and total inactivity are the best way to care for lameness without a trip to the vet. Rest your dog until he quits limping. Then rest him some more.

An arm and a leg

Puppies are especially susceptible to bone and joint injuries. They should never be allowed to jump from high places or run until exhausted.

Persistent limping in puppies may result from one of several developmental bone problems and should be checked by the veterinarian. Discourage both puppies and adult dogs from romping on slippery floors, where they can lose their footing.

Knee injuries, especially of the cruciate ligaments, are common in dogs. Overweight dogs are particularly at risk. Knee injuries can also arise if the dog is pushed sideways while running, jumps straight up and lands at a funny angle, or even when he pushes off at a dead run. Ruptured cruciate ligaments can be hard to diagnose in a Pit Bull because their dense muscle mass stabilizes the knee despite the rupture. Because most cruciate tears don't get well on their own, they usually require surgery. However, cruciate surgery requires a commitment to careful post-surgery nursing and should not be undertaken casually.

Older dogs or dogs with a previous injury often limp as a result of osteoarthritis. Arthritis can be treated with buffered aspirin, but only under veterinary supervision. Your veterinarian can also prescribe other drugs that may be more effective. If a young or middle-aged dog ever shows signs of arthritis, especially in a joint that has not been previously injured, the vet should be consulted.

Examine the feet of a lame dog for burs, cuts, peeled pads, misaligned toes, or damage to the nails. Split or broken nails can be treated by cutting the nail as short as possible and soaking it in warm salt water. Apply an antibiotic and then a human fingernail mender, followed by a bandage.

Cuts and peeled pads should be carefully flushed with warm water, and an antibacterial ointment applied. Cover the area with gauze, then wrap the foot with Vet-Wrap (a stretchable bandage that clings to itself.) You can also add padding. Change the dressing twice daily (or anytime it gets wet) and restrict exercise until the wound heals. Peeled pads are very painful. A local anesthetic such as hemorrhoid cream or a topical toothache salve can help ease some of the discomfort.

If you need a quick fix for a minor injury, you can fashion a makeshift pad by adhering a thin piece of rubber or leather to the bottom of the pad with Super-Glue, or you can apply a coat of Nu-Skin (available at drug stores) if the injury is not too extensive.



REMEMBER If your dog has deep cuts or extensive peeling, your veterinarian should check for foreign objects or tendon damage.

From the hip

Hip dysplasia (HD) occurs frequently among Pit Bulls. Thirty-one percent of American Pit Bull Terrier and 24 percent of American Staffordshire Terrier radiographs submitted to the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals are judged dysplastic. Yet, few Pit Bulls exhibit the crippling effects that the severity of the damage shown in the X-rays predicts. Perhaps their dense muscle mass stabilizes the hip joint and compensates somewhat, or perhaps the Pit Bull's high pain tolerance and stoical nature enables Pits to simply ignore the pain. However, some unlucky Pits have ultimately been in such pain that euthanasia was the only alternative to chronic discomfort.

HD occurs when the ball of the femur (thigh) bone does not fit properly in the acetabulum (socket) of the pelvic bone. The fit is affected both by the depth and shape of the socket and the laxity of the joint. With pressure on the joint, even the amount of pressure that occurs when the dog walks or runs, the combination of laxity and a shallow socket allows the ball of the femur to pop in and out of the socket. This movement further deteriorates the rim of the socket, making the condition get worse, which is why early diagnosis and treatment is important.

Hip radiographs can diagnose dysplasia before outward signs of the disorder are perceivable. In the United States, radiographs are most often rated by either the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) or the Pennsylvania Hip Improvement Program (PennHIP).

The OFA certification is the most common. During the process, a panel of specialists subjectively rates radiographs, based upon a number of specific joint characteristics. A dog with normal hips (which receive ratings of excellent, good, and fair) receives an OFA number. Borderline normal ratings indicate that a dog should be rechecked in another 6 to 8 months. Dysplastic hips receive ratings of mild, moderate, and severe.

(Ratings are not given until dogs are two years old, but preliminary ratings can be obtained before then.)

A dog with normal hips receives an OFA number, such as PBT133G24MT.

- » PBT stands for Pit Bull Terrier.
- » 133 means this dog is the 133rd APBT to receive an OFA number.
- » G stands for good.
- » 24 stands for the dog's age, in months, when X-rayed.
- » M stands for male.
- » T stands for tattooed (M stands for microchipped).

PennHIP evaluations are based upon objectively measured degrees of joint laxity, reported as a Distraction Index (DI), with lower numbers reflecting tighter (better) hips. The X-rays must be taken, using special procedures, by veterinarians approved to do them by PennHIP.



TIP

Breeders disagree about which method is better; many breeders thus elect to have two radiographs taken at the same time, submitting one to each registry. Both registries are good; the only bad choice is to have no certification at all.

Hip dysplasia becomes progressively more crippling and painful, even for a stoical Pit Bull. The good news is that even dogs who have severe cases of HD can live full lives if given timely surgery. If the condition is detected in a young dog before secondary changes (osteoarthritis) have occurred, a procedure called a *triple pelvic osteotomy* (TPO) can be performed. In a TPO, the orientation of the dog's hip socket is surgically changed, allowing the femur head to better fit into the socket.

Older dogs or dogs with more advanced dysplasia are candidates for a total hip replacement. The procedure is similar to the one performed on

humans. The ball of the femur is replaced with a metallic ball and the socket is replaced with a plastic cup.

Another procedure, which is less effective in large dogs, is to simply remove the head of the femur. It may be a reasonable choice, for financial reasons, if you have an older dog who only needs to be comfortable while walking around the house.

Doctoring Your Dog

Most veterinarians adhere to traditional western medicine, based upon rigorous scientific experimentation, testing, and clinical trials in animals and humans. In most cases, the therapy available at a typical vet's is the best care that you can give your dog. Nonetheless, alternative medicines are sometimes a reasonable adjunct to traditional medicine. Some forms of alternative medicine, in particular, have more promise and more evidence favoring their efficacy. When your dog is suffering from a serious illness, trying anything that may help is tempting. As long as you remember to be an intelligent consumer, you should certainly explore alternative treatments. Do not do so at the expense of traditional therapies, however. The best option may be to find a veterinarian who is well versed in both traditional and alternative medicine.

Holistic medicine

Holistic medicine focuses on the entire dog, rather than the single problem area. As such, it emphasizes nutritional, emotional, and social health, as well as overt physical health. This is an approach that makes intuitive good sense, especially when it comes to maintaining health. Many traditional veterinarians are adapting elements of holistic medicine.

Homeopathic medicine

Homeopathic medicine is a system of treatment in which minute amounts of a chemical are given to treat various ailments. The chemical that's given would produce the same symptoms as the disease it's supposed to be curing if that chemical were given in a larger amount.

This approach sounds sort of like a vaccination, except that homeopathic remedies are for symptoms only, and only after the symptoms appear. Little, if any, scientific evidence exists to support the efficacy of these treatments. They probably do no harm — unless they're given at the expense of proven therapies.

Herbology

Many of the drugs used in western medicine are derived from herbs and other plants or from chemical compositions that mimic the active agents found in nature. In fact, herbs are an ancient form of medicinal therapy. Many people prefer them because they consider herbs safer than chemicals, but of course they contain just as many chemicals as any other drug. They can also be just as deadly. Most herbs have not been scientifically tested to determine their safety or efficacy in animals. In addition, the dosage may vary from one batch to another because they are unregulated. Consistently finding a dose that works without creating the risk of an overdose is difficult. However, some herbs are proving to be promising and can be worth trying. Cannabis products are fast becoming popular, although not currently approved for veterinary medicine. Dogs are more susceptible to THC compared to humans, so THC should generally be avoided. Cannabidiol (CBD), however, has been shown to be safe for dogs and to have good effects on arthritic pain, noise phobias, anxiety, and possibly seizures in dogs.

Chiropractic medicine

Chiropractic medicine is popular with humans and is becoming more common with dogs. By manipulating the spine, and sometimes the limbs, minor misalignments that may result in pain can be corrected. Chiropractic manipulation is most helpful to dogs who have problems of the neck, lower back, pelvis, and knees. You must have a cooperative Pit Bull who will relax enough to allow a stranger to manipulate him before you can consider taking your dog in for a session of bending, twisting, and rearranging. Yet another reason to be certain that your dog is well socialized and well trained. Some risks exist, so be sure that you use a veterinarian certified by the American Veterinary Chiropractic Association.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture involves the placement of needles in specific locations in the skin, where they may be left for up to ten minutes. Dogs tend to tolerate it quite well — they often fall asleep during the session. It is most commonly used in veterinary practice to relieve pain; many people swear their dogs show great improvement after treatment, but considerable controversy still exists about its efficacy. Nonetheless, acupuncture will do no harm and is worth a try if your dog is in pain. Veterinary acupuncture has become so well accepted that several veterinary schools now offer courses in it. You can find an accredited veterinary acupuncturist through the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society (www.ivas.org).

Trying Home Remedies

In general, if your dog is sick enough to need treatment, he's sick enough to go to the doctor. But don't you ever find yourself avoiding human doctors unless you're really sick, and trying to come up with ways to heal yourself if you're just a bit under the weather? For those of you who may want to tinker with your Pit's health, be warned: The consequences can be dire. But if you're careful about when you use them and are ready to take your dog to the vet should things worsen, some household remedies can take care of a lot of Pit problems. But before using any of these remedies, at least talk to your vet and get her opinion.

- » To decrease swelling from injuries, use an icepack or ice cubes wrapped in a towel.
- » To drain abscesses and infections, use a towel soaked in hot water (and wrung out) as a moist compress.
- » To clean superficial cuts, use a providone–iodine solution.
- » To treat superficial cuts, use a human antibiotic ointment.
- » To reduce allergic reactions, use a human antihistamine pill such as Benadryl (diphenhydramine).

- » To control diarrhea, use a human medicine such as Imodium, but for a short time only.
- » To decrease pain and inflammation, use aspirin, but for a short time only.
- » To induce vomiting, use hydrogen peroxide, table salt, or mustard.
- » To absorb ingested toxins, use activated charcoal.
- » To control coughing not related to heart disease, use a human pediatric cough suppressant, but for a short time only.
- » To treat constipation, use mineral oil.



WARNING Examine the ingredient label of any human medicine carefully.

For example, some medicines made for children contain xylitol as a sweetener, which is toxic to dogs. Dogs also can't tolerate the levels of acetaminophen that humans can, so you generally want to avoid human medications containing it unless your veterinarian prescribes them. Dogs are also less tolerant of alcohol than humans are, so avoid medication containing it. Finally, be careful of any medications you apply to your dog's skin, because most dogs will lick them off and ingest them. If the label says don't eat it, don't put it on your dog.

Chapter 14

Pit Bull First Aid

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Being ready for an emergency
 - » Understanding artificial respiration and CPR
 - » Handling specific emergencies
-

Even experienced Pit Bull owners have a difficult time deciding what constitutes a true canine emergency. When in doubt, err on the side of caution and call the emergency clinic or your veterinarian for a professional opinion.

Consider it an emergency if your Pit Bull is ...

- » Hit by a car
- » Suffering severe trauma
- » Bleeding profusely
- » Bleeding from the nose, mouth, ears, eyes, rectum, or has blood in the urine or stools
- » Collapsing
- » Extremely lethargic
- » Breathing with difficulty
- » Drowning
- » Suffering heat stroke
- » Showing a temperature over 104°F
- » Exhibiting signs of hypothermia or frostbite
- » Vomiting repeatedly

- » Vomiting material that contains blood or that looks like coffee grounds or feces
- » Attempting to vomit but unable to do so, especially if the stomach is swollen
- » Restless, if the stomach is swollen
- » Experiencing frequent, watery diarrhea
- » Bitten by a poisonous snake or spider
- » Stung multiple times by insects
- » Possibly poisoned, especially if you think she drank antifreeze
- » Suffering from clusters of seizures or a prolonged seizure
- » Paralyzed
- » Showing pupils that are unresponsive or unequal
- » Squinting, with red eyes and aversion to light
- » Suffering from electric shock
- » Dehydrated

One of the best gifts that you can give your dog is to take a first aid course. Some courses are available specifically for pets, but even a human first aid course is invaluable. Because no paramedics exist for dogs, you must be ready to assume that role. By the way, there aren't any ambulance drivers for dogs, either — be ready for that role, too. It sounds daunting, but the prep work will keep your dog and your family happy and healthy.

Prepare now, while your Pit is healthy. Study the emergency procedures described in this chapter and keep this book handy. Misplaced instructions can result in a critical loss of time. Know the phone number and location of the emergency veterinarian in your area. Program the number into your phone. Another thing to keep in mind: Always have enough fuel in your car to make it to the emergency clinic (stopping for gas is the last thing you want to do if your Pit is bleeding in the back seat).

In general:

- » Make sure that you and your dog are in a safe location.
- » A dog in pain may bite. Make an emergency muzzle by looping a cloth around the muzzle and then tying it behind the ears.
- » Move the dog as little and as gently as possible.
- » Use a piece of plywood or a blanket to transport the dog.



REMEMBER In any emergency, keep calm, keep your dog calm, and don't give up. Keep calm and bully on.

ABCs of First Aid

In an emergency, check to see whether the dog is responsive by calling her name or tapping on her head. If she doesn't respond, quickly use the ABCs of first aid:

A: Airway

B: Breathing

C: Circulation

- » **Airway:** Make sure the airway is open. Extend the head and neck, open the mouth, and pull the tongue forward.
- » **Breathing:** Make sure the dog is breathing. Is the chest rising and falling? Can you feel exhaled air against your cheek? If not, give two rapid breaths through the nose before checking circulation.
- » **Circulation:** Check gum color, capillary refill time, and pulse. Gum color should be pink. When you press your thumb on the gum, it should regain its color within two seconds. Check the pulse by feeling either the heart beat (on the left side of the rib cage, a couple

of inches behind the elbow) or feeling the pulse (on the inside of the thigh, near the groin).

If your dog has a pulse, but she's not breathing, administer artificial respiration. If your dog does not have a pulse, administer cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR). I explain both life-saving techniques in the sections that follow.

Artificial respiration

You may need to perform some vital, preliminary first aid before you perform artificial respiration. If an object is obstructing the airway, wrap your hands around your dog's abdomen, behind the rib cage, and compress briskly. Repeat if needed. If the dog loses consciousness, extend the head and neck forward, pull the tongue out fully, and explore the throat for any foreign objects.


If the dog is in danger of drowning, turn the dog upside down, hold her around her waist, and sway back and forth so that water can run out of her mouth. Now you're ready to perform artificial respiration:

- 1. Open the dog's mouth, and clear the passage of secretions and foreign bodies.**
- 2. Pull the dog's tongue forward.**
- 3. Seal your mouth over the dog's nose and mouth. Blow into the dog's nose for two seconds, and then release.**
- 4. You should see your dog's chest expand; if not, try blowing with greater force, making a tighter seal around the lips, or checking for an obstruction.**
- 5. Repeat at a rate of one breath every four seconds.**
- 6. Stop every minute to monitor breathing and pulse.**
- 7. If air collects in the stomach, push down just behind the ribcage every few minutes.**
- 8. Continue until the dog breathes on her own.**

CPR

To perform CPR on a dog:

1. **Place your hands, one on top of the other, on the left side of the chest, about 2 inches up from and behind the point of the elbow.**
2. **Press down quickly and release.**



REMEMBER

VITAL STATISTICS FOR YOUR PIT BULL

Respiration: 10 to 30 breaths per minute at rest

Pulse: 60 to 120 beats per minute at rest

Temperature: 99.5°F to 102.5°F

Capillary refill time: Less than 2 seconds (checked by pressing on the gums)

Gum color: Pink (not white, red, bluish, yellowish, or pink with tiny red spots)

Hydration: Skin should pop back into position within 3 seconds of being lifted

3. **Compress at a rate of about 100 times per minute.**
4. **After every 15 compressions, give two breaths through the nose. If you have a partner, the partner can give breaths every two or three compressions.**

Specific Emergencies

Most other types of emergencies give you a little more time to act — but not much. For the following situations, administer first aid and seek veterinary attention.

Poisoning

Signs of poisoning vary, depending on the type of poison, but commonly include vomiting, convulsions, staggering, and collapse. If in doubt

about whether your Pit ingested poison, call the veterinarian anyway. If possible, bring the suspected poison and its container with you to the veterinarian. If the dog vomits, put the vomit in a plastic bag and bring it with you to the vet.

This list contains items you may have around the house that can poison your dog. The poisonous compound is given in parenthesis.

- » **Acetaminophen**, such as is found in Tylenol: A toxic dose for dogs is over 75 mg/lb.
- » **Ant or roach bait**: Modern ant and roach baits are relatively nontoxic to mammals. But the plastic casing can cause problems if swallowed.
- » **Antifreeze** (ethylene glycol): Causes kidney failure; prognosis is poor once symptoms have begun. Veterinary treatment must be obtained within two to four hours of ingestion of even tiny amounts if the dog's life is to be saved. You can reduce the risk of antifreeze poisoning by using a brand that does not contain ethylene glycol.
- » **Chocolate** (theobromine): Causes vomiting, diarrhea, restlessness, fever, seizures, coma, and death; toxic dose for dogs is 50 mg/lb. Dark chocolate contains over 400 milligrams of theobromine per ounce, so a five ounce candy bar can be life threatening to a 40 pound dog.
- » **Cold medications**: Those containing pseudoephedrine can cause cardiovascular and central nervous system problems, leading to agitation, panting, and high heart rate. Eating just 20 to 25 milligrams of pseudoephedrine per pound of body weight can cause life-threatening signs.
- » **Flea and tick poison and dewormers** (organophosphates): Overdose can cause vomiting, muscle tremors, pupil constriction, diarrhea, excitability, difficulty breathing, and death. Prognosis for recovery varies — it can be poor, depending on a variety of factors.
- » **Fleet enema** (hypertonic sodium phosphate): Can cause sleepiness, muscle rigidity, unsteadiness, seizures, vomiting, shock, and death.

Toxic dosage for a Pit Bull is four ounces. Prognosis depends on the amount ingested and how quickly treatment begins.

- » **Ibuprofen:** Can cause vomiting, stomach ulcers, and kidney failure. Kidney failure can result from dosages of 150 mg/lb.
- » **Insect poison, weed killer, and wood preservatives (arsenic):** Cause vomiting, diarrhea, weakness, and eventually kidney failure, coma, and death; prognosis is poor if symptoms have already started.
- » **Lead:** Causes abnormal behavior, unsteadiness, seizures, loss of appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, and blindness. Lead can be found in paint, golf ball coatings, linoleum, and even newsprint. Prognosis is usually good.
- » **Prescription medications:** Because so many prescription medications are dangerous, it's worth calling a dog poison help center if your dog gets into any.
- » **Rodent poison (warfarin compounds):** Contains anticoagulants that cause uncontrolled internal bleeding; prognosis ranges from good (if caught soon after ingestion) to poor (if several days have elapsed).
- » **Rodent poison (cholecalciferol):** Deposits calcium in the blood vessels, causing kidney failure and other problems; prognosis is poor, even if your Pit only ate small amounts.
- » **Rose fertilizer (iron):** Can cause kidney and liver failure; toxic dose is one teaspoon of 5 percent concentration per 20 pounds. Prognosis is varied, depending upon the amount ingested and the delay in treatment.
- » **Snail and slug poison (metaldehyde):** Causes anxiety, unsteadiness, tremors, coma, and death; prognosis is fair.
- » **Squirrel and bird poison (strychnine):** Can cause seizures, hyper-reactivity to noise, and rigid muscles. This poison is usually ingested by way of birdseed with a blue coating of strychnine. Prognosis is poor.
- » **Tricyclic antidepressants:** Overdose can cause seizures and fatal heart rhythm abnormalities; prognosis varies.

- » **Xylitol:** This artificial sweetener is found in a variety of sugar-free products such as candy, gum, and cookies, as well as in toothpaste, cough syrup, and medicines, especially children's medicines. It's safe for humans, but it can be fatal for dogs. It causes a rapid release of insulin, leading to profound hypoglycemia. As little as 50 milligrams of xylitol per pound of body weight is life-threatening for dogs. Depending on the brand, in a 45-pound dog, only sticks of xylitol-containing gum would be needed to cause hypoglycemia, and ten sticks may cause liver failure.
- » **Zinc:** Causes breakdown of red blood cells. Symptoms include decreased appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, depression, pale gums, and brown urine. Zinc can be found in pennies, zinc oxide skin cream, calamine lotion, fertilizers, and shampoos. Prognosis varies.

Call the veterinarian or a poison control hotline and give as much information as possible. Induce vomiting (except in the cases outlined below) by giving either hydrogen peroxide (mixed 1:1 with water), salt water, or dry mustard and water. Treat for shock and get your Pit Bull to the veterinarian at once. Be prepared for convulsions or respiratory distress.

Do not induce vomiting if the poison was an acid, alkali, petroleum product, solvent, cleaner, tranquilizer, or if a sharp object was swallowed; also do not induce vomiting if the dog is severely depressed, convulsing, comatose, or if over two hours have passed since ingestion. If the dog is neither convulsing nor unconscious, dilute the poison by giving milk, vegetable oil, or egg whites. Activated charcoal can absorb many toxins. Baking soda or milk of magnesia can be given for ingested acids, and vinegar or lemon juice for ingested alkalis.



REMEMBER Call an animal poison control center for advice (usually for a fee) if you think your dog has eaten something dangerous. Here are two places to try:

» **24/7 Animal Poison Control Center:**

www.petpoisonhelpline.com; 855-764-7661

» **ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center:** www.aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control; 888-426-4435

Seizures

A dog undergoing a seizure may drool, become stiff, or have uncontrollable muscle spasms.

- » Remove other dogs from the area (they may attack the convulsing dog).
- » Wrap the dog securely in a blanket, to prevent her from injuring herself on furniture or stairs.
- » Never put your hands (or anything else) in a convulsing dog's mouth.
- » Most convulsions are over in a few minutes. (If they continue for more than 10 minutes, you must get the dog to the emergency clinic).
- » After the seizure, treat the dog for shock.
- » Call your veterinarian for advice, as some seizures can result from poisoning, high fever, or other conditions that must be treated immediately. Taking careful note of all the characteristics of the seizure and the sequence of seizure activity can help your vet diagnose the cause.

Heat stroke

Early signs of heat stroke include rapid, loud breathing; abundant, thick saliva; bright red mucous membranes; and high rectal temperature. Later signs include unsteadiness, diarrhea, and coma.

Wet the dog and place her in front of a fan. If doing so is not possible, immerse the dog in cool water. *Do not plunge the dog in ice water*; the resulting constriction of peripheral blood vessels can make the situation worse because it traps heat in the body's core. Offer small amounts of water for drinking.

You must lower your dog's body temperature quickly, but you don't want it to go below 100°F. Stop cooling the dog when the rectal temperature reaches 103°F, because it will continue to fall without your help. If the dog is not responding, rush him to the closest veterinarian who can administer intravenous fluids to further cool him. Because high temperatures can cause organ damage, take your dog to the veterinarian even if he seems to have recovered.

Hypothermia

Shivering and sluggishness are signs of a dog who has become excessively chilled. Later signs include a very low (under 95°F) body temperature, slow pulse and breathing rates, and coma.

Warm the dog gradually. Wrap her in a blanket (preferably one that has been warmed in the dryer). Place plastic bottles filled with hot water outside the blankets (not touching the dog). You can also place a plastic tarp over the blanket, making sure the dog's head is not covered.

Monitor the dog's temperature. Stop warming when the temperature reaches 100°F.

Bleeding

Consider wounds to be an emergency if your dog is bleeding profusely, if the wounds are extremely deep, or if they open to the chest cavity, abdominal cavity, or head.

- » Do not remove impaled objects; seek veterinary attention.
- » Control massive bleeding.
- » Cover the wound with clean dressing and apply pressure.
- » Don't remove blood-soaked bandages; apply more dressings over them until bleeding stops.
- » If possible, elevate the wound and apply a cold pack to it.
- » If the wound is on an extremity, apply pressure to the closest pressure point.



TIP

Apply pressure to stop the bleeding from an extremity. For a front leg, press inside of the leg, just above the elbow; for a rear leg, press inside of the thigh, where the femoral artery crosses the thigh bone; for the tail, press the underside of the tail, close to where it joins the body.

- » Use a tourniquet only in life-threatening situations and only when all other attempts to reduce bleeding have failed. Check for signs of shock.
- » For sucking chest wounds, place a sheet of plastic or other nonporous material over the hole and apply a bandage to make as airtight a seal as possible. It probably still won't work very well, but it may help.
- » For abdominal wounds, place a warm, wet, sterile dressing over any protruding internal organs and cover with a bandage or towel. Do not attempt to push organs back into the dog.
- » For head wounds, apply gentle pressure to control bleeding. Monitor for loss of consciousness or shock and treat accordingly.
- » For animal bites, allow some bleeding, then clean the area thoroughly and apply antibiotic ointment. A course of oral antibiotics will probably be necessary. It's best not to suture most animal bites, but a large one (over one-half inch in diameter) or one on the face or other prominent position may need to be sutured.

Limb fractures

In most cases of limb fracture, you should simply transport the dog to the veterinarian as gently as possible, taking great care to prevent the affected limb from hitting anything. You risk doing more damage than good if you try to splint the leg. If you must try to splint, use lots and lots of padding and tape the splint outside of the padding. If the bone is exposed, place a sterile covering over it. Don't try to push the bone back in.

Bloat (gastric torsion, gastric dilatation-volvulus)



WARNING Bloat is a life-threatening emergency in which gas and fluid become trapped in the stomach. It is most common in large, deep-chested breeds. Symptoms include distention of the abdomen, unproductive attempts to vomit, excessive salivation, and restlessness. A dog with these symptoms needs to go to the emergency clinic right now — not tomorrow, not even an hour from now.



REMEMBER Bloat is an extreme emergency that can kill within an hour.

The veterinarian will try to pass a tube into the stomach so gases can escape. Often, the stomach has twisted and rotated on its axis, so the tube can't get into the stomach. Dogs with rotated stomachs require emergency surgery in order to save their lives. The rotation of the stomach cuts off the blood supply to the stomach wall and other organs, which will die, and subsequently kill the dog, if surgery isn't performed quickly. Other organs may also be compromised. During surgery, the veterinarian should tack the stomach in place to prevent future rotation. Dogs who bloat once will often continue to do so.

Insect stings and allergic reactions

Insects often sting dogs on the face or feet. Remove any visible stingers as quickly as possible by brushing them with a credit card or stiff paper; grasping a stinger often injects more venom into the dog. Administer a paste of baking soda and water to bee stings and vinegar to wasp stings. Clean the area and apply antibacterial ointment. Keep an eye on the dog in case she has an allergic reaction, including swelling that can interfere with breathing, or any change in consciousness.

Call your veterinarian immediately if you think that the dog may be having a severe reaction. Insect stings are the most common cause of

extreme allergic reactions. Swelling around the nose and throat can block the airway. Other possible reactions include restlessness, vomiting, diarrhea, seizures, and collapse. If any of these symptoms occur, immediate veterinary attention is probably necessary.

Snakebite

Poisonous snakebites are characterized by swelling, discoloration, pain, fang marks, restlessness, nausea, and weakness. Most bites are to the head and are difficult to treat with first aid.

Restrain the dog and keep her quiet. Be able to describe the snake. If (and only if) you can't get to the veterinarian immediately, apply a pressure bandage (not a tourniquet, but a firm bandage) between the bite and the heart.



TIP

The best place for advice is the National Snakebite Support page on Facebook (www.facebook.com/groups/987850051297436), which is manned by snake bite expert physicians and veterinarians who supply advice free of charge. Among their general advice is that antivenin and pain medications are always warranted; antihistamines, steroids, and antibiotics are not helpful; and in most cases, the bite site should be slightly elevated in order to distribute the venom and prevent it from causing massive localized damage. If you live in snake country and you're on Facebook, join the page now. Regardless, if your dog is bitten by a venomous snake, take him to a veterinarian immediately.



REMEMBER

In North America, copperheads are the most likely to bite, but are the least venomous. Coral snakes are least likely to bite, but are the most venomous. Rattlesnakes and water moccasins usually try to avoid biting and can have deadly bites.

Burns

Deep burns, characterized by charred or pearly white skin, with deeper layers of tissue exposed, are serious threats to your dog's health.

Cool burned areas with towels soaked in cool water or by immersing them in cold water. If over 50 percent of the dog is burned, do not immerse the dog in water as doing so increases the likelihood of shock. Cover the area with a clean bandage or towel to avoid contamination. Do not apply pressure; do not apply ointments. Monitor for shock.

Electrical shock

A dog who chews an electrical cord may collapse and have burns inside her mouth. Before touching the dog, disconnect the plug or cut the power; if that cannot be done immediately, use a wooden stick to knock the cord away from the dog. Keep the dog warm and treat for shock. Monitor breathing and heartbeat.

Chapter 15

Helping Your Dog Age Well

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Feeding and exercising the older Pit Bull
 - » Coping with special health concerns
 - » Saying goodbye
 - » Coping with loss of a true friend
-

Pit Bulls are the Peter Pans (well, maybe if Peter Pan were a wrestler) of the dog world, eternally young at heart. They remain young of body as well — up to a point. While your Pit Bull may be active and healthy for a long time, one day you will look at your youngster and be shocked to discover that his face has silvered and his gait has stiffened. He sleeps longer and more soundly than he did as a youngster, and he's slower to get going. He may be less eager to play and more content to lie in the sun. Feeling a bit sad is natural, but getting your dog to a healthy old age is a worthy accomplishment.

Few things are as adorable as a mischievous Pit Bull pup discovering the world, or as magnificent as an adult Pit Bull exuding self-confidence, but other Pit Bulls pale in comparison to the wise and stately Pit Bull elder.

Older Pit Bulls can enjoy full and active lives, as long as you know what extra measures to take.



REMEMBER Average life expectancy for a Pit Bull is about 11 to 13 years, although many have reached ripe old ages of 15 or 16.

Eat and Run

Many Pit Bull owners have the idea that their macho little dog won't ever slow down with age. But staying in a state of denial about your dog's increasing age or decreasing abilities is not doing him any favors.

Older Pit Bulls, who may have had minor joint problems when young, really begin to suffer from them. Keeping your older Pit Bull relatively active, without putting too much stress on his joints, is critical to his health (see [Figure 15-1](#)). If your dog is sore the day after you exercise, you've probably asked too much. You may have to walk with your dog and do your marathon running by yourself. Swimming is an excellent low-impact exercise, as long as the dog doesn't get chilled and is never put in a dangerous situation. Remember that exercise is *essential* to keeping your dog healthy and happy.



FIGURE 15-1: Older Pit Bulls still need an active lifestyle to stay healthy.

Older dogs should be fed several small meals instead of one large meal, and should be fed on time. Moistening dry food or feeding canned food

can help a dog with dental problems enjoy his meal. He may also enjoy eating while lying down or eating off of a raised platform.

Older dogs engage in less physical activity and have lower metabolic rates, so they require fewer calories than they used to. Older dogs who are fed the same amount of food as when they were young can become obese; obese dogs have a greater risk of cardiovascular and joint problems.

Some Pit Bulls lose weight with age, which can be as unhealthy as gaining weight. Your dog needs a little bit of padding, so that he has something to fall back on if he gets sick. Consuming high-quality (not quantity) protein is especially important for older dogs. The good news is that most older dogs do not require a special diet unless they have a particular medical need for it.

Act Your Age

Older dogs tend to like a simple life. Although they're still up for adventure, that adventure may have to be toned down a bit. Long trips can be grueling for an older dog, and boarding in a kennel may be extremely upsetting. Consider getting a house sitter whom your dog knows if you want to go on vacation.

Some older dogs become cranky and impatient, especially when dealing with puppies or boisterous children. But don't excuse behavioral changes, especially if they're sudden, as entirely due to aging. They can be symptoms of pain or disease.

The slight haziness that appears in an older dog's pupils is normal and has minimal effect upon vision, but some dogs, especially those with diabetes, may develop cataracts. Cataracts can be seen through the dog's pupils as a densely clouded area. The lens can be removed by a veterinary ophthalmologist if the cataract is severe. Older dogs may experience hearing or visual loss. Be careful not to startle a dog with impaired senses, as a startled dog can snap in self-defense.

Dogs with gradual vision loss can cope well, as long as they are kept in familiar surroundings and extra safety precautions are followed. For example, don't move furniture, and place sound or scent beacons throughout the house or yard to help the dog locate specific landmarks. Also lay pathways in the yard, such as gravel or block walkways, and even in the house, using carpet runners. Block open stairways or pools. Dogs with hearing loss can learn hand gestures and also respond to vibrations.

The immune system may be less effective in older dogs. As a result, shielding your dog from infectious disease, chilling, overheating, and any other stressful condition is important. A bit of good news: An older dog who's never exposed to other dogs may not need to be vaccinated as often or for as many diseases as a younger dog. Discuss this with your veterinarian.

Vomiting and diarrhea can signal that an older dog may have various problems; keep in mind that an older dog cannot tolerate the dehydration that results from continued vomiting or diarrhea. You should not let it continue unchecked.



REMEMBER An older Pit Bull should see the veterinarian at least twice a year. Blood tests can detect early stages of diseases, and your vet may be able to spot developing problems without any tests whatsoever.

Older dogs are somewhat more at risk when they undergo anesthesia. Most of the increased risk can be negated, however, by carefully screening dogs to determine whether they're healthy enough to undergo the procedure. Many older dogs need tooth cleaning under anesthesia — this is generally safe, as long as your dog is healthy.

Older dogs tend to have a stronger body odor. Don't just ignore increased odors, though. They can indicate specific problems, such as periodontal disease, impacted anal sacs, seborrhea, ear infections, or

even kidney disease. Any strong odor should be checked by your veterinarian.

Like people, dogs lose skin moisture as they age. Although dogs don't have to worry about wrinkles, their skin can become dry and itchy. Regular brushing can help to stimulate oil production.

Although Pit Bulls of any age enjoy a soft, warm bed, such a bed is an absolute necessity for older Pit Bulls. Arthritis is a common cause of intermittent stiffness and lameness, and it can be helped with heat, a soft bed, moderate exercise, and possibly drug therapy. New arthritis medications have made a huge difference in the quality of life for many older Pit Bulls, but not every dog can use them. Ask your veterinarian to evaluate your dog's ability to take some of the new medicines, if your Pit has arthritis.

In general, any ailment that an older dog has is magnified in severity on account of age. Some of the more common symptoms of illness that an older Pit Bull may display, and the possible causes of the symptoms, include

- » **Diarrhea:** kidney or liver disease; pancreatitis
- » **Coughing:** heart disease; tracheal collapse; lung cancer
- » **Difficulty eating:** periodontal disease; oral tumors
- » **Decreased appetite:** kidney, liver, or heart disease; pancreatitis; cancer
- » **Increased appetite:** diabetes; Cushing's syndrome
- » **Weight loss:** heart, liver or kidney disease; diabetes; cancer
- » **Abdominal distention:** heart or kidney disease; Cushing's syndrome; tumor
- » **Increased urination:** diabetes; kidney or liver disease; cystitis; Cushing's syndrome
- » **Limping:** arthritis; hip or elbow dysplasia; degenerative myelopathy
- » **Nasal discharge:** tumor; periodontal disease

If you're lucky enough to have an older Pit Bull, you must accept that an end will come. Heart disease, kidney failure, and cancer eventually claim most of these senior citizens. Early detection can help delay the effects of these diseases, but, unfortunately, can seldom defeat them.

When You've Done Everything

Despite the best of care, a time will come when neither you nor your veterinarian can prevent your dear friend from succumbing to old age or an incurable illness. It seems hard to believe that you will have to bid farewell to an animal who has been such a focal point of your life — in truth, a real member of your family. That dogs live such a short time compared to humans is a cruel fact, but one that you must ultimately face.

You should realize that both of you have been fortunate to share so many good times. You must also make sure that your Pit Bull's remaining time is still pleasurable. Many terminal illnesses make your dog feel very ill, and there comes a point when your desire to keep your friend with you for as long as possible may be cruel to both of you. If your dog no longer eats his dinner or treats, he's giving you a sign that he doesn't feel well and you must face the prospect of doing what's best for your beloved friend. Every Pit Bull owner has to determine when they feel the point has come, using whatever criteria they feel is right. In my opinion, many people put off making the difficult choice for longer than they should and for longer than is kind to the dog. They don't want to act in haste and be haunted by thoughts that, just maybe, the most recent dip into lethargy and illness was a temporary setback. And of course, they put it off because they can't stand the thought.

Euthanasia is a difficult and personal decision that no one wishes to make, and no one can make it for you. Ask your veterinarian whether there is a reasonable chance of your dog getting better and whether your dog is likely suffering. Ask yourself whether your dog is getting pleasure out of life, and whether he enjoys most of his days. Financial considerations can be a factor too, if you'd have to go into debt to keep

your dog alive for just a bit longer. Your own emotional state must also be considered.

We all wish that, if our dog has to go, he could just fall asleep and never wake up. This, unfortunately, almost never happens. Even when it does, you're left with the regret that you never got to say goodbye. The best way you can simulate a natural death is with euthanasia. Euthanasia is painless and involves giving an overdose of an anesthetic. The dog falls asleep and dies almost instantly. In a very sick dog, because the circulation is compromised, it may take slightly longer for the anesthetic to go into effect.

If you do decide that euthanasia is the kindest thing you can do for your beloved friend, discuss with your veterinarian what will happen. You may ask about giving your dog a tranquilizer beforehand, if he's afraid of the vet's office. You may feel better having the doctor meet you at home or if the vet comes out to your car. Although it won't be easy, try to remain with your dog so that his last moments will be filled with your love; otherwise, have a friend whom your dog knows stay with him. Try to recall the wonderful times you've shared, and realize that, however painful losing such a once-in-a-lifetime dog is, it's better than never having had such a partner at all.

Eternally in Your Heart

After losing such a cherished friend, many people say that they will never get another dog. True, no dog will ever take the place of your dog. But you'll find that another dog is a welcome diversion and will help keep you from dwelling on the loss of your first pet, as long as you don't keep comparing the new dog to the old. It's true that by getting another dog you're sentencing yourself to the same grief in the future, but wouldn't you rather have that than miss out on a second once-in-a-lifetime dog?

The loss of your companion may mark the end of an era for you, a time when you and your Pit Bull grew up or grew old together. But one can scarcely ask for a better life partner than a special Pit Bull. As long as

you hold your memories close, your relationship with your dog will last forever.

Part 5

The Part of Tens

IN THIS PART ...

Find resources to make your life with your Pit Bull even better.

Get tips for what you can do to help boost the breed's reputation everywhere you go.

Chapter 16

Ten Pit Bull Resources

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Learning more about your dog
 - » Getting help when you need it
-

Ready to get even more involved in everything Pit Bull? This chapter lists ten of my favorite online resources that I think you'll like, too.

American Dog Breeders Association

The American Dog Breeders Association (ADBA) has been registering Pit Bulls since 1909 and remains the largest Pit Bull registry. Although it has the reputation of being the registry of fighting Pit Bulls, the ADBA also promotes a variety of Pit Bull competitions and champions responsible Pit Bull ownership. The website (www.adbadog.com) has information about current legislation, responsible dog ownership, and a library of Pit Bull resources on a wide variety of topics from resolving disputes to ADBA events.

American Kennel Club

Although the AKC (www.akc.org) doesn't register as many Pit Bulls as the UKC does, it makes up for it with more competitions for all dogs, including some you can videotape at home and send in for judging. You can enroll your Pit mix so she can compete in almost every type of all-breed competition except for conformation. The AKC offers pet insurance and backs the AKC Reunite (www.akcreunite.org) microchip service. And the AKC Marketplace (<https://marketplace.akc.org>) lists AKC-registered puppies available. The AKC also has an extensive

list of upcoming events you may want to attend just to meet breeds and breeders.

The AKC website has a plethora of information on subjects ranging from health and nutrition to behavior and training. You can keep abreast of legislation that may affect dogs in your community, and join with the AKC to fight anti-breed or anti-breeder legislation. Don't forget to check out AKC TV (www.akc.tv) for coverage of various breed, health, and training topics, as well as dog shows and current events. The AKC bills itself as “the dog's champion,” and its website reflects that.

DogsBite.org

DogsBite.org (www.dogsbite.org) maintains an up-to-date database of not just Pit Bull attacks, but reported bites associated with any breed. However, the emphasis is on Pit Bulls. Throughout this book, I say that ignoring facts doesn't make you a better Pit Bull owner; in fact, if your dog adds to these statistics because of your overconfidence in the breed, it only adds to the ammunition against the breed.

DogsBite.org has information helpful to Pit Bull owners, such as lists of communities with breed-specific legislation (BSL), information about the legality of BSL, and information about safety around dogs.



TIP

DogsBite.org is one of several science- and statistics-driven sites about dangerous dogs. Others worth checking out are Animals 24-7 (www.animals24-7.org), National Pit Bull Victim Awareness (www.nationalpitbullvictimawareness.org), and Responsible Citizens for Public Safety (www.rc4ps.org).

Dogster

This mammoth Dogster website (www.dogster.com) is home to tens of thousands of articles about dogs, covering a wide range of topics from

just plain silly to heartwarming to educational. Uplifting Pit Bull and shelter dog stories are perennial favorites at Dogster. Though less common, more controversial topics can also be found here. The one overreaching attitude, though, is a love of dogs.

Dr. Sophia Yin

Renown veterinary behaviorist Dr. Sophia Yin was a driving force in the world of humane dog behavior shaping before her untimely death in 2014, but she left a legacy of information on her website (www.drSophiaYin.com). There, you can read the current blog written by other respected behaviorists, or jump directly to www.drSophiaYin.com/resources/dog_behavior for information on specific behavior problems.

Live Science

Ever wanted to be the dog science nerd in your group of friends? Check out www.livescience.com/topics/dogs for regular updates about science research involving dog health, behavior, genetics, evolution, and the human-animal bond. You can even sign up to be notified when new research comes out. And don't worry — the information is translated into everyday language you can use with your friends, so you don't need a biology degree to understand it.

Pit Bull Rescue Central

Pit Bull Rescue Central (www.pbrc.net) is not a shelter, a rehab facility, or a sanctuary. They house no dogs and have none available for adoption. But they have every resource you'll ever need to look for an available Pit to own or foster, list a Pit in need of a home, find local Pit rescues, copy sample Pit adoption contracts, access guidelines for screening applicants, apply for funding to spay or neuter your Pit, check out great Pit community programs, learn about breed-specific legislation,

and, well, everything you could ever need regarding the world of Pit Bulls in need.

Strombeck's Home-Prepared Diets for Dogs and Cats

I'm not a fan of home-prepared diets unless they're designed by experts, and Donald R. Strombeck, DVM, PhD, is a true expert in the field of nutrition. If your dog is suffering from kidney, heart, or liver disease, or has pancreatitis or some other ailment, or you're just not a fan of commercial foods, check out the special recipes at

<http://dogcathomeprepareddiet.com>.

United Kennel Club

Of the three main registries that recognize Bully-type breeds, the United Kennel Club (UKC; www.ukcdogs.com) probably registers the majority of them, mostly as American Pit Bull Terriers (APBTs). (This is in contrast to the American Kennel Club [AKC], which registers the less popular American Staffordshire Terrier and Staffordshire Bull Terrier breeds.) In fact, the UKC registers more APBTs than any other breed. And although the American Dog Breeders Association (ADBA) registers only Pit Bulls, it doesn't emphasize the variety of sports available to their registrants that the UKC does.

The UKC's slogan is "Dogs that do more," and they do their best to encourage dog owners to help their dogs live up to that slogan. The UKC offers conformation, obedience, Rally, weight pulling, agility, dock diving, racing, lure coursing, and nosework competitions for all breeds.

Veterinary Partner

With so many veterinary resources on the web, it's hard to know which one to trust. Your primary source should always be your own

veterinarian, but sometimes you may want to look up information online, and who can you trust?

One great resource is Veterinary Partner (<https://veterinarypartner.vin.com>), the pet-owner division of the Veterinary Information Network (www.vin.com), a site aimed at veterinarians. It's written and reviewed by veterinarians (many of them board-certified specialists), it has no products to sell, and it includes different viewpoints as long as they have some scientific merit. Veterinary Partner covers emergencies, as well as a wide variety of health conditions.



TIP

Avoid turning to sites that sell products or supplements, or seem to have an agenda at odds with traditional viewpoints, when you're seeking reliable pet health information online.

Chapter 17

Ten Ways to Help the Pit Bull's Reputation

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Knowing how to enlighten folks on Pit Bulls
 - » Supporting Pit Bull causes
-

As the owner of a breed subject to so much discrimination, you have a special obligation to make sure your Pit Bull is a walking example of why this breed can be so great. More than most dogs, Pit Bulls attract attention — good and bad — wherever they go. That means you have a ready-made audience. Make the most of your time in the spotlight by showing the Pit Bull in a good light.

Understanding Both Sides

No other breed has so much misinformation buzzing around it as the Pit Bull does. Countless websites and social media groups claim that Pit Bulls are “nanny dogs,” misidentified as the culprits in attacks, and vilified for the slightest misdeeds. Other groups call Pit Bulls maulers (and a host of other words my publisher won’t allow me to include here). Neither side is right or wrong.

The fact that you’re reading this book probably means you’re a Pit Bull lover, so you’re more likely to be swayed by the group that fervently believes Pit Bulls are the victims of discrimination. But that group is also one of the greatest victims of Pit Bull attacks — because they refuse to see that there is the potential — not the promise, but the potential — that this dear family member could one day answer to his heritage and inflict serious injuries to people or pets.

My plea is this: Listen to both sides. Realize that this issue is not black and white. (It isn't even gray. It's more like a marble design, with swirls of truth running throughout both sides.) And act accordingly. Take the extra precautions that old time dogmen took because they realized the potential for danger. Don't give your dog a chance to be a statistic simply because you trusted too much. Be a loving — but careful — custodian who doesn't set your dog up for failure, and in so doing, doesn't bring even more bad attention to the breed.

Showing Off

If you have a Pit Bull who is a great example of what the breed can be, show him off! Train for or enter any of the competitions mentioned in this book: weight pulling, agility, dock diving, obedience, Rally, tracking, scent work, barn hunt, trick dog, Canine Good Citizen. If your Pit Bull performs with typical Bully enthusiasm, you can be sure she'll be making a good impression on everyone there!

Being Considerate

Many people will be uneasy having your Pit Bull around their child or pet. Don't blame them for these feelings. Instead, try to understand that, statistically, they have cause for concern. Your job is to set their fears at ease, not confront or antagonize them. Keep your dog on a sturdy leash in public, close to your side, and don't allow him to stare at or threaten other people or pets. I know, I know: Your Pit Bull is a sweetheart. But they don't know that. Prove them wrong. Don't feed into the stereotype of the inconsiderate Pit Bull owner.

Steering Your Dog away from Trouble



REMEMBER Don't set your dog up for failure. Dog parks are generally just too exciting to take a chance on going. But if you see out-of-control dogs anywhere, just leave. Don't give them the chance to start something with your dog. Your dog may not be the one to start it, but he may be the one to finish it — and get the blame for the whole thing.

Being Realistic

Every day, I see pleas from Pit Bull owners who can't keep their dogs. They deeply love their dogs, but they can't keep them because they've killed another family pet or threatened their children. They try to find a home without pets or kids, but that's not easy, and it also doesn't protect future neighborhood pets and kids. Some owners, upon realizing there are no takers, decide not to mention their dogs' problems, perhaps in the hopes that the dog will somehow be less aggressive in a new home. The situation is horribly tragic, but placing a potentially dangerous dog where he could injure anyone — human or animal — is not an option.

Staying Optimistic

Although Pit Bulls have a higher chance of inflicting severe injury than other breeds do, most Pit Bulls spend their entire lives biting nothing but their dinners! Being aware and careful is not the same as being scared. Have fun with your Pit Bull — there's a reason Pit Bulls are so popular, and it's because most of them are good, and when they *are* good, they're *very* good!

Coming to the Rescue

No machine has been developed that can outperform a dog's nose in olfactory detection or that can outperform a dog when it comes to finding buried, lost, or even dead people. Not every dog is up to the

challenge, however. To be a Search and Rescue dog, not only must a dog have a good nose, but he must also be courageous, strong, nimble, obedient, intelligent, enthusiastic, and tough. This sounds like a job for a Pit Bull!



TIP

Contact the Search and Rescue Dogs of the United States (www.sardogsus.org) for more information about training for Search and Rescue.

Organizing a Local Pit Bull Group

Sometimes it's difficult to lead your own private crusade, but there's strength in numbers — and few things are stronger than a group of determined Pit Bull owners. Your group can organize competitions and perhaps even hold sanctioned events under the auspices of the ADBA, UKC, or AKC; you may also conduct Canine Good Citizen tests or Temperament Tests.

Spreading the Word

All your good deeds will be undone if uneducated or uncaring Pit Bull owners let their dogs run amuck. It's difficult to be a one-person crusade, but you may have to show these people the light in order to make the world a better place for Pit Bulls in general and your dog in particular. Perhaps you could write a dog care column for your local paper. Publicize cases of Pit Bull heroism and good deeds. You could volunteer at the local Humane Society and take special care to educate Pit Bull adopters. You could call up classifieds in the paper advertising Pit Bulls and make yourself available to these people or to their puppy buyers for advice. You could pass out Pit Bull information at dog events. Make yourself known in your community as a dedicated and responsible dog owner and lover. Make it difficult for community leaders to say anything bad about Pit Bull owners, because they will think of you first.

Remember that your Pit Bull is the best ambassador for the breed you have, but you have to be his PR agent.

Supporting the Cause

Perhaps being in the public spotlight just isn't for you. You can still do your part by joining a national or international group that fights for dog rights. You can contribute your time, money, or expertise to fight dog fighting, animal abuse, breed-specific legislation, or unjust laws. Dog fighting gives the Pit Bull a bad public image; many other ways exist to test this breed's gameness that don't involve cruel practices or illegal venues. Animal abuse occurs everywhere. It's just as bad if it happens to a mixed breed as to a Pit Bull. Become involved in stopping it not only because it's the humane thing to do, but because as a Pit Bull owner you have the chance to show that Pit Bull owners care about humane animal care. Fight unjust laws no matter where they are or whether they affect you or not. Every unfair law that goes unchallenged in another community helps your community leaders to justify passing the same laws where you live. Help people in other communities fight their battles, and they will be there for you. The following organizations may be of help:

» **American Kennel Club Government Relations Department:**

www.akcgr.org

» **United Kennel Club Dog Law:** www.ukcdogs.com/dog-law

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About the Author

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Dedication

To Luna, Tuggy, and Scooty

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