

Potty train Rex

A science-based and dog-friendly method for a house-trained pup

By OhMyDog!

INTRODUCTION

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?

Most dogs can be quite reliable within five to six months. Some get there in days, others need nearly a year. No matter what, you will need perseverance, and there WILL be the odd accident.

WHEN ARE PUPS PHYSICALLY READY?

Pups need a mature digestive/urinary tract to be reliable. A good rule of thumb = Rex can hold it for [±]one hour for every month of age.

AVERAGE AGE	POTTY MATURITY
6 weeks	Maximum 1 hour autonomy.
8-9 weeks	Develop preferred spots. Ideal starting age for potty training.
3.5 months	Maximum 4 hours' autonomy (daytime).
4 months	Most can last all night.
5-6 months	Most can be reliably housetrained (day + night).

To find out more on your pup's maturity stages, Google "OhMyDog puppy readiness infographic".

[±] Longer autonomy for larger breeds.

THE METHOD

Here's the magic recipe: a few broken nights, occasional clean-ups, constant supervision and a bit of planning.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES



WHAT'S THE BEST SPOT?

CRITERIA	REASON
A quiet environment	The nervous nelly: "I think I'll wait until am back home, thank you very much."
Varied surfaces e.g. earth, asphalt.	The hyper-specialist: "I only go on fine-grained, sun-kissed sand, you understand."
Appropriate surfaces	The indoor guy: "Well, it USED to be OK to pee on newspapers. Make up your mind!"
A convenient distance to your home	The trekkie: "Go on, just another mile, I swear. I know you want to go to bed, but I need to go"
Scent-primed	The newbie: "It all smells the same to me unless you pre-scent a spot for me" (yup, scooping soil from a popular elimination spot).
Clean	If on your own property, keep the elimination spot clean enough that the dog would want to use it!

²Enzyme cleaner: Urine Off is sold in Dutch shops

HOW TO PLAN TOILET VISITS?

LIKELIEST TIME HE'LL NEED TO GO
After playing/exercising: immediately.
After waking up: immediately.
After eating: about 15-20 minutes.
And... When showing 'the signs': immediately

Some dogs have few day-peaks during they need a break every 15 minutes!

The signs are:

SIGNS	WHAT TO DO
Pawing you	Take him out with no fuss.
Scratching at garden door	Take him out with no fuss.
Whining	Take him out with no fuss.
Circling/sniffing	See 'Caught red-handed'.
Lifting the tail	See 'Caught red-handed'.
Left lift/crouching	See 'Caught red-handed'.

Why 'with no fuss'? Because fuss increases the chance of...

- ... attention-seeking false alerts;
- ... excitement-related accidents on the way out;
- ... submission-related accidents when you approach.

HOW TO GET HIM TO MY CHOSEN SPOTS?

1. For each toilet break, guide (not drag) him to your chosen spot.
2. Once there, stand slightly sideways to him, and relax. Do not stare/crowd/pressure him.

If he eliminates in the first 5 minutes:

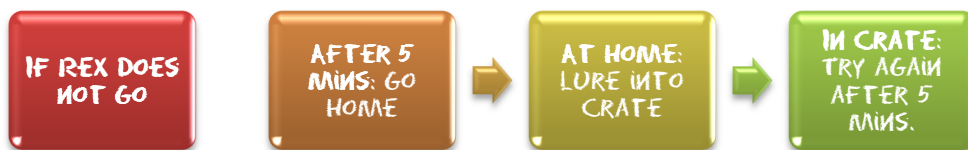
- **During elimination:** Praise him cheerfully (but without fussing or petting – let's not interrupt now).
- **2-3 seconds after elimination:** Give him a treat (but do not present the treat before he's truly finished – let's not interrupt).
- **And then:** Play with him and/or let him explore a little.



Caution: Please pick up after your dog. It's common courtesy, and it gives anti-dog lobbyists less fodder.

If he doesn't go within 5 minutes:

- After 5 minutes outside: Encourage him back inside, no fuss.
- Once home: Gently lure him into his crate
- Once in the crate (see [crate-training hand-out](#)): Set the timer to 5-10 minutes and then try again.
- After 2nd attempt: Try 3-4 more times if you must. He WILL go eventually unless there's a problem (see [typical problems](#)).



AT NIGHT

HOW OFTEN DO WE TAKE HIM OUT AT NIGHT?

Do NOT let him eliminate in his crate, ever. This is one of the toughest habits to break.

To make sure you take him out on time:

- Scheduling:
 - Plan his last feed more than 1 hour before your own bedtime.
 - Let him out one last time just before you're going to bed.
 - Expect he'll need to go after about 4 hours of sleep at first.
- Alerts:
 - If you have a smartphone, download a free movement sensor that will alert you when the pup is moving.
 - You could have the pup sleep in his crate in your bedroom for a while.

HOW TO DECREASE THE NIGHTLY TOILET BREAKS?

At first, you should have about 4-5 hours of peace for a 6- to 8-week-old pup at night (their nightly metabolism is slower than their daily one).

For the first 3 weeks of potty training, extend the interval by 10-15 minutes each night. Then expand the duration in bigger increments.

HOW TO BRING HIM TO HIS POTTY AREA AT NIGHT?

Follow the daytime instructions ([How to get him to my chosen spots?](#)), except that you reward elimination with quiet praise and a brief opportunity to explore, not play. We don't want to make him too alert. Night is for sleeping, not playing.

ACCIDENT, NOW WHAT?

IT WILL HAPPENS

Don't despair. You can expect the odd accident, even with the best supervision/crating/planning regime.

Do take every possible measure to avoid it, though, as every instance blurs the line on the golden rule we're trying to teach: going inside is a big no-no.

CAUGHT RED-HANDED

Get his attention by making a surprising sound like clapping or a whistle (not too loud, or you will startle the dog and he might fully empty his bladder).

As soon as you have his attention, guide (not drag) him to the right spot and follow instructions in "[How to get him to my chosen spots](#)".

CLEANING UP

If you didn't get there on time, clean up out of the dog's sight – the less fuss, the better.

Use enzyme cleaners (e.g. [Urine Off](#)®) which help breakdown the smell of urine. This prevents the scent of a previous accident becoming a trigger on that spot.

If it happens in the crate, take the whole crate apart to clean it. But this should be avoided at all costs, as crate elimination is a tough habit to break.

WHY NOT PUNISH?

1. He'll learn to do it sneakily (behind the couch...)
2. He'll learn not to eliminate in front of you (not so handy even on a walk...)
3. He'll learn to submissively urinates when you approach (one of those dog ironies)
4. Morally, you can't punish the pup for something that is your responsibility. Pups do not eliminate out of spite/disobedience, but through health problems/incomplete training.

TYPICAL PROBLEMS

HE WON'T DO IT ON THE LEASH

Common cause: Some pups don't get used to the leash that easily, and it distracts them from doing their business.

Solution: Use a longer, lighter, leash that you just allow to droop, and in the meantime, desensitize him to a short leash ([socialisation checklist](#)).

HE WAITS TOO LONG WHEN WE'RE ON A WALK

Problem: My dog waits ages before he goes potty when I take him out.

Common cause: You typically turn around and go back home as soon as he's finished his business, so now he's postponing it to stay outside longer.

Solution: Always reward elimination by giving the dog the freedom to stay outside and explore a little (even during that last walk at night when you're dying to go to bed).

HE ELIMINATES IN TINY QUANTITIES

Problem: Your dog eliminates a little, sniffs around, eliminates some more, etc.

Cause: To a certain extent, this is normal marking behaviour. It can be exacerbated in dogs that are rushed at potty time

Solution: When your dog is eliminating, leave him plenty of:

- *Space:* Do not crowd him, or look at him, as he's doing his business; and
- *Time:* Do not rush him so he eliminates much of his bladder on the first go.

HE WILL ONLY GO INSIDE

Cause: This can happen to dogs that feel unsafe outside, for whatever reason.

Solution: Try to find out what scares him, and desensitize him to it ([socialisation checklist](#)). Before desensitization is complete, try to find a 'scare-free' spot.

HE WON'T GO IN BAD WEATHER

Cause: Pups commonly hate the rain/snow/wind, and some will not eliminate under these conditions.

Solution: Protect him from the elements as best you can (e.g. hold the umbrella over him - without crowding him - or seek a more sheltered spot).

In the meanwhile, try to desensitize him to the rain ([socialisation checklist](#)) by associating bad weather with treats and games.

HE LETS OUT A FEW DROPS WHEN I COME GET HIM

Cause: The dog may be submission-urinating, or excitement-urinating

Solution: When you get him to come with you outside, approach him sideways (not facing him), and avoid bending over him/crowding him.

HE USED TO BE CLEAN, AND NOW LETS OUT A FEW DROPS INSIDE

Problem: A previously house-trained dog starts to spray small quantities in the house (small quantities, so a trickle rather than a puddle).

Cause: He could be trying to cover up the scent of another dog (even on your clothing), or he could be marking his territory after a change of routine (e.g. new house, baby, job ...).

Solution: Go back to puppy levels of supervision/crating/encouragement. If things do not improve, contact us for advice (info@ohmydogschool.com).

HE USED TO BE CLEAN, AND NOW HE'S HAVING REPEAT ACCIDENTS

Cause: The dog could be having physical problem, like old age or a urinary tract infection.

Solution: Contact your vet for advice, and, once a physical problem has been ruled out, contact us (info@ohmydogschool.com).

OTHER METHODS

CAN I USE A POTTY WORD?

Yes and no. It IS possible to teach the dog to go on command (say the word every time he goes, then reward him). But some veterinarians worry that the owners' schedules will rule elimination time, rather than the pup's digestive system.

WITHDRAWING WATER DURING THE DAY

The average dog drinks 60-100 ml of water (per kg of dog) per day.

Dogs should really have constant access to water during the day, or they might learn to binge-drink (leading to a full bladder, leading to more accidents) or to drink from dodgy sources like dirty plant pots outside.

WITHDRAWING WATER AT NIGHT

If you're having trouble with night potty training, you could, at a push, withdraw water for the thick of the night (but 4-5 hours max). Check that his stools continue to be a normal consistency, though (too hard = sign of mild dehydration).

USING PADS

Pads can be handy – especially if you have a small dog – but three walks per day are ESSENTIAL to give Rex the mental, social and physical stimulation he needs (yes, even if you have a huge garden).

If you've started with pads and want out: bring the pads closer and closer to the front door, then bring them outside, and finally cut them into smaller and smaller pieces.

USING A DOG FLAP

A dog flap is, well, a garden door for dogs.

At first sight, it can be tempting as it gives the dog constant access to a restroom (i.e. the backyard) but...

1. He may never learn to hold it in very long, so beware of when he needs to stay overnight somewhere without a dog flap;

2. Beware of the danger of robbery if you have a large dog (and thus a man-sized flap);
3. Your dog will **STILL** need to be walked 3 times a day, to give him the mental, physical and social stimulation he needs.
4. Your dog will **STILL** find it difficult to stay home alone for long periods of time. Just because his toilet needs are met does not mean that you can expose him to intolerable amounts of home alone time. See our [Rex likes to stay home alone](#) hand-out for separation training.

FINAL WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

The first few weeks after your pup's arrival are similar to the arrival of a newborn (human) baby. It can be exhausting, but with perseverance, patience, and a lot of love, you'll get there.

If you feel stuck, contact us for advice (info@ohmydogschool.com).

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- 🐾 [Crate training hand-out](#)
- 🐾 [Socialisation checklist](#)
- 🐾 [Rex likes to stay home alone hand-out](#)