

THE YOUNG SAINT BERNARD

HIS CARE, FEEDING AND TRAINING



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This brochure was prepared by the **Saint Bernard Club of America, INC**, to acquaint new owners with a few basic facts about their puppy. It is not intended in any way to take the place of competent professional advice. Indeed, the new owner is urged to select a veterinarian as soon as the puppy arrives – finding one who is experienced in the special requirements of the giant breeds and who in general “likes big dogs.”

Your puppy was probably one of a litter of 6 to 9 puppies – average for Saint Bernard, although a matron might have as few as one. He came into this world blind and deaf and he weighed about one pound.

The areas on his body which, at maturity, will be various shades of brown or red were at birth almost black and until your pup was about a month old, his breeder could not be sure whether his coat would be longhaired or shorthaired.

His eyes remained closed until about ten days of age, when the first gleam appeared. They were fully open at two weeks, but it was more than another week before he began to rely on vision.

At that time, his dam was spending less and less time with her brood. Instinct – assisted by the appearance of needle-sharp little teeth - was teaching her to leave the pups for longer intervals between feedings.

For the first two or three days, the breeder actually had to force her to leave the pups in order to relieve herself. At that point, the pups were nursing almost constantly, eating as often as sixteen or eighteen times in a 24 hour period. The mother washed them frequently – a process which helped stimulate a steady milk supply and which also kept her “nest” clean.

When the litter was about three weeks old, she had begun the weaning process, and the breeder stepped in to do his part. A cup of warm puppy formula – and a little patience in dipping noses, one by one, was the starting point. Puppies do not, by nature, lap – they suck. Puppies do not, by nature, dip their heads to eat from a dish – they are used to reaching up to get food from mother.

By dipping noses means getting pablum all over the face – and one pup begins to lap the pablum from the face of another. Within a few days, all pups can be gathered around one low dish.

By the time your pup was between four and five weeks, he was probably fully weaned. In the first week of life, he had nearly doubled his birth weight. At four weeks of age, he probably weighed about 6 pounds – roughly six times his birth weight. He will continue to grow very rapidly. At eight weeks he may weigh from 16 to 20 pounds. And, at three months of age, he could well weigh up to 40 pounds. However, you will not want to push him into too rapid growth. Nor should you be surprised if a female pup consistently is lighter in weight than a male. This is to be expected in pups as well as fully mature dogs.

Your puppy was probably about seven to nine weeks old when you got him. The breeder would have given you a pedigree to show the pup's ancestors for three or four generations. He will also have given you the pup's *American Kennel Club* registration certificate or an application for registration – either a “Limited” or “Full” registration, and perhaps a spay/neuter contract. The breeder also should have given you written information about what and when you feed him, as well as any worming and vaccination information and any other information that would help you take good care of your pup.

At eight weeks of age, your Saint should be eating three times a day. His basic diet will probably consist of one of the well-known brands of puppy kibble. You may or may not need to supplement his diet – check with your veterinarian or follow the advice of your breeder. The exact amount of food depends on your pup's age and growth rate – and is increased week by week as your pup grows.

You will feed him morning, noon and night until he is 3 or 4 months old. At that time he will likely show reluctance to clean up all his food at one of these feedings – his way of telling you that he is now ready for just two meals a day (but the same total amount). And, when he is a year or so old, he may prefer to be fed just once a day, although twice a day may promote better digestibility.

For the growing pup, highly-quality, high protein diet is very important. His growth will be extremely rapid. At one point he may add nearly a pound a day to his weight! While the present-day commercial dog foods

are carefully balanced as to the essential ingredients, some breeders find that pups need more of certain vitamins and trace minerals than will be found in the commercial feeds. A knowledgeable breeder and your veterinarian can best advise you in the area.

While dogs are as different in their habits and requirements as humans are, it is a good general rule to always feed your pup from the same dish, to have fresh drinking water available to him at all times, and of course, if he does not finish his meal – to remove his food dish promptly.

Your pup's breeder will have given you his starting diet, and will have told you to increase the amounts as the pup grows older. **DON'T STUFF HIM.** Many owners keep their Saints too fat – and reduce their life span by doing so.

While you will follow the basic diet recommended by the breeder, do not add scraps. Never give him chicken, pork or rabbit bones – or any bones which can splinter and cause internal injury. Many breeders will recommend no bones at all. If any are given, they should be big beef bone (preferably uncooked) – and these bones should be picked up when your Saint has finished chewing on them.

Awkwardness is a part of your pup's adolescence, and you should not be surprised if at times during the first year and a half he is two to four inches higher at the shoulder than at the rump – and vice versa. He will

be a very a clumsy, gangling youngster. His head, which looked beautiful at eight weeks, may be very much out of proportion – the nose and ears looking long and “houndish.” He is not likely to be in perfect proportions until well over a year of age, and should be mature at about three years of age. His friendly, wildly waving puppy tail can sweep the contents off a coffee table in a flash . . . but he will become more sedate as he grows older.

You must not expect too much in the way of learning and obedience from your pup at first. He is an infant in spite of his size. He can be taught many things at an early age, and most breeders recommend a “puppy kindergarten class” by the time the puppy is four months old.

The fluffy puppy coat will be shed between three and five months, along with the baby teeth. Do not be surprised to find a puppy tooth on the floor although most often the pup will swallow the teeth. With the new “permanent” coat will come an indication of his color at maturity, although the coat will often darken with age.

From the time you get him, daily brushing should be a part of his routine. He may not be enthusiastic at first, but will soon learn to stand quietly when you produce his brush. This daily routine will help develop a most beautiful coat, plus removing dead hair and odor. If he is bathed, be sure to rinse him thoroughly and dry completely. **NEVER** shear your Saint. This does **NOT** make him cooler in hot weather, and leaves him without nature’s protective insulation against heat and insects.

For brushing, use a wire slicker brush with the bristles slightly bent at the end. Work back to front, “against the grain,” then, front to back. Be especially careful to brush behind the ears, otherwise wads of dead hair may accumulate and have to be cut out with scissors.

Once your pup has his permanent coat, he will shed about twice a year (depending on your climate); spring and fall. For these periods, you will find a wide long-toothed steel comb very helpful in stripping out the old, dead coat and undercoat.

While most breeders in this country now remove dewclaws, it is possible that your pup has these extra toes, single or double. They are allowed under the Breed Standard, and are not taken into consideration in judging. If they impede the movement of the legs, they can be removed surgically at any age. Be sure that the nails on these dewclaws do not grow into the pads. Indeed, you will want to keep all the nails at proper length. Your vet can cut the toe nails when you take your Saint for a checkup – and will be glad to show you how to do it, and suggest the proper type of clippers.

Moderate exercise on rough ground (gravel) will help to keep toe nails at proper length (except dewclaws, which never reach the ground.) Exercise is as important as diet in the development and growth of your puppy. Long walks on rough ground are ideal – but in moderation, of

course. You will not want to take a three month old puppy on a mile hike. Always avoid strenuous exercise immediately before and after feeding and during the heat of the day.

You may notice the young pup bending back slightly at the pastern (just above the front paws). A slight bend is normal – too much may indicate a need for extra calcium for bone development in his diet. You should consult your veterinarian or breeder on questions such as this.

Your puppy needs to learn to go up and down stairs, walk on linoleum and other surfaces but he must **NOT** be raised on any kind of slippery surface. When picking up your pup, **NEVER** lift him by his front legs. Lift him only by putting your hands under his chest and rump. The less handling, the better.

You will wonder about his weight from time to time. Your vet will weigh him on early visits, but as he gets larger no one will be able to lift him alone. A handy system to use is coal or grain scales, or the scales at an airline's freight office.

While some Saints may weigh over 200 pounds, this is rare. And, the stories you will hear about Saints weighing 250, 300 or 350 pounds are just that – stories. Normal weight of a mature male is 150 to 180 pounds; of the mature female, about 25 pounds less. Note that our Breed Standard says nothing about weight. It requires only that a minimum height for a male be about 27 ½ inches at the shoulder; for a female, about 25 ½ inches.

You will find (in cooler climates) a moderate weight gain in winter months, and a corresponding weight loss when warm weather comes. This is normal, and is nature's way of preparing the dog for each season. Do not, therefore, be surprised if your Saint "goes off feed" when hot weather comes. In fact, you will probably want to cut down on his portions in each feeding.

If your Saint is to live outdoors, be sure he has a well-insulated house – clean, draft-free with the floor well insulated so no dampness can come up. Bedding of straw or cedar shavings is excellent. You will find that his coat (if he is longhaired) will absorb a great deal of moisture and be rather slow to dry so a house dog should be kept out of the rain and early morning/evening dews as much as possible.

In hot weather, he needs a cool shady retreat, with fresh drinking water always available and some protection from flies and other insects which will bother his nose and eyes. You will find him quiet in the heat of the day, but ready for play or a walk as the sun starts to go down.

House training should start as soon as your pup arrives in his new home. Determine where you want him to sleep and confine him to that area for the first few nights. He must learn at once what "NO" means. Like all puppies he will soon be into the teething/destructive stage and can "antique" a chair or table in a very few moments.

Give him his own special toys, shoes, playthings. Say “NO” emphatically when he chews on anything else. Saints are stubborn, yet very sensitive and eager to please. When your pup understands what is expected of him – what he can and cannot do – a firm “NO” will usually be all that’s needed in the way of discipline.

Teach him to go on a lead right from the start. A 6 foot canvas “training lead” is ideal. Put the clip end through the hand loop to make a loose “choke.” Put this around his neck, and let him take some of the lead in his mouth. Then let him wander at will, leading you, until very gradually you begin to steer him where you want him to go. A little patience and you will have a dog who is “leash-trained.” And when he is a little older, get him a collar – metal, leather or nylon – of the “choke” type being careful that you replace it with larger sizes as his head and neck grow larger. This type of collar is **NEVER** to be left on the dog.

A fenced in yard or pen will be ideal for him when you are not outdoors with him. He should not be allowed to run loose in a suburban area. His size may frighten some children – his tail can knock a child down. His big feet and inquisitive nose can be disastrous to a flower bed. He has no fear of cars and could quickly become a casualty. And, a loose dog is an open invitation to dog-nappers – for resale through a distant pet shop or for sale to a medical laboratory for experimentation. Your Saint puppy represents a substantial investment, one which you should protect.

Do not encourage your pup to jump up on you. It's cute – right now- but it will not be cute when 150 pounds of mature dog jumps up on a well-dressed guest a year from now. Also, do not allow him to take your arm or hand in his mouth to lead you, or to play.

House-breaking is generally quick and easy – especially with a female pup. Obviously, you'll put the pup outdoors the first thing in the morning, the last thing before you go to bed at night and after every feeding. Since the young pup cannot last all night without urinating, you'll want newspapers on the floor in his sleeping area. Put them also near the outside door in the room where he'll spend most of his time. When he makes an error in the house – and it will happen occasionally- put him outside at once with a little scolding. And give him lots of praise when he does urinate or potty outside. You will find he catches on very quickly. Some breeders also recommend “crate training.” This can be very useful if used properly. Your breeder or a dog-trainer can best show you this method.

Many Saint owners ask about carts and sleds. The Saint is a working dog. In Europe, he could often be seen hitched to a cart, drawing bread or milk. Of course, you will not want to try carting until your Saint is sufficiently mature, say at least one year old and you will want to be sure the load is not too much for him. The Saint Bernard Club of America has a Working Dog Committee and you can contact them for further information about this.

Probably your puppy had been wormed before you got him. But he can pick up eggs again at any time. When you take him to your vet the first time, take along a stool sample. By microscopic examination, he can determine whether the pup has any worms – and if so, will give the proper medications. You should have such an examination every three months in puppyhood, twice a year thereafter. It is foolish to buy a “worm remedy” in a pet shop – there are several different kinds of worms and different medications to get rid of them. This is a job for your veterinarian, as this exam will also detect bacteria problems.

Your puppy should be immunized against distemper, hepatitis, leptospirosis, parvo and corona virus as well as ‘kennel cough.’ Probably he had at least a “puppy shot” before you got him. The breeder should have given you a record showing exactly what shots the pup had and when. You should pass this information along to your veterinarian who will set up a schedule to make sure your puppy completes his “puppy series.” Then when he completes this series, he will need an annual booster, commonly called a “DHLPPC” or a version of that term.

In some parts of the country, your pet must also be on a heartworm prevention program. He may also have to be vaccinated for Lyme disease. Be sure to check with your veterinarian.

Your puppy must also be vaccinated against rabies. Once your puppy has received his first rabies shot, it is usually every three years after that. Again, your veterinarian will guide you. Do not neglect these very important aspects of you pup’s health.

If your puppy is a female, she will probably experience her first “season” when 10-12 months old – although it may happen as early as 6 months or as late as 15 months. If you plan to breed her, she must be will matured, which generally means **NO** breeding before 18 months of age. Of course, only a small percentage of Saints are of breeding quality and if your Saint is to be a companion only, you should spay or neuter it. You can also alleviate potential health and behavioral problems for either sex when you spay or neuter.

A word about temperament may be in order. Generally, the Saint Bernard has been noted as much for his gentle disposition as for life-saving activities over many years. Yet, the temperament and disposition of dogs – any breed – vary as much as those of humans. In general, the Saint is placid and even-tempered. He is a great children’s dog, a guardian yet NOT a “watchdog.” But, he will not thrive on harsh treatment. He will resent it and he will react to it. **A SAINT SHOULD NEVER BE KEPT TIED OR CHAINED UP.**

Treat your Saint Bernard puppy with courtesy. Show him affection, teach him responsibility. Punish him when you must, but accept him back into your good graces at once. Reward him lavishly when he pleases you. Give him the same sense of security a child needs. Make him a part of the family. And, forgive him when, in a burst of wonderful affection, he upsets a lamp or stains a new dress. Because, what would you ever do without him?

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