The Happy Dog Training Academy

Myth Busted

**Myths That Many Dog Owners Still Believe**

Let us look at some of the most popular myths, that many of pet owners still may believe. Think you know your stuff, I bet you still think a few of these are factually true, or maybe you just thought they were. Some of these myths have been around for years, I can remember being told some when I was in training way back in the 1980s, take a look at these 30 myths and see how many you believed. For this article, I've gone through a lot of legends and myths related to dog ownership, and then researched them further by checking on what veterinarians, scientists, psychology, and other reputable sources have to say. It turns out, a whole lot of what we were led to believe is simply, not true. As dog trainers, it's our responsibility to understand our animals' behaviour and not buy into all the myths that circulate in the dog community. It's our responsibility to educate owners in order to provide the best possible care for the dogs. If you believe myths, like those about canine aggression, you could put yourself, the pet, other people, owners, and pets at risk.

**30 Myths That Many Dog Owners Still Believe**

**1. You can’t teach an old dog new tricks**

Actually, dogs are continually learning and can continue to learn new tricks up until their last days. In fact, teaching older dogs’ new tricks can help to keep their mind sharp, it may take a little longer but once an older dog has learnt something new, it is unlikely to forget.

**2. Dogs tell us when they’re sick**

Dogs try to hide when they're feeling under the weather out of natural instinct. Being unwell makes an animal weaker in the wild, this would be a sign to predators that they were an easy target. Although our dogs don’t live in the wild, our pets hide illness just the same. As dog owners, however, we become aware of our dog’s normal behaviour patterns. When these behaviour patterns are changed, we can tell, and this is how many owners know when their dog is under the weather.

**3. Every dog should have a litter of puppies before being spayed**

Dogs do not need to have a litter for any reason, there is no reason at all for your dog to have a litter of her own. Wait to spay or neuter your pet, unless your vet says there is a medical reason. Neutering your pet to early, pets should be adults, for most breeds this is approximately 18 months of age. It has been proven to have many side effects if you neuter to early; one report is it can increase your pets’ chances of cancer by up to 60%. For some dogs, there a number of potential risk factors to consider and this procedure can be disadvantageous as well, according to vets.

**4. A “good dog” won’t bite**

A well-trained dog with a loving family that has never shown signs of aggression can bite just as easily as any other dog. There's a vast amount of scientific research on why this happens, and factors vary. Dogs bite for many reasons, including when they are startled or surprised. When they feel cornered, or when they are defending their territory or loved ones. A dog will more often bite when it is injured, this does not have to be a serious injury. Just a small injury to their ear, if you stroke them a dog may strike out, just from reaction. As you might pull away from anyone who touched your ear, the dog may bite. A dog does not have to be a “mean dog” to bite.

**5. Dogs should not be allowed to bark**

Our dogs bark as a method of communication, as well as for many other reasons like alerting, warning. When we discourage barking, we discourage them from communicating. Dogs should be trained to recognize when barking is and is not appropriate, but they should never be prohibited from barking altogether. While there's a number of methods, techniques, and tools to solve barking problems, using things like dog barking collars, is not advisable and should be done only as the absolute last resort.

**6. One dog year is seven human years**

Assuming one dog year is seven human years simply doesn’t make sense, based on the wide variety of dog breeds and sizes, as well as all the research done to date. The rate at which your dog ages differ based on his size most of all, with larger dogs aging at a faster rate than smaller dogs. Some dog breeds also have a longer lifespan.

**7. Mean dog’s growl**

ALL dogs growl. Just like barking, growling is a method of communication that our dogs use to warn us of danger, to scare away something they perceive as a threat, and to communicate their irritation with a situation or individual. Growling does not mean that a dog is “mean” or even aggressive. It means that a dog is trying to convey a message, and that message should always be heeded. There are also different types of growling of dogs, and scientists have looked into that as well.

**8. A dog that’s wagging his tail is happy**

Dogs wag their tails for many reasons and different posturing of the wagging tail has different meanings, according to researchers who have studied this for years. While dogs may wag their tail because they are happy, dogs may also wag their tail when they’re fearful, stressed, on guard, or prior to biting. Therefore, it's important to understand and learn about your dog's body language to know what he's communicating.

**9. A dog’s mouth is cleaner than a human’s**

This is one of the largest myths of all. There has been no study to date that can conclusively show that a dog’s mouth is cleaner than a human. Dog mouths and human mouths both harbour bacteria, albeit different types, which makes neither particularly clean. Also, if you think where dogs usually put their mouths, and what has been in it, there should probably be a very strong argument against this commonly popular myth.

**10. Destructive behaviour when you’re not home is a sign of spite**

Dogs that exhibit destructive behaviour when you are not home do that not out of spite dogs really don’t know what spite is, it is not in a dog genetic makeup. rather, it is a sign of fear, anxiety, or boredom your dog is experiencing.

Fear of being away from you better known as separation anxiety, anxiety over noises outside, or pent-up energy and boredom can all lead to behaviours like chewing furniture, emptying trashcans, and tearing up clothing.

Instead of getting angry at your dog, find dog-friendly ways how to prevent your pet from experiencing anxiety and how to make sure he’s not chewing or destroying your furniture.

**11. An adventurous puppy is the best pick of the litter**

A well-rounded puppy in any litter should show signs of being adventurous because that's what healthy puppies do. However, a puppy should also have a healthy level of caution. A puppy that is too adventurous to the extreme levels is just as unhealthy as a puppy that is too shy, and there may be something that needs to be looked into. Just like a shy puppy, an adventurous puppy will need some form of training. In saying this you are far better to bring home a well-rounded puppy, than a shy one.

**12. Table scraps are fine for a dog to eat.**

“When I was growing up, our dog ate nothing but table scraps.”

This is a particularly common statement, but it does not mean that table scraps are the best food, for your dog just because this is how it was done back in the day. Myths about what your dog should eat, and what they should not eat are some of the most popular. Today we know a lot more about proper dog nutrition. Also, how to feed our dogs. Like humans, dogs need a balanced and healthy diet. Dog food today is just a balanced healthy diet. However just because you have brought home a working breed of dog, this does not mean you will need to get working dog food. Working dog food has been balanced for dogs that work. Not for pets that do not.

**13. Dogs only see in Black and White.**

Can dogs see in colour? Yes, why wouldn't they be able to see in colour? Numerous studies have revealed that dogs are capable of seeing various colours. While dogs have fewer colour receptors in the eye than humans do, they are still capable of perceiving greys, blues, yellows, green, and others, the spectrum they do see is believed to be of higher value than ours. For instance, the green we see the grass, our dogs see it as a brighter green. They certainly do not see the world in black and white.

**14. Your dog must see you as “alpha”**

This myth has long been propagated among dog trainers for many years. Even today an uninformed trainer will still train dogs using the alpha based training, that has been around for many years. Its popularity today is attributed to Cesar Millan. However, the dog training research has revealed over and over that dog’s do not need to be dominated to be well behaved and secure. In fact, dogs that have parental figures who provide stability, positive reinforcement, and praise without dominating are more well balanced and happier dogs overall.

**15. Food will motivate any dog**

Some dogs will do absolutely anything for a tasty treat, but contrary to popular belief, not all dogs will, and not all animals will be motivated by food. For some dogs (if they are receiving adequate nutrition from their regular diet) motivation lies in praise, dog toys, play time with the owner, or other stimulations instead. There are also several psychological training tricks, that reveal more about this behaviour. Dogs that are motivated by treats, it then comes down to the treat. Normal doggy treats are not a great motivator for dogs. In fact, a Study revealed that dogs are much smarter than we thought. They may hold off on the treat if they know that a better thing may come

**16. A dry nose means illness**

Whether a dog’s nose is wet or dry, it has nothing to do with their overall health. It definitely does not mean that your dog may be ill or has a fever.

Most often the wetness of your dog’s nose has more to do with the environment. Science shows that it's nothing more than that. Wondering if your dog is sick? Get out your pet thermometer, but before using one find out how to use it. Every pet owner should know how to take a dog’s temperature.

**17. More baths means a cleaner dog**

Some dog owners love to go the extra step and bathe their dog almost daily. It really is not a good idea, and veterinarians worn against washing your dog too often. Even though your intentions may be good, more frequent bathing may make your dog smell cleaner for a while, but it can also cause problems. Too much bathing can create dry skin, an oily coat, or dandruff which can lead to other hygiene concerns. Finally, when bathing your dog, make sure you do it correctly. Get a good brush, brushing your dog 2 or 3 times a week will make them smell better, keep their coat waterproof and most of all it gets rid of the dead hair from the coat.

**18. Butt-scooting is a behavioural problem**

You may think it's funny or cute, but 99% of the time butt-scooting in dogs means a health problem that should be treated by your veterinarian ASAP. When a dog scoots their bottom on your carpet, it is almost always because they have parasites, or their anal glands are full. Not treating this issue will result in more serious health problems down the road.

**19. Dogs that don’t go outside don’t need heartworm prevention**

Most dogs need effective heartworm prevention, otherwise, you risk serious problems. Heartworm prevention kills heartworms that are actively living in your dog at the time of medication. Heartworms are usually contracted via mosquito bites when infected mosquitoes transmit heartworm larvae onto your dog. Since mosquitoes can infiltrate your home, it is entirely possible for a dog who has never been outdoors to contract heartworm disease as well. Also keep in mind that not all wormers are the same, so make sure you get the right solution.

**20. “It’s all in how you raise them”**

Well-meaning dog owners defend dogs by claiming that their behaviour depends on how dogs are raised. Despite good intentions, however, this simply isn’t true. There are many examples of dogs that have been used in dog fights who have gone on to loving homes where they exhibit no aggressive behaviour whatsoever. There are many factors involved, including genetics, breeders, socialisation as puppies etc.

**21. Some dog breeds are just aggressive**

Like humans, all dogs have the potential of being aggressive. This aggression is the culmination of many different factors including genetics, human training, past experience, and that particular dog's personality.

While individual dogs of a certain breed can be aggressive, it is not always the dog’s breed that makes it aggressive, or at least to that level of aggressiveness. In fact, many other factors will always be the reason over the dog's breed.

**“It is important for dog owners and members of the public to be aware that any dog is capable of showing aggression, even where it has not done so in other situations,” said researchers of the above Bristol study.**

**22. “It feels cool enough outside, my dog will be fine in the car”**

While the temperature outside may feel fine to you, the temperature inside your car climbs rapidly and exponentially. After just 30 minutes on a 70-degree day, your car will reach a deadly 104 degrees Fahrenheit, even with the windows slightly open. Moreover, dogs are not humans, and they control their body temperature differently. That means what feels too hot or too cold for you may, feel or not for your dog. As a result, each year over 57 dogs die as a direct result of heat stroke in cars. With many more when over exercised during the hot weather. Heat stroke is thought to effect 1 in 7 dogs.

**23. Don’t allow your dog to hide behind you in fear**

Many dog owners are told that they should not allow their dog to hide behind them when he is afraid. However, forcing a dog to come out of hiding and face their fear can be more detrimental to your dog's psychology and both of your relationships. Research shows that this practice will eliminate your dog's trust in you. Therefore, rather than being forceful or being complacent about your dog’s fear, gently work with him over time to desensitize him to whatever he is afraid of and use proper dog training methods.

**24. Dog poop will fertilize the yard**

Not only is this not true, but actually the opposite is true has been proven by research. While cow manure is an excellent fertilizer, dog poop on the other hand does not have the same makeup due to the dog’s diet. A diet high in protein makes for very acidic poop, which is not hospitable to growing anything. There has been a lot of studies on how dog feces contaminate the soil and pollute the environment, which is why dog owners are strongly encouraged to use poop bags and always, always clean up after their dogs.

**25. Dogs don’t need a coat in the winter**

This is partially true, but not completely. Healthy dogs with a thick coat do not need a coat in the winter (of course, this depends how cold the winter actually is, Antarctica may be too cold for most breeds).

However, smaller dogs and/or dogs with a low body weight, slender built dogs, sick dogs, older dogs, puppies, and dogs with conditions that compromise their body’s ability to keep warm should all wear doggy coats in freezing/cold rain when temperatures are low. Letting a dog get to wet, is not a good idea in cold weather.

**26. A fearful dog must have been abused in the past**

Although that may be the case sometimes, **it's not a rule**. Some fearful dogs have had a very safe home life, and yet they still suffer from different fears and phobias. There are many factors that go into developing fears, and abuse is just one of them. For example, a well-loved dog who has had limited social exposure can develop a fear of people despite being loved and well treated. It's because the dog simply doesn't fully understand the world around him. Even though there are many different methods to deal with fearful and particularly anxious dogs, such as anxiety medication, most medication is shown to only mask the problem, not dealing with the underlying problem, plenty of research now show that comforting your dog and continued training, with a qualified trainer or canine psychologist may be the best option for everybody.

**27. “My dog is shaking because he is cold”**

It is true that a dog may shake because he is cold, but there are many other reasons that dogs shake as well. For example, dogs also shake when they are fearful, anxious, when they are in pain, or when they are particularly excited. To understand why your dog is shaking, you have to look at the circumstances under which he is shaking and analyse the environment. Is it cold or are there fireworks going off? Is he injured or have you just returned home? Use common sense to understand it.

**28. A puppy will perk up a senior dog**

Whether or not a puppy will perk up your senior dog has everything to do with your dog’s personality and also the way either dog has been trained. By default, some senior dogs are in pain with arthritis and the last thing they want is a young puppy pouncing on them all day. Some senior dogs enjoy the presence of another dog and still have the energy to keep up with a puppy.

**29. Dogs don't get fleas and ticks in wintertime**

It's true only partially. When the cold weather sets in, we see fewer fleas and ticks because many of them die off. However, some fleas and ticks can survive by seeking out warm hiding places. Those surviving critters can then attach themselves to your dog and feast freely even in winter. Summer sees fleas and ticks, but we also see them when we put the heating on, in the home.

Keep your dog protected against fleas and ticks all year round using well-proven flea treatment, and make sure you know how to remove a tick from your dog when needed.

**30. Mutts are always healthier than purebreds**

I kept this one for last. The myth has been around for many years. Research shows in the main, there is little difference in health between the purebred dog and a cross breed. It is felt that this myth is because the lower paid had cross breeds of dog, with the wealthier looking to get purebred dogs. The wealthy may have taken the dog to see the vet when ill. As the lower paid had little money, not seeing the vet, was quite normal. Allowing the dog to overcome many illnesses themselves. Of course, there were many homemade remedies that would have been used. Then by conclusion as the vet sees more purebred dogs, and less cross breeds, the crossbreed dog were thought to be healthier.