



**AKITA OWNERS RESCUE FOUNDATION, INC.**  
**d.b.a.**

**MIDWEST AKITA RESCUE SOCIETY**  
**INFORMATION PACKAGE**  
**[www.akitas.org](http://www.akitas.org)**

This information package was created with the intent to inform those interested in obtaining a Rescue Akita as a family pet. Some of the information may seem to be in contrast to what you may have heard or read about the Akita. We wrote this packet to enable prospective owners to make an informed decision about this special breed. In addition, we want to be completely honest about the unique dogs Midwest Akita Rescue Society has to offer.

It is very important to bear in mind that not all AKITAS have any/all of the described problems/faults. Most just have one or two, if any. If you adopt from AKITA RESCUE, we will definitely advise you of “YOUR” AKITA’S IDIOSYNCRACIES. AKITAS ARE WONDERFUL, BUT NOT PERFECT!!

If, after reading this, you have any questions, please feel free to contact any of the following people:

**Deanna O’Brien**  
**773 594 9302**  
[marsakita@sbcglobal.net](mailto:marsakita@sbcglobal.net)

If a machine answers, please leave a message and we will get back to you as soon as possible. If it is an EMERGENCY, please indicate this on the message. We all work full-time jobs in addition to the rescue work and cannot always return your call as quickly as we would like. Please have patience.

In addition, Please understand the reason for the numerous editor notes in these articles. Many of the enclosed works were written in the early 1980’s, prior to the enormous dog behavior/training revolution. We did not want to alter the work of the original authors in any way that would change the article’s original meaning. Therefore, please read and absorb the editor’s notes, they are an updated version of owning an Akita in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **HISTORY OF MIDWEST AKITA RESCUE SOCIETY (MARS)**

In 1998, Midwest Akita Rescue Society (MARS) was formed by a very small group of concerned individuals that felt that they could assist orphaned Akitas residing in the Midwestern region. The purpose of this organization was to rescue, medically treat, rehabilitate and re-home abandoned, relinquished or otherwise homeless Akita dogs. Co-Founders Deanna O’Brien and Lisa R. McCluskey were a part of the initial individuals that helped create MARS.

### **WHERE DO THESE AKITAS COME FROM?**

(MARS 01/04]

The majority of them are from animal shelters. When an Akita is brought into the shelter, the shelter notifies MARS and a MARS volunteer adopts the dog from the shelter when necessary. More and more Akitas are being turned into rescue by their owners. Once the cute little puppy grows into a very large, powerful adult, the owner does not want to face the task of living with an Akita. All Akitas are given a complete temperament evaluation screening.

### **WHAT HAPPENS TO THE AKITAS AFTER MARS GETS THEM?**

Once an animal ends up in our rescue, they are wormed, given vaccinations, spayed or neutered, and live in a Foster Home (when available) until a suitable home can be found for the animal. We euthanize only terminally ill or excessively aggressive dogs, those that would be impossible to ever place.

### **WHAT DOES IT COST TO ADOPT A MARS AKITA?**

We charge an adoption fee, which is tax deductible because we are a non-profit organization listed with the IRS. If the new owner feels the dog will not fit into his home, the animal is returned and a refund is given or another dog may be selected. All orphans must be returned to MARS if an adoption does not work out, but the adoption fee is only refunded if the return takes place during the first four weeks of ownership. Please note the breakdown of fees incurred by rescue on pages 4-5. Adoption fees are utilized to defray these expenses.

### **WHAT REQUIREMENTS DOES MARS HAVE BEFORE A DOG CAN BE ADOPTED?**

All potential homes are well screened. The new owner must be experienced with a large working breed dog or be willing to learn. The dog must be provided with a fenced yard, kennel run or regular leash walking regime, protection from the weather, the basics of life (food and water), regular veterinary care, a sturdy collar (provided by MARS) and leash and a license must be purchased within the first 4 weeks of ownership. Due to the sheer size of the Akita breed, no Akita is placed in a home with resident children under the age of 10. Every Akita placed by MARS has become a family member, loved and well cared for. For safety reasons and danger of theft, Akitas are not permitted to be outdoors if a household member is not at home.

### **WHAT ARE CONTRIBUTIONS USED FOR?**

MARS is operated by unpaid volunteers, so every penny contributed goes to the care and well being of the Akitas. The money is used to pay for their daily care. In addition, donations are used for veterinary care (vaccinations, spaying, etc.). The funds are also used for newspaper advertisements, which help us to find good homes for the animals. There are NO administrative costs, except the printing of this brochure, which was necessary so that we could tell you about MARS.

### **TELL US ABOUT SOME OF THE DOGS**

We do not take in cross-breeds, only purebred Akitas. We get dogs of every age, from 2 months to 9 years, and in every color. Some are show quality. We get long coats, smaller import types and massive ones. Some dogs have been abused and must stay with us until they are rehabilitated. Many dogs are already well trained.

### **WHAT CAN AKITA RESCUE DO FOR YOU?**

Akita Owners Rescue Foundation, Inc. d.b.a. Midwest Akita Rescue Society is a non-profit, all volunteer organization dedicated to helping Akitas in distress. MARS depends entirely on tax-deductible donations to continue this work. Midwest Akita Rescue Society (MARS) was originally founded in 1997 as Akita Rescue of Wisconsin (ARW) to serve Akitas in the Southern Wisconsin and Northern Illinois areas.

### **PROBLEM SOLVING**

We offer consultations on all types of AKITA behavior problems from destructive chewing to inappropriate aggression. Our consultants, who have extensive experience in the training and rehabilitation of AKITAS, are available for emergency calls. Sometimes, a brief telephone conversation is all you need to find a solution for your problem. There is no charge for such a service. If you require more extensive assistance, such as a home visit, you will be asked to make a donation. Before you decide to give up your AKITA, why not give us a try? We also work in cooperation with local canine behavior facilities and extensively refer many Akita owners to these experts. We can help recommend a behavior expert that is right for you.

### **PREVENTION**

The best way to solve a problem is to prevent it. To this end, we also offer information and advice about raising and training your AKITA. We can give you general instructions for establishing leadership without intimidating your dog, and "WHAT A WELL BROUGHT UP AKITA SHOULD KNOW." In addition, one of our consultants

can evaluate your AKITA and home circumstances. Problems often arise not because the dog or home is "BAD", but because they are mismatched. We can help minimize the adverse effects of such a mismatch.

### **REFERRAL SERVICES**

Ever feel like your dog is the only AKITA your veterinarian has ever met? Wish you could buy good-quality dog food cheaper? From our work with large numbers of AKITAS in various conditions of health and development, we have gathered considerable information about veterinary services in the area. Our co-operating veterinarians have become somewhat of AKITA health experts, and may be able to offer a solution to your problems. Or perhaps we can refer you to a specialist. Our members include scientific researchers and information analysts who monitor the research literature for the latest developments of relevance to AKITAS. We can also steer you to local sources for high-quality, reasonably priced dog food and other supplies. And, oh yes --- finding a good boarding kennel or groomer will be a lot easier if you call us first!

### **OUT PLACEMENT**

For whatever reason, you may decide that you can no longer keep your AKITA. We hate it, but it happens. We offer two types of services to owners who have decided to place their AKITAS -- help with DO-IT-YOURSELF programs, or placement through AKITA RESCUE. Because rescue services depend entirely upon volunteers and contributions, we do request a donation when you have received service from us.

The DO-IT-YOURSELF programs goes like this: You place ads in the local newspapers, tell everybody you can think of who might know someone who might be interested; post notices at work, in the supermarket, at school, at the Vet, or anyplace that comes to mind. We can help you compose the ad and screen telephone responses. Once you have narrowed it down to a few good prospects, we can help you investigate them and make sure they offer a good home for your dog. Once the dog is placed, we will be a continuing resource to the new owners.

The rescue placement program goes like this: Your AKITA must be spayed or neutered at your expense, be up-to-date on all vaccinations, and have been tested negative for heartworm. You turn the dog, its AKC papers (if any) and all relevant medical information (names and locations of all vets who have treated the dog) over to an AKITA rescue representative. We will first evaluate the dog's characteristics and decide what type of home he/she is best suited for. We will keep the dog in a foster home (if one is available). Otherwise, the dog will be placed in a kennel until a foster home is open, or until someone who can offer the optimum environment for your dog submits an application and passes our rather vigorous investigation. When the person adopts your dog, there is a one-month trial period during which the adopter may return the AKITA and receive a full refund. It generally takes about three months for a dog to be placed through rescue, during which time the dog is cared for, socialized provided with top-of-the-line health care and refreshed on his/her basic pet manners training.

All prospective orphans must pass a complete temperament evaluation screen and have no history of a bite (we will request a complete rabies history from the respective county).

### **ADOPTION**

Suppose you want to adopt a dog from AKITA RESCUE? You call us and talk it over, read our information package, then fill out an adoption application form. Our representatives will check out your references, getting as much information as possible in order to decide if you will provide an environment compatible with any dog we may have waiting for a new home. One or two AKITA RESCUE VOLUNTEERS will visit you in your home in order to ask specific questions about what you want in a dog and to talk about the dogs we have available. Any potential problems we see at that time will be fully discussed and resolved. After the investigation is complete, you will be notified either that 1) We have one or more dogs you may wish to adopt; 2) We have nothing at this time that suits your needs but will notify you if such a dog comes in; or 3) We cannot place an AKITA with you.

When you have been approved for adoption, you will be introduced to the AKITAS we think would suit your home. Each will have been spayed or neutered, and will be up-to-date on all vaccinations, heartworm negative and receiving monthly preventative medication, and in general good health. The AKITA will have been

evaluated on its response to male and female adults, children, cats, other AKITAS, small dogs and various other stimuli. We can certainly tell you what to expect.

There is a \$300.00 required donation when you adopt; additionally, unusual expenses incurred during the investigation or adoption (for example, long distance telephone charges or shipping costs) will also be paid by the person adopting the AKITA. During the one month trial period, you may return the dog to **AKITA RESCUE** at any time and receive a 50% refund of the \$300 donation (but not the additional expense), or we will help you select another Akita. After the one month trial, you may still return the AKITA at any time, but with no refund of the \$300 donation. All consultation and problem solving services offered by AKITA RESCUE VOLUNTEERS are, of course, available to you as an AKITA owner.

### **COST OF AN AKITA RESCUE DOG**

#### **INITIAL VET COSTS**

\$25.00 - 40.00	Office Visit (occasionally waived, depending on Vet)
\$15.00 - 40.00	Heartworm Test
\$12.00 - 20.00	Fecal Test
\$25.00 - 30.00	Rabies Vaccination
\$25.00 - 45.00	DHLPPC Vaccination
\$20.00 - 30.00	Bordetella Vaccination
45.00	Microchip
<b>\$167.00 - \$250.00</b>	<b>TOTAL</b> (occasionally less if discounted)

We usually go through a local Humane Society or Friends of Animals to have low-cost spay or neutering performed.

\$65.00	Male, going to Humane Society
\$40.00	Male, going to Friends of Animals
\$65.00	Female, going to Humane Society
\$60.00	Female, going to Friends of Animals
\$110.00 - 150.00	Male or Female at local Vet with discount

The above figures are the cost barring any complications such as extra long uterine horns, pregnancy, undescended testicles, or damage done by abuse.

Using the above figures, the initial cost for an unspayed/unneutered animal with no surgical complications can range as follows:

	Minimum	Maximum
Male	\$160.00	\$355.00
Female	185.00	355.00

**MAINTENANCE COSTS**

	<b>Monthly</b>	<b>Daily</b>
Heartworm Preventative (monthly)	\$7.50	N/A
Flea/Tick Prevention	\$10.00	N/A
Multi-Vitamins	\$2.50	\$0.08
Canned Dog Food (½ can daily)	\$20.00	\$0.67
Hard Dog Biscuits	\$6.00	\$0.20
Non-soy Dry Dog Food (5-7 Cups daily)	\$37.80	\$1.26
<b>TOTAL COSTS</b>	<b>\$83.80</b>	<b>\$2.21</b>

*Editor's note: Please keep in mind that most Premium Large Breed dog foods now cater to the needs of the Akita. Always consult with a licensed veterinarian or pet nutrition specialist before adding excess supplementation to your Akita's diet.*

We have used commercial boarding kennels for interim boarding at times due to lack of space in Foster Homes, or lack of Foster Homes. The daily rate is \$7.00 - \$15.00 per day and this includes a discount afforded to Akita Rescue.

The costs of a basically healthy Rescue Dog with unknown medical history, unspayed / unneutered for 3 months is:

	<b>IN FOSTER HOME</b>	<b>IN BOARDING KENNEL</b>
Male	\$370 - \$400.00	\$790 - \$1685.00
Female	\$380 - \$400.00	\$815 - \$1705.00

The \$300.00 donation requested by Akita Rescue when a dog is adopted barely covers a one-month stay, much less the average 3 months an Akita usually stays with us. The only way we make up the difference is out of Volunteers' pockets, donations from concerned, caring Akita owners and breeders, and by fund-raising activities (selling sweatshirts, T-shirts, hats and visors, calendars and other Akita specialty items).

The maintenance figures were based on a 30-day month. The average stay of an Akita in Rescue care is 3 months. We have had dogs for one day and dogs for over 3 years.

## THE AKITA STANDARD

**GENERAL APPEARANCE** - Large, powerful, alert, with much substance and heavy bone. The broad head, forming a blunt triangle, with deep muzzle, small eyes and erect ears carried forward in line with the back of the neck, is characteristic of the breed.

**HEAD:** Massive but in balance with body; free of wrinkle when at ease. Skull flat between ears and broad; jaws square and powerful with minimal dewlap. Head forms blunt triangle when viewed from above. Fault - Narrow or snippy head.

**MUZZLE:** Broad and full. Distance from nose to stop is to distance from stop to occiput as 2 is to 3. Stop - Well defined, but not too abrupt. A shallow furrow extends well up forehead.

**NOSE:** Broad and black. Liver permitted on white Akitas, but black always preferred. Disqualification - Butterfly nose or total lack of pigmentation on nose.

**EARS:** The ears of the Akita are characteristic of the breed. They are strongly erect and small in relation to rest of head. If ear is folded forward for measuring length, tip will touch upper eye rim. Ears are triangular, slightly rounded at tip, wide at base, set wide on head but not too low, and carried slightly forward over eyes in line with back of neck. Disqualification - Drop or broken ears.

**EYES:** Dark brown, small, deep-set and triangular in shape. Eye rims black and tight.

**LIPS AND TONGUE:** Lips black and not pendulous; tongue pink.

**TEETH:** Strong with scissors bite preferred, but level bite acceptable. Disqualification - Noticeably undershot or overshot.

**NECK AND BODY:** Neck - Thick and muscular; comparatively short, widening gradually toward shoulders. A pronounced crest blends in with base of skull. Body - Longer than high, as 10 is to 9 in males; 11 is to 9 in bitches. Chest wide and deep; depth of chest is one-half height of dog at shoulder. Ribs well sprung, brisket well developed. Level back with firmly muscled loin and moderate tuck-up. Skin pliant but not too loose. Serious faults - Light bone; rangy body.

**TAIL:** Large and full, set high and carried over back or against flank in a three-quarter, full or double curl, always dipping to or below level of back. On a three-quarter curl, tip drops well down flank. Root large and strong. Tail bone reaches hock when let down. Hair coarse, straight and full with no appearance of a plume. Disqualification - Sickie or uncurled tail.

**FOREQUARTERS AND HINDQUARTERS:** Forequarters - Shoulders strong and powerful with moderate layback. Forelegs heavy-boned and straight as viewed from front. Angle of pastern 15 degrees forward from vertical. Faults - Elbows in or out; loose shoulders. Hindquarters - Width, muscular development and comparable to forequarters. Upper thighs well developed. Stifle moderately bent and hocks well let down, turning neither in or out.

**DECLAWS:** On front legs generally not removed; dewclaws on hind legs generally removed.

**FEET:** Cat feet, well knuckled up with thick pads. Feet straight ahead.

**COAT:** Double coated. Undercoat thick, soft, dense and shorter than outer coat. Outer coat straight, harsh and standing somewhat off body. Hair on head, legs and ears short. Length of hair at withers and rump

approximately two inches, which is slightly longer than on rest of body, except tail, where coat is longest and most profuse. Fault - Any indication of ruff or feathering.

**COLOR:** Any color including white, brindle, or pinto. Colors are brilliant and clear and markings are well balanced, with or without a mask or blaze. White Akitas have no mask. Pinto has a white background with large, evenly placed patches covering head and more than one-third of body. Undercoat may be different color from outer coat.

**GAIT:** Brisk and powerful with strides of moderate length. Back remains strong, firm and level. Rear legs move in line with front legs.

**SIZE:** Males 26 to 28 inches at the withers; bitches 24 to 26 inches. Disqualification - Dogs under 25 inches; bitches under 23 inches.

**TEMPERAMENT:** Alert and responsive, dignified and courageous. Aggressive/reactive toward many dogs and small creatures.

**DISQUALIFICATIONS:**

- Butterfly nose or total lack of pigmentation
- Drop or broken ears
- Noticeably undershot or overshot
- Sickle or uncurled tail
- Dogs under 25 inches; bitches under 23 inches

Approved effective April 4, 1973



## **ANIMAL PROFILE: THE AKITA**

by Barbara Bouyet

Reprinted from "Animal Review", October 1984

This noble breed had its beginnings many hundreds of years ago on Akita Prefecture, a small region on the northernmost tip of Honshu Island in Japan. The area gave the breed its name and us, this marvelous breed. In Japan, the dog is called "Akita Inu". "Inu" is dog in Japanese.

At one time, the Akita was owned only by shoguns, those imperial leaders of a bygone era. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Akita was crossed with the Tosa, a large fighting dog, and the resultant strain was used for dog fighting. This instinct to fight is still one of the major problems with these dogs today.

In 1931, the Akita was officially named a Japanese national monument, but during World War II, the Akita faced extinction because of food and clothing shortages. Many were clubbed to death and, had not a few concerned owners hid their dogs, the breed would probably have become extinct. Why was this magnificent Japanese national monument attacked so viciously? They were the largest breed of dog and food was scarce. Their pelts were used for clothing.

Helen Keller was responsible for bringing the Akita to this country. In 1937, while on a trip to Japan, she expressed a desire to own an Akita and she was presented with a three month old puppy named "Kamikaze". He became her constant companion until he died from distemper at only eight months. A determined Miss Keller wrote to Japan and received a littermate to her beloved "Kami", "Kensan-go", who lived with his mistress at her estate in New York until his death in 1945.

No history of the Akita would be complete without the story of "Hachi-ko", a purebred belonging to Professor Elisabaru Ueno of Tokyo. In the early 1920's, the professor commuted by train to his work. Each day, the two of them walked to the station where Professor Ueno boarded the train each morning and arrived each evening to "Hachi-ko", who waited at the station. On May 21, 1925, "Hachi-ko" was waiting, but the professor never arrived. Hours earlier, he'd died of a stroke. Relatives took care of "Hachi-ko", but each day the dog faithfully waited at the Shibuya station for his master's return. He continued to wait, in vain, until his death in 1934, at the age of 11 years. Because of his devotion and faithfulness, a bronze statue of "Hachi-ko" stands today at the Shibuya station, a monument to a forever faithful AKITA.

Serious breeding of the AKITA in this country began in the 1950's and 1960's. Today the breed is found in nearly every state, but California is where the breed started. The American Kennel Club recognized the AKITA in 1973, and sadly, the AKITA became the "fad dog" of the 80's.

### **A DOG OF STRENGTH AND SUBSTANCE**

"Large, powerful and alert, with much substance and heavy bone" is the way the AKITA standard describes the breed. The average female AKITA of good breeding will stand at approximately 24 inches or more and weigh about 80 pounds. Males are a third larger, usually 26 to 27 inches or more and weigh 100 pounds at maturity. A dog of such size and strength must understand leadership early, before they ever attain their great size and the AKITA MUST UNDERSTAND WHO THE LEADER IS!

An adult Akita is dignified, aloof and aggressive, while an Akita puppy is playful, affectionate and adorable, resembling a bear cub. Because they are friendly and open to socialization as puppies, all Akita puppies must be well socialized so they can grow into calm, well adjusted adults. You cannot simply put an Akita puppy into a yard, feed him and ignore him, as many people wrongly do with other breeds. Akita puppies must be taken out for walks to shopping centers, through parking lots, parks and busy streets. Allow strangers to pet and fuss over them, always assuring the experience is positive. Invite friends and relatives into your home and allow them to

play with and pet the youngster. As the Akita puppy grows, he will seek these relationships less and less. His aloofness will increase with age, so it's vitally important that the puppy be well socialized.

*Editor's note: The most success in rearing Akitas has been from attending a positive reinforcement Puppy Kindergarten before 18 weeks of age (8-18 weeks is the perfect window). Also use food when introducing the puppy to strangers, have them sit for the tidbit and then they may be petted. This helps in teaching the puppy that jumping up is not an option while making the whole experience wonderful.*

## **THE AKITA'S FIGHTING INSTINCT MUST BE REDIRECTED WITH SOCIALIZATION AND PET MANNERS TRAINING**

As early as four months old, the Akita puppy should be entered into a pet manners class with other dogs, a perfect opportunity to set up situations where you can modify your dog's reactivity towards other dogs. The Akita's instinct to fight is never fully overcome, but you can redirect him to some degree with training.

Kuma, a very large five year old male lives in the Akita Rescue kennel. Kuma was turned into Akita Rescue by his owner, who claimed that Kuma regularly sailed over his fence to kill every dog within a three mile radius of his home. At first, he could not be kenneled near another dog and the kennels on either side of him were left empty. After months of working with him, he permitted a female to live near him. This big, powerful Akita loves people, but his instinct to fight was never tempered, controlled or corrected and he became a killer.

Usually Akitas will demand submission from another dog and let it go at that, but some are interested only in fighting. Two males rarely live harmoniously together and two females are even more difficult, unless one is the daughter of the other. A male will live with a female but the male may try to be top dog, and in establishing his position can lead to some noisy but harmless arguments between the pair -- rather like husbands and wives!

To dominate the female, the male will usually knock her down and sit on her, demand first rights to the water bowl and so on. Akitas of either sex can fit into a home with another breed of dog, just as long as the other is of the opposite sex. There are exceptions. A young two year old Akita lives with and loves a mixed breed shepherd, both are males. The shepherd was there first and welcomed the Akita puppy. Growing up with the male dog, the Akita never considered his docile friend a threat to his territorial rights and they get along well.

## **THE AKITA WILL LEAD, IF NOT LED BY HUMAN "PACK LEADER"**

Many Akitas challenge their owner for the role of pack leader and if this behavior is not modified immediately, the challenge will grow in intensity. Usually occurring before the dog is a year old -- in the form of ignoring a command, vocalizing, growling or snapping -- this serious offense should be modified in accordance. Let the dog win the first challenge and you will not wish to live with him. Expect to deal with it and go on from there. A firm modification at the first display of challenge for leadership and your Akita will rarely repeat the act.

*Editor's note: If a serious situation seems to be brewing, you must use modification under the advisement of a canine behaviorist. Misinterpreting your Akita's behavior and using a "Wolfman correction" will only create mistrust and deepen the issue before you.*

## **AKITAS AND CHILDREN, AND CATS.....**

As a breed, as different as individual dogs are, they are all very intelligent and devoted to their families. They have a wonderful sense of humor and fun that makes them a joy to live with. They like long walks on a leash and snow (they are often used for pulling sleds when full adults) and children when they're raised with them.

An Akita raised with a child is a wonderful companion and loyal defender; Akitas not raised with children should be watched carefully when around children. Because of some tragic incidents and the sheer size of the breed, Akita Rescue does not place Akitas in homes with children under the age of 10 years. The fast movements of children will put an Akita on guard, which can result in injury to the child. The Akita puppy raised with toddlers

is very tolerant and can be trusted completely. As a matter of fact, the child will become the Akita's favorite person even when the dog towers over his small owner.

Akitas are very feline -- they clean their faces after eating and when hunting, they stalk low to the ground in a feline position. Often used in Japan to hunt bear and wild boar, they hunt small animals and that can include the family cat! Raising an Akita puppy with an adult cat is still no guarantee of safety. A six year old Akita, who had been raised with two adult cats, killed one in an unprovoked attack, though she had never shown aggression previously. Yet, I've seen Akitas live to ripe old ages with the family cat as a friend and companion. Each Akita is different, unpredictable.

### **BEWARE -- THE PET PROFITEERS HAVE JUMPED ON THE TRENDY BANDWAGON!**

For such a relatively new breed in this country, the Akita is already facing some of the breeding problems afflicting other popular breeds. Because Akitas command a high price -- \$250-\$1200 -- there are people who consider the breed for its monetary worth only and when buying a puppy, **BEWARE!** There are some very serious genetic problems in the breed and you could buy a genetic time bomb.

Hip dysplasia is one problem, but some years ago responsible breeders began having breeding stock OFA'd (x-rayed) and the incidence of dysplasia was reduced from 51% to 17%.

Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA), which results in blindness, is found and buying a puppy from parents certified free from PRA does not guarantee that your puppy will never have PRA. The certification must be done every six months and since this disease can occur at any age, though parents may be free from PRA when the puppies are born, they can still develop the disease later on. This means that parents could have passed on the genetic tendency. Certification is not a test for genetic carriers, but an eye examination to determine the presence of the disease.

Glaucoma, epilepsy and auto-immune diseases are also found in the Akita. Stay away from **pet stores** and **backyard**, unknowledgeable breeders. The pain of watching your dog suffer from auto-immune diseases or blindness is simply not worth it. Any breeder who will sell to a pet store is more interested in money than in producing healthy, sound animals. Ignorant breeders who own a male and a female which they've bred together (or a female who was bred to a male down-the-street) do not care enough or know enough to research the genetic backgrounds of both lines to determine if the breeding will be a good one. They see puppies with dollar signs on their bodies and you would be ill advised to own one of their puppies.

This noble breed, once companion to shoguns, is dignified, intelligent, loyal, devoted, courageous and aloof. They are large, with breathtaking beauty, but they are also very strong and seek to dominate.

Because of these two latter traits, they require a great deal of work: socialization and training. If the extra work and challenge appeal to you, then you should be **owned** by an Akita.

Barbara Bouyet lives in Thousand Oaks, California and is, most importantly, the Secretary of the Akita Rescue Society of America. Because of her work with Rescue, this profile takes on special significance. Her hands-on experience with this breed is beyond question. If you know of anyone who is considering the purchase of an Akita, please show them this profile before they buy! Their Akita will be eternally grateful for a happy and truly permanent home!

## **BREED PROFILE: THE AKITA**

by Edith Van der Lyn  
Dog Fancy Magazine, November 1984

"Tender in heart and strength" is how the Japanese describe their Ichiban (number **One**), the **AKITA**. Of the seven purebred Japanese breeds, the Akita is the largest and the most revered by the people of Japan. It has been designated as a national monument by the Japanese Ministry of Education, and in their native land, they are regarded not only as fine pets and companions but also as symbols of good health.

The breed was developed in the 17th century when a nobleman, exiled to Akita Prefecture, the northernmost province of the island of Honshu, Japan, encouraged the land barons there to compete in the breeding of a dog for hunting. He wanted a large, aggressive dog that would be versatile enough to hunt deer and bear. Generations of selective breeding produced the Akita's ancestor (smaller than the modern day Akita), a dog of superior size and frame with versatile hunting abilities.

Once, ownership of an Akita was restricted to the Imperial family and the ruling aristocracy. Instructions for the dog's care and feeding were detailed in elaborate ceremony and special leashes denoted the Akita's rank and the standing of its owner. Each dog had a caretaker who wore an ornate costume in accordance with the Akita's standing.

Several times over the next 300 years, this "good luck charm" of the wealthy was nearly driven to extinction. Periodic favor kept the Akita alive through the Meiji and Taisho eras. But, during the 17th and 18th centuries, dog fighting posed a serious threat to the breed's continuation. Crosses with the Tosa Fighting Dog (a large, mastiff type of dog) from Shikoku Island produced the "Shin-Akita" (New Akita Dog), an animal of imposing size, trigger-like aggression and immense power. With all the interbreeding to produce Shin-Akitas, the original strain was nearly lost.

In 1899, there was a devastating outbreak of rabies in Japan. During the next 30 years, nearly 3,000 cases were reported. Dogs, including many Akitas, were ruthlessly and indiscriminately killed, for fear they might be carriers of this fatal disease.

By the 1900's, Akitas were nearly extinct. In 1927, the Akita Inu Hozankai Society of Japan was established to preserve the purity of the breed. In 1931, the government of Japan designated the Akita breed as a national monument as one of Japan's national treasures. The breed was so highly prized because of its rarity that the government would subsidize food for Akitas when their owners couldn't afford to feed them.

The ancient Japanese word matagi, meaning esteemed hunter, was bestowed on the best hunters in a village. The Akita was known as matagiinu (esteemed hunting dog) by the hunters of the northern Prefecture of Akita, who used pairs of dogs (a male and a female) to hunt deer, bear and wild boar. The animals would hold their prey at bay until the hunters arrived.

Akitas are highly prized because they hunt silently. They also have a "soft mouth" which allows them to retrieve game unharmed. Akitas are even said to have been used to drive fish into waiting nets.

The renowned Helen Keller is accredited with bringing the first Akita to the U.S. Outside of a Tokyo train station there is a statue of Hachiko, faithful pet of Dr. Elisaburo Ueno. The dog waited faithfully each day for his master to debark the train after work. One day the master did not come home, but still Hachiko waited, keeping up his daily vigil for nine years. He was fed by station attendants until his death, and each year a solemn ceremony is held in his honor. Keller was so taken with the story of the dog's fidelity that the Ministry of Education presented

her with an Akita puppy named Kamikaze. Later, when the puppy died, the Ministry sent a second Akita to Miss Keller.

The breed's popularity in the U.S. really started when returning servicemen brought the dogs home with them. They were attracted to the dogs' strength and adaptability. The Akita Club was founded in 1956, and the breed was admitted to registration in the American Kennel Club Stud Book in October, 1972, and to regular show classification in 1973.

It is not uncommon for the uninitiated to ask if the Akita is a cross between a dog and a bear. Indeed, its massive head and chest do "bear" a certain resemblance to the larger mammals. One distinctive feature of the Akita is its fine ears: erect, triangular, small ears, set slanting forward and on either side of the head. Another Akita feature you can't miss is its tail, set high and carried in a curve over its back. Its eyes are deep-set and triangular.

The Akita is a liberal combination of kindness, courage and alertness. It is extraordinarily affectionate and tolerant. It is also very protective and will defend itself and its charges against others, particularly other dogs. It is intelligent and retains its lessons very well. It can't be bullied into submissiveness and will resent forceful training methods and nagging.

Akitas will not tolerate physical abuse. They are strong willed dogs with proud egos. They need firm handling, patience and praise. Large breeds like the Akita have a potential for violence and should not be sold to weak-willed or impatient owners. These dogs won't stand for mistreatment and will resent disciplinary training tactics sometimes used on other large breeds. An Akita may live 10 to 12 years and needs love and gentle guidance to prosper. Because of their strength, Akitas in the wrong environment, or without proper training, can be dangerous.

Akita puppies resemble teddy bears as much as older dogs resemble the full-sized, real ones. The Akita litter is usually about 8 to 10 pups. Pet quality pups cost about \$500 to \$700, while show quality ones will cost \$1,500 or more.

At 3 months, an Akita pup might weigh more than 30 pounds, and at 10 months, it is filled out to nearly adult stature. Akitas will adjust to any climate and don't require as much exercise as other large breeds; however, a large, fenced yard should be considered a necessity.

Akitas mature at 3 to 4 years of age and can be given calcium supplements while growing, if a need is indicated by a licensed veterinarian.

*Editor's note: Over-supplementation can be as dangerous as under-supplementation. Most Large Breed Premium Dog foods on the market today take into account the needs of the growing large dog.*

Akitas are basically sound with few health problems. Conscientious breeders have their stock x-rayed for hip dysplasia. Bloat is a life threatening condition to watch for that requires immediate veterinary attention. It can be prevented by making sure meals are digested before vigorous exercise and that water is not drunk in excess. Otherwise, regular grooming, veterinary checkups and a good diet will keep the Akita in good condition.

An Akita is an intrepid guardian of its family and property. In Japan, it is often left to baby-sit children while mothers go off to work. It will not bark unless thoroughly alarmed, so it can be kept in close proximity to neighbors. It is an ideal car passenger that won't fuss, drool, or get sick, and it keeps itself fastidiously clean. Akitas shed twice a year, unless kept in a cold climate in which case they shed only once.

They are known for their mild disposition and their ability to "keep their cool" in stressful situations. One bad habit they seem to have is "goosing" people, and being gored from either front or behind by one of these dogs can

be embarrassing. The Akita is also inclined to be jealous, so showing affection to other family pets will have to be handled diplomatically.

Akitas are gentle, extremely loyal dogs. They won the heart of their native land with their kind disposition and loving nature, and for a few special owners, they are the only breed to own. In Japan, they are considered good luck and are often given to ill persons or families with newborns to bring good fortune and happiness into their homes. But no matter what country and customs it must adhere to, the Akita is a versatile and revered companion, capable of loving and protecting its family for many years.

## **FAILED PLACEMENTS**

by Sheila Proudman

For some reason(s), a person who once decided to own an Akita can no longer keep the dog. An so, an ad goes in the local paper, or the dog is given away to an acquaintance, or is taken to the shelter or pound, or is left at the local kennel, or is shoved out of a car on an unfamiliar highway, or is left in (or tied near) the house the owners have moved away from or ..... to paraphrase Paul Simon, "there must be 50 ways to get rid of your Akita". As a breeder, I have been fortunate in that most of my failed placements have been returned to me; in fact, four of the eight pups in my first litter came back by the age of 6 months! However, there are also a few "lost souls" out there -- I don't know if they are dead or alive, who owns them, how they are cared for, nothing! Their original owners decided to sell or give them away rather than return them to me. What goes wrong in a failed placement? What makes people give up their Akitas?

In 1984, our local Akita Rescue Society investigated the circumstances of 33 homeless Akitas. Of course, four were strays that had wound up in local shelters and were subsequently returned to their owners. All the rest, 29 Akitas, were placed in new homes or euthanized. Ten of these were in "foster care" with rescue society members, and so we got to know them pretty well. In every case, the dogs were well-behaved, even tempered, accepting of friendship, all-around good pets. You might think that the main reason people give up their Akitas is viciousness or uncontrollable behavior -- these dogs certainly exploded that theory! So, what went wrong?

Admittedly, many people who are giving up a dog will not tell the real reason, even if they know it. As far as we can tell, though, the main reason for giving up their Akitas has to do with lifestyle: the people are moving to a smaller place, or one that doesn't allow dogs, or they are working more hours and don't have enough time to spend taking care of a big dog or the family is breaking up and neither adult wants the responsibility of a dog. Generally, the dogs these people have are under three years old. At least five of the ten Akitas placed by the local rescue society in 1984 were in this category.

So far in 1985, the local group has taken in nine Akitas: five due to lifestyle problems of the owners, two because of neighborhood protests (for killing cats or attacking small dogs), and two were found straying. In only one case was there a problem with the dog itself, a 14-month old male who had been kept crated on the deck of a condo for most of his short life. His personality had never developed properly, and he suddenly attacked a member of the family of the rescue worker with who he was living, a person who had regularly fed, walked and played with him. With much regret, the rescue group members decided this dog was unplaceable, and had him euthanized: a rescue group can have its own failed placement.

The point is, in only three out of 19 rescue cases was there an actual behavior problem with the dog, and in only one instance was it found to be "incurable". What is going wrong is not with the dogs themselves! **IT IS WITH PEOPLE WHO THINK THEY WANT AN AKITA, THEN DECIDE A COUPLE OF YEARS LATER THAT THE DOG JUST ISN'T FOR THEM.** In the case of my own failed placements, in each instance there was nothing I could discern wrong with the pups; they just didn't meet their new owner's expectations. I have learned to point out every disadvantage I can think of (they chew, they shed, they have to be kept in a run or in the house in a DOG PROOF place, they can be headstrong if not trained young, they will attack other dogs, they

cost money to keep properly, and so on) and give the people at least a 24 hour cooling-off period to think all these things over.

It seems that there are two ways in which we can decrease the number of failed placements. One is telling people just how much time, work and money is involved, and that the pups soon outgrow the cuddly Teddy-Bear stage and become big, independent dogs who spend much of their time eating, eliminating, shedding and getting bored. It is important that potential Akita owners understand that **THEY ARE MAKING A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT**, and that the house will never be the same once the dog lives there. I find that the most successful placements I have are ones where a big dog has lived before: the people are used to what that means, and they have decided to accept whatever inconveniences there may be in return for the pleasures derived from having an Akita.

In addition, we need to assess the stability and judgment of the potential owner: not just finding out if there is a fenced yard, but getting an idea of how realistic it is for this person to have an Akita. It may be impossible, of course, to detect the seemingly happy couple who will file for divorce next year, or the executive who will suddenly be transferred to Hawaii. But it should be possible to determine how that person will **REACT** to these situations -- will he or she return the pup, place it with a friend, or dump it on the interstate median strip? Unfortunately, there is no easy way to find out about a potential owner, except perhaps through checking on what happened to other animals he or she has owned. It may help to ask for a reference from their veterinarian. What we can do as breeders, then, to make our placements as successful as possible, is to try to match the expectations of the potential owner with what can realistically be "delivered" by the dog, to match what the potential owner is willing to give in terms of time and work expense with the needs of the dog, and to discuss in advance what the owner will do if it doesn't work out. If you are unwilling to take back your failed placements, at least suggest the person try a responsible local organization such as a Akita Rescue or a Humane Society; and if you do that, it would be nice if you would send the group a few dollars to help them take care of **YOUR** dogs.

## **AKITA FACTS**

1. Most Akita puppies chew. A poodle puts a few teeth marks in chair, an Akita will destroy the whole chair. Most grow out of this stage by their first birthday, but some do not stop until they are about two. They have been named "100 pound termites" with good reason.
2. Akitas do not bark unless there is a good reason. When an Akita is barking, pay attention!
3. Akitas are inherently aggressive/reactive towards other animals and for this reason, they should not be allowed to run free or roam at will.
4. Akitas consider small animals as prey and hunt them. This includes cats, rodents, birds, small wildlife and small dogs. Akitas can be raised to accept animals in residence. Some adult Akitas can even be trained to fit into a home where other animals are already established. It is imperative, however, that the Akita be closely watched around the other animals until you have established a peaceful co-existence.
5. Akitas are can be **VERY FOOD POSSESSIVE**. If you have other pets, you will want to be certain the Akita is given his own food bowl or treats well away from other animals and that no other animal is allowed near the Akita until the food is gone.
6. Akitas not raised with children are not always tolerant of small children, and the Akita should never be left alone with a child until you are **CERTAIN** you have a dog who adores children. Often, Akitas raised with children will tolerate their own children, but may not accept the neighborhood kids.

7. Akitas do not like to be teased and may respond by biting. Some children are allowed to treat animals unkindly, a behavior that often leads to cruelty to animals. These children should be kept away from an Akita whose large size and hunting instincts can endanger the child's life.
8. Akitas like to take charge -- an inherited trait from their wolf ancestry and may, at times, challenge you for the leadership position (especially adolescent males from 1 year to 2 years of age). This behavior cannot be tolerated and a fair, CONSISTENT schedule of modification should be your immediate response. Akitas with good temperament accept leadership well -- never beating, but intelligent, kind leadership.
9. Akitas should be trained BY THEIR OWNER and not sent away to school like some little poodle!! A good pet manners class will guarantee a firm bond with your dog and well-behaved dog. Remember though, Akitas are extremely intelligent and tend to get bored easily. They learn quickly so short training periods are suggested. This keeps the dog from becoming bored. Akitas are very headstrong, and when the dog thinks it is a waste of time to "sit" or "stay" one more time, he may simply walk away and ignore you. Pet manners training requires patience!
10. Some Akitas are "talkers". They may grunt, groan and mumble to entertain themselves and you. This conversational verbalizing is not growling and should not be interpreted as a growl, which sounds quite different. Akita "talking" is an endearing trait and should not frighten you. After living with the dog, you will easily distinguish between talking and growling.
11. Akitas are not considered hyperactive; they are low activity indoor dogs and moderate activity outdoor dogs. They can fit into a sedentary household, but for optimum health for both you and your Akita, regular exercise is important.
12. Akitas are very people oriented and are not happy when kept apart from the family. If you do not plan on having your dog live with you both inside your home and yard, you should not seriously consider an Akita for a pet.
13. When keeping another dog with an Akita, it is usually more harmonious to have one of each sex.
14. If your Akita has a propensity for digging, expect your yard to resemble a lunar landscape; they are great earth moving machines when so motivated.  
*Editor's note: We can suggest a behavior modification protocol for this when it occurs.*
15. Some Akitas are escape artists. They will hook their front paws over a low fence and climb over. If they can get their heads under a fence, the rest of the body is sure to follow. Some have been known to go through a wooden fence with the right motivation.
16. Akitas usually shed twice a year in great quantities. It is called "blowing their coat". They lose the entire wooly undercoat, which makes little tumbleweeds of hair all over your house. The shed lasts 4 to 8 weeks. It can be hurried along by daily brushing and warm baths.
17. **GROOMING:** If you get a puppy, start cutting toenails, brushing, bathing, ear cleaning, teeth brushing very early. It is much easier to do this to a 20 lb. puppy and get him used to it than to fight with a 100 lb. adult. Adults can be trained to accept this with patience and a little TLC.
18. Akitas are big dogs. Therefore, everything is going to be "more". More expensive vet bills, medications, collars, food, bigger piles of stool to clean up, large food/water bowls, large size crates. It will be expensive to board your Akita, or have it bathed and dipped. This will affect you financially, so consider carefully, and be sure you can afford to have an Akita.



19. Akitas live from 10-14 years with good care and proper nutrition.
20. Akitas are loyal, excellent watch dogs, wonderful companions who enjoy affection, but do not crave it. Once you've been owned by an Akita, you will never switch to another breed!

### **WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?**

A lesson in becoming a Leader

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"My dog just tried to bite me! All I did was tell him to move over so I could sit on the couch next to him."

"My dog got into the trash can and when I scolded her, she growled at me. What's wrong with her? I thought she loved me!"

"Our dog is very affectionate most of the time but when we try to make him do something he doesn't want to do, he snaps at us."

What do these three dogs have in common? Are they nasty or downright vicious? No - they're "alpha." They've taken over the leadership of the families that love them. Instead of taking orders from their people, these dogs are giving orders! Your dog can love you very much and still try to push you around or other members of your family.

Dogs are social creatures and believers in social order. A dog's social system is a "pack" with a well-defined pecking order. The leader of the pack is the alpha, supreme boss, Top Dog. He (or she) gets the best of everything - the best food, the best place to sleep, the best toy, etc. The leader also gets to be first in everything - he gets to eat first, to leave first and to get attention first. All the other dogs in the pack respect the alpha dog's wishes.

Your family is your dog's "pack." Many dogs fit easily into the lower levels of their human pack's pecking order and don't make waves. They do what they're told and don't challenge authority. Other dogs don't fit in quite as well. Some of them are natural born leaders and are always challenging their human alpha's. Other dogs are social climbers (alpha wannabes) - they're always looking for ways to get a little closer to the top of the family ladder. These natural leaders and the social climbers can become problems to an unsuspecting family that's not aware of the dog's natural pack instincts.

Some families encourage their dogs to take over the "pack" without realizing it. They treat their dogs as top dogs, not as pack members. They give them special privileges like being allowed to sleep on the bed or couch. They don't train their dogs and let them get away with ignoring commands. In a real dog pack, no one but the alpha dog would get this kind of treatment. Alpha doesn't have anything to do with size. The tiniest Chihuahua can be a canine Hitler. In fact, the smaller the dog, the more people tend to baby them and cater to them - making the dog feel even more alpha and in control of his humans.

Alpha dogs often seem to make good pets. They're confident, smarter than average, and affectionate. They can be wonderful with children and good with strangers. Everything seems to be great with the relationship - until someone makes him do something he doesn't want to do. Then, suddenly, this wonderful dog growls or tries to bite someone and no one understands why.

In a real dog pack, the alpha dog doesn't have to answer to anyone. No one gives him orders or tells him what to do. The other dogs in the pack respect his position. If another dog is foolish enough to challenge the alpha by trying to take his bone or his favorite sleeping place, the alpha dog will quickly put him in his place with a hard stare or a growl. If this doesn't work, the alpha dog will enforce his leadership with his teeth. This is all natural, instinctive behavior - in a dog's world. In a human family, though, this behavior is unacceptable and dangerous.

Dogs need and want leaders. They have an instinctive need to fit into a pack. They want the security of knowing their place and what's expected of them. Most of them don't want to be alpha - they want someone else to give the orders and make the decisions. If his humans don't provide that leadership, the dog will take over the role himself. If you've allowed your dog to become alpha, you're at his mercy and as a leader, he may be either a benevolent king or a tyrant!

If you think your dog is alpha in your household, he probably is. If your dog respects only one or two members of the family but dominates the others, you still have a problem. The dog's place should not be at the top or somewhere in between.

In order to reclaim your family's rightful place as leaders of the pack, your dog needs some lessons in how to be a pack member, not a top dog. You're going to show him what it means to be a dog again. Your dog's mother showed him very early in life that -she- was alpha and that he had to respect her. As a puppy, he was given a secure place in his litter's pack and because of that security, he was free to concentrate on growing, learning, playing, loving and just being a dog. Your dog doesn't really want the responsibility of being alpha, having to make the decisions and defend his position at the top. He wants a leader to follow so he can have the freedom of just being a dog again.

### **How to become leader of your pack:**

Your dog watches you constantly and reads your body language. He knows if you're insecure, uncomfortable in a leadership role or won't enforce a command. This behavior confuses him, makes -him- insecure and if he's a natural leader or has a social-climbing personality, it'll encourage him to assume the alpha position and tell -you- what to do.

"Alpha" is an attitude. It involves quiet confidence, dignity, intelligence, an air of authority. A dog can sense this attitude almost immediately - it's how his mother acted towards him. Watch a professional trainer or a good obedience instructor. They stand tall and use their voices and eyes to project the idea that they're capable of getting what they want. They're gentle but firm, loving but tough, all at the same time. Most dogs are immediately understand this type of personality because they recognize and respect alpha when they see it.

#### Editor's note:

*Most professional pet trainers stand tall and use their voices, hand signals, food lure and bodies consistently to obtain this goal, it is not just voice commands. Please remember, do not expect your dog to perform a command regularly if you have not taught it well.*

Practice being alpha. Stand up straight with your shoulders back. Walk tall. Practice using a confident tone of voice, one that's deep and firm. Don't ask your dog to do something - tell him. There's a difference. He knows the difference, too! Remember that, as alpha, you're entitled to make the rules and give the orders. Your dog understands that instinctively.

#### Editor's note:

*Ask your dog to do things that you know it can do successfully. Beware if you did not train it well, do not expect a consistent response.*

With most dogs, just this change in your attitude and multiple pet training courses will be enough to turn things around. With a dog that's already taken over the household and has enforced his position by growling or biting and has been allowed to get away with it, you'll need to do more than just decide to be alpha. The dog is going to need an attitude adjustment as well.

#### Editor's note:

*Attitude adjustments should really be done under the supervision of an experienced behaviorist that understands the principles of behavior modification.*

Natural leaders and social climbers aren't going to want to give up their alpha position. Your sudden change in behavior is going to surprise and possibly threaten them. Don't worry, there's a way around it.

An alpha dog already knows that he can beat you in a physical fight so returning his aggression with violence of your own won't work. Until you've successfully established your position as alpha, corrections like hitting, shaking, or using the "rollover" techniques described in some books will not work and can be downright dangerous to you. An alpha dog will respond to these methods with violence and you could be seriously hurt.

What you need to do is use your -brain- ! You're smarter than he is and you can out think him. You'll also need to be more stubborn than he is. What I'm about to describe here is an effective, nonviolent method of removing your dog from alpha status and putting him back as a pack member where he needs to be. In order for this method to work, your whole family has to be involved. It requires an attitude adjustment from everyone and a new way of working with your dog.

This is serious business. A dog that bites or threatens people is a -dangerous- dog, no matter how much you love him. If treating your dog like a dog and not an equal seems harsh to you, keep in mind that our society no longer tolerates dangerous dogs. Lawsuits from dog bites are now settling for millions of dollars - you could lose your home and everything else you own if your dog injures someone. You or your children could be permanently disfigured. And your dog could lose his life. That's the bottom line.

#### Canine Boot Camp for Alpha Attitude Adjustment

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From this day forward, you're going to teach your dog that he is a -dog-, not a miniature human being in a furry suit. His mother taught him how to be a dog once. Along the way, through lack of training or misunderstood intentions, he's forgotten. With your help, he's going to remember what he is and how he fits into the world. Before long, he's even going to like it!

Dogs were bred to look to humans for food, companionship and guidance. An alpha dog doesn't ask for what he wants, he demands it. He lets you know in no uncertain terms that he wants his dinner, that he wants to go out, that he wants to play and be petted and that he wants these things -right now-. You're going to teach him that from now on, he has to -earn- what he gets. No more free rides. This is going to be a shock to his system at first but you'll be surprised how quickly he'll catch on and that he'll actually become eager to please you.

#### Editor's note:

*Remember, nothing in life is free...*

If your dog doesn't already know the simple command SIT, teach it to him. Reward him with praise and a tidbit. Don't go overboard with the praise. A simple "Good boy!" in a happy voice is enough. Now, every time your dog wants something - his dinner, a trip outside, a walk, some attention, anything - tell him (remember don't ask him, -tell- him) to SIT first. When he does, praise him with a "Good Boy!", then tell him OKAY and give him whatever it is he wants as a reward. If he refuses to SIT, walk away and ignore him. No SIT, no reward. If you don't think he understands the command, work on his training some more. If he just doesn't want to obey, ignore him - DON'T give him what he wants or reward him in any fashion.

#### Editor's note:

*You will want to tell him SIT, use your hand signal and food lure. Hold the food at his nose and lure the dog to look towards the ceiling, his butt will plant itself on the floor automatically. Give the dog the food and say GOOD SIT! Do this three times, at the end of the exercise, release the dog and say FREE. The word OKAY is overused in the everyday English language, and FREE or GO PLAY are more appropriate and less used. If you ignore the dog when he refuse to SIT he will feel that he CAN ignore you, and at the point when you asked the dog to SIT, your attention was not a motivator, and therefore if you use ignoring as a negative, the dog will care less.*

*If you are confident after many exercises that the dog knows SIT, and he ignores the command, say SIT again, use the hand signal, and praise, no tidbit that time. Redo the exercise, and when you do get the SIT on the first command (which will probably be the next time, because he wants the tidbit he did not get), then praise and give him the tidbit. We also have an extensive handout on phasing out food.*

Make him sit before giving him his dinner, make him sit at the door before going outside, make him sit in front of you to be petted, make him sit before giving him his toy. If you normally leave food out for him all the time, stop. Go to a twice daily feeding and -you- decide what time of day he'll be fed. Make him sit for his dinner. If he won't listen to the command - no dinner. Bring the food out later and tell him again to SIT. If he understands the command, don't tell him more than once. He heard you the first time. Give commands from a standing position and use a confident, consistent tone of voice.

*Editor's note:* *Use the food bowl as a lure, couple with the hand signal. Make sure you are using your hand signal and are being consistent.*

If the dog respects certain members of the family but not others, let the others be the ones to feed him and bring the good things to his life for now. Show them how to make him obey the SIT command. It's important that your whole family follows this program. Dogs are like kids - if they can't have their way with Mom, they'll go ask Dad. In your dog's case, if he finds a member of the family that he can dominate, he'll continue to do so. You want your dog to learn that he has to respect and obey everyone. Remember - his as a pack member. Bouncing him from the top spot helps but if he thinks he's anywhere in the middle, you're still going to have problems.

*Editor's note:*

*Make sure the children are luring the dog into the SIT and using their hand signal. Having the dog work for food builds a leadership bond because the children are being kind, fair, consistent leaders.*

Think - you know your dog and know what he's likely to do under most circumstances. Stay a step ahead of him and anticipate his behavior so you can avoid or correct it. If he gets into the trash and growls when scolded, make the trash can inaccessible. If he likes to bolt out the door ahead of you, put a leash on him. Make him sit and wait while you open the door and give him permission - OKAY! (*ed. FREE!*) - to go out. If your alpha dog doesn't like to come when he's called (and he probably doesn't!), don't let him outside off leash. Without a leash, you have no control over him and he knows it.

*Editor's note:*

*You can use a long line to train COME, it is much more effective. Please ask us about this if you are having difficulty.*

Petting and attention: Alpha dogs are used to being fussed over. In a real dog pack, subordinate dogs are forever touching, licking and grooming the alpha dog. It's a show of respect and submission. For now, until his attitude has shown improvement, cut down on the amount of cuddling your dog gets. When he wants attention, make him SIT first, give him a few kind words and pats, then stop. Go back to whatever it was you were doing and ignore him. If he pesters you, tell him NO! (*ed. OFF!*) in a confident voice and ignore him some more. Pet him when -you- want to, not just because -he- wants you to. Also, for the time being, don't get down on the floor or on your knees to pet your dog. That, too, is a show of submission. Give praise, petting and rewards from a position that's higher than the dog.

Games: If you or anyone in your family wrestles, rough-houses or plays tug of war with your dog, **stop!** These games encourage dogs to dominate people physically and to use their teeth. In a dog pack or in a litter, these games are more than just playing - they help to establish pack order based on physical strength. Your dog is already probably stronger and quicker than you are. Rough, physical games prove that to him. He doesn't need to be reminded of it!

*Editor's note:*

*Tug-of-War should only be played under the advice of a trained behaviorist that can teach you the rules of the "game."*

Find new games for him to play. Hide & seek, fetch or Frisbee catching are more appropriate. Make sure you're the one who starts and ends the game, not the dog. Stop playing before the dog gets bored and is inclined to try to keep the ball or Frisbee.

Where does your dog sleep? Not in your bedroom and especially not on your bed! Your bedroom is a special place - it's your "den." An alpha dog thinks he has a right to sleep in your den because he considers himself your equal. In fact, he may have already taken over your bed, refusing to get off when told or growling and snapping when anyone asks him to make room for the humans. Until your dog's alpha problems are fully under control, the bedroom should be off-limits! The same goes for sleeping on furniture. If you can't keep him off the couch without a fight, deny him access to the room until his behavior and training has improved.

Crate-training: Dog crates have 1,000 uses and working with an alpha dog is one of them. It's a great place for your dog to sleep at night, and just to stay in when he needs to chill out. The crate is your dog's "den." (*ed. Please see the enclosed hand out on proper usage of a crate.*)

Graduating from Boot Camp: What's next?

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Just like in the army, boot camp is really just an introduction to a new career and new way of doing things. A tour through boot camp isn't going to solve your alpha dog's problems forever. It's a way to get basic respect from a dog who's been bullying you without having to resort to physical force.

How long should boot camp last? That depends on the dog. Some will show an improvement right away, others may take much longer. For really tough cookies, natural leaders that need constant reminders of their place in the pack, Alpha Dog Boot Camp will become a way of life. Social climbers may need periodic trips through boot camp if you get lax and accidentally let them climb back up a notch or two in the family pack order.

How do you know if you're making a difference? If boot camp has been successful, your dog should start looking to you for directions and permission. He'll show an eagerness to please. Watch how your dog approaches and greets you. Does he come to you "standing tall," with his head and ears held high and erect? It may look impressive and proud but it means he's still alpha and you still have problems! A dog who accepts humans as leaders and will approach you with his head at mid-body position and his ears back or off to the sides. Watch how he greets all the members of the family. If he displays this posture to some of them, but not others, those are the ones who still need to work on their own alpha posture and methods. They should take him back through another tour of boot camp with support from the rest of the family.

Pet Manners Training:

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Once your dog has begun to accept this new way of life and his new position in the family, you should take him through a pet manners course with a qualified trainer. All dogs need to be trained and alpha dogs need training most of all! You don't have to wait until he's through with boot camp to start this training but it's important that he respects at least one member of the family and is willing to take direction from them.

Pet manners class teaches -you- to train your dog. It teaches you how to be alpha, how to enforce commands and rules, how to get respect and to keep it. All family members who are old enough to understand and control the dog should participate in the class.

Pet manners training is a lifelong process. One pet manners course does not a trained dog make! Obedience commands need to be practiced and incorporated into your daily life. Certain commands, like DOWN/STAY, are

especially effective, nonviolent reminders of a dog's place in the family pack order and who's really in charge here.

Editor's note:

*The much newer command is OFF, which means remove your body from whatever you are touching, going to touch, or are thinking of touching. Please ask us about this.*

A well-trained obedient dog is a happy dog and a joy to live with. Dogs want to please and need a job to do. Training gives them the opportunity to do both. A well-trained dog has more freedom. He can go more places and do more things with you because he knows how to behave. A well-trained dog that's secure in his place within the family pack is comfortable and confident. He knows what's expected of him. He knows his limits and who his leaders are. He's free from the responsibility of running the household and making decisions. He's free to be your loving companion and not your boss. He's free to be a dog - what he was born to be and what he always wanted to be in the first place!

**When You Need Professional Help:**

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If your dog has already injured you or someone else or if you are afraid of your dog, you should consult with a qualified professional dog trainer or behaviorist before starting Canine Boot Camp. Your dog should also have an exam by your vet to make sure there are no physical causes for his behavior.

To find a qualified trainer or behaviorist near you, contact your veterinarian or the American Kennel Club for a list of obedience training clubs in your area.

The American Kennel Club  
51 Madison Avenue  
New York, NY 10010  
(212) 696-8200

*Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT)*  
*17000 Commerce Parkway, Suite C*  
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*1-800-PETDOGS   information@apdt.com*

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**Editor Reading Recommendations:**

*Leader of the Pack-Dr. Patricia McConnell*  
*Beginning Family Dog Training-Dr. Patricia McConnell*  
*Puppy Primer-Dr. Patricia McConnell*  
*Cautious Canine-Dr. Patricia McConnell*  
*Don't Shoot the Dog-Karen Pryor*  
*Culture Clash-Jean Donaldson*  
*Dogs Are From Neptune-Jean Donaldson*  
*Toolbox for Remodeling Problem Dogs-Terry Ryan*  
*Sirius Puppy Training-Dr. Ian Dunbar*  
*The Evolution of Canine Social Behavior-Dr. Roger Abrantes*  
*Dog Language: An Encyclopedia of Canine Behavior-Dr. Roger Abrantes*

----This article was written by Vicki Rodenberg, Chairman of the Chow Chow Club Inc.'s Welfare Committee. Uploaded with permission from the author, it may be reproduced for non-profit purposes with author's credit given.

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The Chow Chow Club, Inc. Welfare Committee  
9828 E. County A, Janesville, WI 53546

---For more information about Akitas, their behavior, and training, contact:

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## **THE EDUCATED AKITA: THE TROUBLE WITH OUTSIDE DOGS**

By Elaine Nussbaum

Akita Graffiti - March 1987

Dogs are considered "pack" animals. They do not tend to be alone or solitary. Domesticated dogs no longer have packs of other dogs to live with, so now want to be members of human families.

Also, dogs are "den" animals. This is the reason dogs can be housebroken. Dogs want their den to be clean and secure, so they regard your house as their den.

Obviously, dogs can be forced to live outside, continually alone and away from their families. But to force this kind of life on a dog is one of the worst things you can do to it. Such a life goes against the dog's two most basic instincts.

If you have any doubts about these ideas, think about all the whining, barking, clawing dogs you have seen trying desperately, at first, to get to their human families, and then just giving up to become over-active, listless, fearful, or vicious when no one hears their perfectly reasonable requests.

Unless you can accept a dog as a member of your family, joining in your activities and sitting in your living room, **DO NOT** get a dog. Both you and the dog you DON'T get will be much happier.

The dog you keep continually outside will be miserable, and you will have the annoyance of dealing with a miserable animal on your property.

Large dogs are just as much in need of attentive human companionship as small dogs. In fact, Shepherds and Setters are among the most dependent breeds. Great Danes and Dobermans, as short and thin as their coats are, cannot tolerate the cold winter weather very well.

Here is just one example of a dog's need for human company: There was a Boxer owned by a man whose wife did not want the dog in their living quarters. The Boxer was confined continually to the basement where it howled, scratched, banged, and made a general nuisance of itself. The wife then decided to allow the dog into the main part of the house, thinking the dog would continue to be a nuisance, and her husband would then get rid of it. However, as soon as the Boxer was allowed to be where its instincts told it had every right to be, it became a quiet, well-mannered family member.

One of the greatest gifts that a dog can offer a human is its devotion. No other living creature will give you more steadfast, abiding love. Fairly treated, dogs are among the world's most joyful animals to own.

A dog becomes sad, lonely and bewildered tied outside its owner's house wondering why it cannot be with its family. It wants to be your happy, devoted, accepted companion. Unless you can accept a dog's offer of this great gift, please **DO NOT** get a dog!

## **MEDICAL CONDITIONS OF OUR BREED**

The following was researched and written by Liz Harrell and presented at the 1983 National Specialty during a seminar. In Liz's absence, Andy Mershon read it to the group. (Special thanks to Sylvia Thomas for recording the talk and to Barbara Bouyet for painstakingly transcribing and spelling the difficult words.)

The Akita has been a recognized breed for ten years. In that time, Akitas have become very popular. In 1963, you might have found two or three small ads for Akitas squeezed in between other miscellaneous ads in Dog World. Twenty years later, Dog World carries several full pages of ads for Akitas, all of which, those ads assure us, are produced from the very best stock which has been championed, tested, certified, guaranteed, etc. Is the current status of our breed really this marvelous? Or would it be closer to the truth to say that the great popularity and corresponding great increase in numbers has adversely affected the breed in some ways.

This presentation will examine the Akita as it now exists and we will limit the discussion to medical problems inherited and otherwise.

**HIP DYSPLASIA** is a problem for all dogs. If you think large dogs are the only ones involved, consider this. A research program done in England a few years ago brought to light the fact that one of the breeds most involved was the tiny Brussels Griffon, a ten-pound dog. Hip dysplasia will be with us for a long time to come, so it would be wise to know as much as possible about this problem.

In the last twenty years, many theories about hip dysplasia have surfaced and disappeared. When the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals first began scanning x-rays, certification of free from dysplastic problems was given at twelve months. Then it became evident that changes took place within the joint after twelve months, so certification was then granted to normals at twenty-four months of age. Today many breed clubs specify in their "codes of ethics" that no breeding may be done prior to thirty-six months of age. This is because many dogs have been found to have arthritic changes after twenty-four months. The dog certified as normal at two years may not be certifiable at three or four years. You cannot assume that every certified dog will be normal for the rest of its life. Most will, but some will not.

The Swedish Canine Corp. did a ten-year study of hip dysplasia. They x-rayed breeding stock and kept working detailed records of what was produced by breeding normals to normals, normals to dysplastic and dysplastic to dysplastic. At the end of ten years, they discovered they were getting the exact same percentage of dysplasia from breeding normals to normals that they were getting when the study started. In short, although the percentages varied up and down over the years, the average for the ten-year period was the same as when the project started. To some, this means to stop x-raying, breed from whatever moves well and looks good. A lot of breeders are pursuing this idea and in a few years, we'll know their success or their failure. Particularly if it's a failure! Nothing surfaces faster than bad news.

I think most of us have come to the conclusion that hip dysplasia is a very complex problem. While it is certainly inherited, we must also accept the fact that the environment appears to be involved as well. Environment in this case means health and well being. If a growing dog becomes ill with a viral or bacterial infection, the results of this illness may show up in his x-rays. Viruses and bacteria can cross the synovial barrier and produce arthritic changes within the joint capsule.

In another large breed, a litter of six pups was x-rayed at six months because they were observed to be weak in the rear. The x-rays showed considerable arthritic problems in the hips of all six. They were destroyed and postmortem examinations were made. Something very interesting was discovered. The fluid in the synovial sacs of the hips, shoulders and knees contained pseudomonas. The dam of this litter had been treated for pseudomonas uterine infection for two weeks prior to being bred. She'd been tested and thought free of pseudomonas when she was bred. The irritation and resultant arthritic build-up in those pups was from pseudomonas. No one will ever know how many of them would have been normal otherwise.



Another environmental factor can be nutrition. When an animal is growing, it needs proper and balanced nutrition. Too little of the necessary nutrients can rob the dog of what it needs to produce bone, ligaments, nerve fiber, etc., and the dogs fed whatever is on sale at the local supermarket will not likely prosper and will, in the case of a female, have little to pass on to her get when she's bred. You will get from your animal precisely what you have given the animal. Don't expect a bargain sale fed animal to produce more than bargain sale pups. A slight exaggeration, but I think you get the idea.

The fat pup is in almost as bad a position. Fat pups are cute but the excess weight produces stress on the joints and results in splayed feet, swaybacks and a lot less than average chance of having good hips, knees, etc. If too much stress is put on the joints when the dog is growing, that dog may never reach its full potential, even if it slims down as it gets older.

There's one other aspect to hip dysplasia that all breeders would be wise to consider. The medical profession has been investigating arthritis in humans for a long, long time. The current thinking is that arthritis might be caused by the body's own immune system. That is, something in the body triggers the immune system to put down bone deposits in the joints, on the spine, or wherever the programming directs. This could happen after a viral or bacterial infection, especially if the immune system overreacts. It is also possible that some animals are born with an overactive immune system which can be triggered to act against the body's own cells. This is autoimmunity and it is an inherited factor.

We know that the Akita is involved in hip dysplasia. We know that hip dysplasia is a very complex problem involving inheritance, the genes from the Parents for normal or dysplastic hips, environment, the animal's health, welfare, plus the additional inherited possibility of a good immune system. Obviously, hip dysplasia must be given great consideration by those who are to produce sound and strong moving animals.

The next important problem concerns **ENTROPION**. About thirty years ago, the Akikyo Club in Japan published a book about the Akita in which considerable space is given to problems in breeding Akitas. One picture clearly shows an Akita with a characteristic rolled-in lid. Entropion causes the lid of the eye to roll inward allowing lashes to scrape the eyeball. This causes irritation and, in time, can affect the eye.

This is an inherited problem. Six to eight week old pups can show the problem. One way it's manifested is that a wet patch appears around the eye and the pup will paw at the eye on occasion. Examination will show the lower lid is probably turning inward at the outer rim. In severe cases, both upper and lower lids can be involved. Sometimes only one pup in a litter is affected, but there have been litters in which 80% of the pups had the problem.

Entropion is a recessive gene and can skip one or two generations. Without intending to, some breeders have selected for breeding animals carrying the gene for entropion. Consequently, in some strains of the breed, the problem of entropion is now considered to be a dominant rather than recessive. How dominant entropion becomes in Akitas depends on how the breeders select their stock. The decisions made now will determine whether or not litters of Akitas will be presented to the local ophthalmologist for corrective surgery, as is now the case with Chows, Shar-Peis, etc. Surgically correcting entropion is a very minor procedure. Once done, the eye can pass for normal in every way and it's no secret that many dogs have been shown after surgery.

Some believe entropion can be treated in the breed by selecting breeding animals with loose facial skin and too many wrinkles. This must be a valid theory if one limits the discussion to breeds like Chows and Shar-Peis. However, the Irish Setter is also deeply involved with entropion and it would be hard to make a case based on the loose facial skin theory for Setters.

Bacterial invasion can produce a temporary form of entropion. As the eyelid swells, it rolls inward causing the lashes to scrape the eye just as in the inherited type. In this case, a culture should be made of the eye secretion and treatment started as soon as possible. When the swelling reduces, the lid returns to normal. A blow to the eye

can cause the same temporary type of swelling. Allergic reactions to insect bites, bees in particular, will also cause temporary entropion. Bee stings can also cause the ears to swell and droop at the same time if the bite is located on the head. Immediate treatment with antihistamines and steroids will reverse the situation and the eyes and ears will return to normal.

Another problem in our breed is **COAT**. You probably think that while it's definitely a problem, it certainly couldn't be considered medical. Here are a few things you might want to consider.

Akita pedigrees done in Japan just prior to, and after 1900, show these dogs have ancestors listed as "foreign dog", "unknown", etc. About this time, Japan had opened up to world trade and one of the most popular gifts used by traders to impress those with whom they wished to do business were dogs. Most impressive was the Mastiff. In fact, one Japanese gentleman with whom I corresponded, and the third generation of his family to breed Akitas, told me he was certain the brindle coloring came from Mastiffs brought to Japan from the Netherlands. Some feel that the short coat seen in present-day Akitas might be traced to the Mastiff-Akita crosses in those early days.

Some long hair in our breed comes from the Karafuto, which is another Japanese breed. You may remember a few years ago there was a Japanese participation in the geophysical studies down in Antarctica. The dogs used in the Japanese expedition were Karafutos. They're a large dog with medium bone and pricked ears, resembling the Akita but with head, body and coat looking more like a Belgian Tervuren. So, here at least, two different types of dogs crossed with Akitas. There were actually more but for this discussion, we'll consider only the Mastiff and the Karafuto.

The Mastiff would bring to any breeding, not only his short coat, but a skeleton different from that of the Akita. The tail carriage, ears and head shape, particularly the muzzle, are all very different from our breed. The Karafuto would bring the long coat, medium bone, narrow chest, high loin and loose tail curl. Now, considering whatever else has come down in today's Akitas from past crosses, there well may have come inherited problems from these outside breedings at the time, too. In short, perpetuating coat problems may also be perpetuating a few other goodies as well.

**BLOAT** is definitely a problem in Akitas. The term "bloat" includes anything from simple gas attacks to torsion to intussusception and strangulation. Dogs that forage and ingest unusual foodstuffs can suffer a gas attack as a result of their feeding habits. Some things causing gas include apples, cabbage, onions, and decaying meat. The gas forms a bubble in the stomach and the resultant pain will make expelling the gas in either direction impossible. A tube run through the mouth into the stomach will relieve the gas at once, after which some soothing liquid like Kaopectate, Pepto-Bismol, Milk of Magnesia, etc. should be put in the dog's stomach to soothe the stomach lining. A change in the dog's eating habits is necessary.

Bear in mind that a simple gas attack can escalate into **torsion** very easily and torsion is not so easy to correct. When the stomach inflates with so much gas that it becomes distended, it starts to rotate. Picture a balloon with the input valve on one end and output on the other. Fill the balloon part way with fluid and the rest with air. Notice how easily the balloon can rotate on the two valves anywhere from a few degrees to 360. That's what torsion is. The twisted input tube makes it impossible to get the stomach pumped through the tube that slides down into the stomach. The twisted output valve makes it impossible for the gas to go in that direction. As the stomach gets larger and larger, it pushes into the spleen, which also starts to rotate, cutting off the blood supply to the spleen. Now there are two serious problems to correct.

Large animal veterinarians approach this problem somewhat differently than small animal vets. Some large animal vets work on horses and cows, which also suffer from bloat. They have more opportunity to cope. The usual procedure here is to insert a large needle through the abdominal wall to draw off gas as soon as possible. When the stomach deflates, it can often be turned enough to allow the stomach pump in and the rest of the gas and

stomach contents can be drawn off without resorting to surgery. If the spleen has not been damaged, it should return to normal when the pressure recedes. Small animal vets, however, usually opt for immediate surgery and manually returning the stomach to normal. Most dogs will live through this experience if they get to the vet before gross damage has been done. If you suspect your dog is in bloat, every minute is precious. If the dog is in bloat a long time before treatment is started, pressure on the body cavity may be too severe for the heart to withstand. There's a dichotomy of opinion on this. Some feel that there is a heart problem prior to the onset of bloat and the rest feel that heart involvement is a result of bloat. I tend to believe in the latter because if there's one thing that's super strong in an Akita, it is its heart.

The stress of pressure in the stomach too long distended by bloat often causes small blood vessels to rupture and the resultant bleeding can cause death.

Bloat must not be ignored. If your dog looks bulgy, is pacing with anxiety and drooling a bit, he cannot sit or lie down comfortably and is in general distress, **get moving, get to a vet!!**

**INTUSSUSCEPTION** is the telescoping of the intestine upon itself, often the result of a prolonged session of diarrhea in puppies. It can also appear in adults. The only solution is surgery. It's rarely successful on pups, but older dogs have a far better chance. The affected section of the intestine is removed and the ends are sewn together.

**STRANGULATION** occurs when a section of the intestine loops through a tear in the mesentery and hangs out in an area of the abdomen where it doesn't belong. This must be correctly surgically.

What most dog owners do not know is that all four of these bloat situations tend to **repeat**. In short, if it happened once, it will likely happen again, so be prepared.

Akitas are sensitive to **sedation**. Every year several Akitas sedated for hip x-rays or surgery die. Most deaths occur as a result of a combination of drugs. For example, **acepromazine** and **suritol** seem safe enough when given separately, but seem to cause problems when given together. Some of these drugs have side effects the owners seldom see.

For instance, a young female of mine was given a slight overdose of suritol and suffered forty-five minutes of hallucinations when the drug was wearing off. I held her during this time because she was thrashing around and banging her head on the concrete floor. This took place in the vet's office where I'd taken her for a hip x-ray.

As for acepromazine, there is a record of a case of a young female taken to emergency for removal of a foxtail in her nose on a Saturday noon. By the following Monday evening, she still could not stand, swallow or control her urine. This dog did not overreact to the sedation, she was **overdosed**.

When major surgery is necessary, most veterinarians will use gas. The dog is mildly tranquilized so gas equipment can be inserted in the throat. Most hospitals now use monitoring devices controlling the flow of gas and/or oxygen depending on the need. Also, the vital signs are checked constantly, either by an assistant or by machine. Most surgeries go along without incident. Occasionally though, a dog will react adversely to the gas and will show this by an elevated heartbeat. Sometimes over twice normal. Procedures are set in motion at once to bring the dog back to normal heartbeat. If the heart reacts well, the dog will be fine. If the heart is quite slow in reacting, the dog will make it, but he might have an enlarged heart the rest of his life. If the heartbeat can't be controlled, the dog will die. There are many drugs available now to correct this situation and you can bet your veterinarian is well prepared before he ever starts a surgery.

Sometimes dogs are tranquilized with **rompun**. In most cases, there's no problem although brain damage can result if the dog is overdosed. The animal will be very slow in recovering; you can see breathing and swallowing difficulties and also staggering gait if the animal can get up and walk.

Sometimes one person will look at a dog and estimate his weight at 125 pounds. Another, at the same time, may estimate the weight at 85 pounds. This is a great way to overdose a dog if the second guess was correct. It is true that breeds react differently to sedation. In an experiment, I watched a really hyper 30-pound dog that was given 3cc's of sedation. It hardly slowed him down. One half of 1cc of the same sedation would knock out an average-sized adult Akita. Different breeds have different responses.

All this time we're trying to gather data on Akitas and different sedations. There are questionnaires available (through your local Akita Club or by writing Gale Nakashima, 12853 SE 235 Place, Kent, WA 98031), and I hope you will all get your veterinarian to fill one out and return it. The information will be correlated and made available to anyone interested. Our aim is that from this time on, fewer and hopefully no Akitas will die from over sedation or improper combinations of sedations.

Judging from letters and phone calls received in the last few years, infertility is on the rise in several strains of our breed. This is a complex problem and cannot be covered in a few paragraphs but here are just a few ideas.

Most of the animals exhibiting infertility problems are those which have been shown a great deal. Two possibilities come to mind. One, the dog owner must realize that dog show circuits are very stressful on a dog. Under stress, the immune system may not function as well as usual and the animal may become more susceptible to low grade infection. If the circuits are long and showing pretty continuous, the infection could become chronic. The dog may only act tired, not too unusual on a long trip. The dog's system may be keeping the bacteria at a low level but this sort of situation can interfere with sperm production as well as form and motility of the sperm.

An example from a veterinarian specializing in reproductive problems: A small breed male had been bred to five bitches, none of which produced puppies. Since he was about the top dog of his breed in the U.S., the owner was really worried.

Tests showed the dog has a low-grade infection, very low sperm count and those sperm were not well formed and had very low motility. After six weeks of treatment, the tests showed no infection, good sperm count and the form and motility were again normal. The first bitch he bred produced five pups. Almost constant showing had contributed to making him a top dog of his breed. He's still shown but now the owner gives him ample time to rest and recuperate, therefore keeping him in top breeding condition as well as top show condition.

For owners of females, during heat the cervix is open and the vulva enlarged. A perfect setup for bacteria. There is no better incubator for bacteria than the bitch's uterus. If she has been bred, bacteria can grow right along with the fetuses. Some of the bacteria that thrive in these circumstances cannot be disposed of easily and may proliferate on successive heats. Pseudomonas, for example, can be responsible for dead pups in a litter and death will ensue in a few days with pups born alive unless the problem is recognized and treatment is started.

No doubt there are Akitas who have inherited a lack of interest in breeding. Some feel this is related to the number of cryptorchidians within the strain, only I doubt this theory. However, as more and more cryptorchids appear in our breed, we will be able to test this. I think some males may be just below par for producing sperm and some females may not produce enough eggs in their lifetime.

I think the majority of infertility problems are related to stress, long show circuits, depressed living conditions, poor nutrition, etc. The decision the dog owner must make is this: Is showing of greater importance to the breed than producing? You must be the judge.

**EPILEPSY** is also a problem in the Akita. It's a symptom of a serious dysfunction within the brain, an abnormal electrical discharge that can affect the brain, the brain stem, or the spinal cord. Idiopathic or true epilepsy is considered an inherited problem in several breeds: Shepherds, Setters, Poodles, Saint Bernards, German Shorthair

Pointers, as a few. This form of epilepsy cannot be cured but it can be controlled with medication. The dog can live a fairly normal life but, obviously, should not be put to the stress of showing and certainly should not be bred.

Acquired or false epilepsy is a temporary situation that can be caused by toxic materials such as lead, cyanide, phosphates, chlorinated hydrocarbons, distemper, parasites, low blood sugar, electrolyte imbalance, hypothermia, brain tumors, or a buildup of bone deposits in the inner surface of the skull in elderly dogs.

An epilepsy attack is very frightening for both the dog and the owner. Fainting and convulsions occur. Seizures may last for several minutes. Soon the dog recovers and acts quite normal. Seizures will not kill the dog unless they come at too frequent intervals. This is a difficult problem for veterinarians to diagnose without a good description of what actually happened and the owner should be as complete as possible in describing the occurrence since the veterinarian must rely a lot on the owners' observations. If epilepsy is suspected, tests can be run and the animal can be treated. In the case of acquired epilepsy, usually once the source of the trouble is established and dealt with, the dog can respond and return to normal. It all depends on how much damage was done.

Now for some more esoteric diseases that are starting to come to light in our breed -- as it we didn't have enough problems.

**PROGRESSIVE RETINAL ATROPHY** has been found in Akitas. This is a situation that is not reversible so once encountered, there is no doubt the dog will eventually become blind. The disease is inherited. It varies from dog to dog. In some, progress is rapid and blindness can ensue in a few weeks time. In others, it may take several months before blindness occurs.

There are other problems that can involve the retina such as retinal damage due to **distemper**, so if you suspect your dog may have PRA, consult an ophthalmologist as soon as possible. If the diagnosis is PRA, then you must decide how to handle the problem. Blind dogs can lead a pretty useful life, but the owner must be willing to accept the responsibility for the extra care the dog requires. You should also notify the dog's breeder so that he or she will know that one or both of the parents of your dog is carrying PRA. Some experts in the field of eye disorders feel that PRA is an immune response problem.

**MICROTHALMIA** or "small eye" syndrome seems to be one of our more recent problems. The only time I've seen this was several years ago. I'd been invited to look at a litter of seven-week old pups, the product of a father/daughter mating. There were seven pups, part of which had very small eyes. In this case, the small eyes were secondary to the main problem, which was **hydrocephalus**.

I wonder how many small eye problems are in animals related to this litter. Some experts feel that small eyes may be associated with detached retinas and congenital cataracts. Also, geneticists feel that there is a relationship between hydrocephalus, eye abnormalities, nervous seizures and cryptorchidism, and therefore relate these problems to inherited hormonal defects.

**SKIN PROBLEMS** in the Akita may be secondary to other diseases. For example, the loss of pigmentation and resultant redness of the eye rim, lips and nose of the dog suffering from lymphosarcoma, or the loss of hair, redness of skin and moist skin of the animal with **lupus erthematosus**. When a skin disorder is persistent and it's obviously not our old complaint of flea allergy, the dog owner has to accept the possibility that something more serious may be happening to his dog.

In a recent publication limited to skin disorders, I was surprised to see Akitas used to illustrate **phemphigus follicueus** and **Voight Kayanaga Harada (VKH)** syndrome. These two problems look a lot alike except for eye involvement and may often be confused with each other or with lupus. Facial skin, nerves, tongue, lips and sometimes even foot pads can be affected. There are skin eruptions followed by crusting over with later loss of

pigmentation of the skin. In advanced cases, there may also be swelling of the legs and feet, very high temperatures, lethargy and loss of appetite. In **VKH** syndrome, uveitis is also present.

**UVEITIS** is the inflammation of the iris in the eye and sometimes the ciliary part of the eye; in short, the pigmented part of the eye. One authority on the subject of eyes divides the iris problem into two classes: acute recent sudden onset is called iritis or iridocyclitis. The chronic or longtime problem is called uveitis. Iritis can be the result of systemic disorders such as an infected prostate, inflamed sinus, pyometra, distemper, hepatitis, infected tonsils, or skin disorders like phemphigus. Although it is believed that systemic problems can trigger a uveitis situation, the feeling is that something else more serious has to be involved to create such a massive reaction. This is where the idea of autoimmunity comes in.

Example: The dog may have an autoimmune problem that has never become apparent because the body and immune system have remained in some sort of balance. When a systemic invasion triggers a reaction, the balance may be lost forever. In the newborn and elderly, the immune system is weakest. There are animals that have very little immune systems all their lives and are consequently wide open to any virus or bacteria that happens along. This is **immune deficient**. The opposite, when the body has such an over-reactive immune system that the system attacks the body's own cells, is called **autoimmune**. Lupus, phemphigus and VKH syndrome are all immune related diseases.

The eye is affected because, like any other part of the body, it depends on a supply of blood, particularly the retina, to keep it fed and healthy. If the body is fighting a battle with a viral or bacterial infection, it will be reflected in the eye. If the

blood supply is contaminated, the eye will be affected just like any other part of the body with this one big difference -- the eye is like a window, and changes within the eye can be observed when the dog is examined. This is often important, too, in making a diagnosis of an illness.

A very small percentage of our breed is involved in problems like phemphigus, lupus, PRA, VKH syndrome, etc. It's really nothing to get worried about except for one thing. These are all thought to be immune related diseases, so the people breeding Akitas should include a good immune system as part of their breeding plans. An immune system, good or bad, is inherited.

As each generation of Akitas is formed, it becomes more and more important for the breeder to know the background of his stock, at least through the grandparents and including as many siblings as possible. If you proceed with the breeding knowing only that both dogs are winners, you will have only yourself to blame. Many a winner carries a gene package only a fool would breed. The fact that an animal has become a champion has no relation to how that animal may rate as a producer and I speak of **quality** not quantity.

Novices hold the future of the breed in their hands. If the people they have bought or are buying from cannot give detailed information about their dogs, my advice is to look elsewhere or the first litter might be full of surprises. If you go into breeding knowing full well what the circumstances are, you're not likely to be surprised. If you go into a breeding knowing nothing of the ancestors or their problems, you can always write a book about your bad experiences.

We must all believe the Akita is a wonderful animal or we would not be exchanging ideas and trying to learn. We observe and recognize the problems that have been brought to light in the last ten years and we use this information as a learning process. Keep the Akita a strong and vital animal. Don't allow this magnificent beast to erode into mediocrity.

**Please read the attached articles (provided courtesy of MOONGAZER INC.):**

The following advice columns are provided to the adoptive families of Midwest Akita Rescue Society courtesy of Moongazer Incorporated. **These informative articles are intended to assist new owners in the areas of crate training, potty training, puppy mouthiness, and walking on a leash.** For further information, we recommend reading the books mentioned in the articles below. If you would like to purchase books written by Patricia McConnell, Ph.D., or any other books, supplies, products, or toys MARS recommends, these items can be found on the Moongazer website ([www.moongazer.com](http://www.moongazer.com)) or, if you do not have internet access, call Moongazer direct at 217-469-9591.

*The information contained in "Dear Marge" is provided courtesy of Moongazer Incorporated. Marge is actually an Akita and the answers are provided by the staffed behaviorist at Moongazer.com.*

## **CRATE TRAINING**

*Dear Marge,*

*Ever since I have gotten my new puppy "Bullet," I have received a lot of advice concerning crate training. Any suggestions to help me wade through the "helpful" advice?*

*Megan - Fargo, ND*

**Dear Megan,**

Crates are truly one of the best ways to potty train your puppy. Buy a cage large enough so that the puppy can stand up and turn around comfortably in the crate. Many of the newer crates on the market are adjustable so that as your puppy grows, you are able to adjust the size of the crate. If you have attained a puppy that will grow to be a large dog and want to purchase only one crate, you may use a partition to make the crate smaller until the puppy gets larger. Do not put any towels or blankets in the crate at first. Later on, once the puppy is semi-trained you may put a blanket or bed in the crate. Always be careful of your choices of bedding in the crate, remember, dogs chew, and beds can quickly become a lodged foreign object if ingested. Keep the puppy in the crate when you are not at home, at night, or when you cannot attend to the puppy. Most dogs will not go to the bathroom where they sleep, therefore you are teaching them bladder control. Also, young dogs will usually chew and get into things when you are not there. With a crate you alleviate this problem and also keep your house in order. Remember dogs are den animals and enjoy having a place of their own. It is also very important to give your puppy indestructible objects they can teeth on while you are away and they are in their crate. One such object that we recommend at Moongazer is the Kong. It is a hollow behavior toy that you can stuff with dog cookies, peanut butter, and/or melted cheese. A good rule of thumb in stuffing Kongs is everything in moderation; small puppies can have sensitive gastrointestinal tracts. In addition, the Kong is a time release "baby sitter," per say, for your puppy and also makes your leaving a good thing, not an anxious event. All sizes are available from Moongazer.

Many times, owners will encounter problems with the puppy pottying in the crate. This may occur for many reasons. The number one reason is that the puppy may not consider the crate his den, therefore you may opt to switch venues for a "den." Clients have found success in using a small room (bathroom, laundry room, partitioned off kitchen) with a baby gate to keep the pet confined. This way, the pet is able to see out and not feel trapped. Feeling trapped lends itself towards the pet becoming anxious and possibly destructive. There are numerous baby gates on the market, pick one that is made of hard plastic and relatively indestructible. If your puppy tries to jump the gate, just double stack the baby gates one on top of the other to keep the puppy in. And always remember your Kong. Never use a crate as a form of punishment and they will always consider it a safe haven.

**-Marge**

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## **POTTY TRAINING**

*Dear Marge,*

*My 7-month-old puppy "Gatsby" still seems to be confused by the whole potty training thing. Sometimes he will go for a long time with no accidents in the house, and at other times, his pottying in the house is more frequent. Help!*

*Norman-Seattle, WA*

**Dear Norman,**

Potty training is one of the most difficult tasks to teach a puppy. We suggest that you do not paper train, this will only teach your dog that it is okay to go to the bathroom in the house. Instead, try to take the puppy out every half-hour. Set a timer for yourself so that you do not forget. Also take the puppy out on lead to a specific potty spot after every meal, when he plays,

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and whenever he drinks water. When you take your dog out, use a command like "go potty," "park," or "hurry up," and when he does go to the bathroom, praise him and give him a treat the instant the dog finishes pottying. You may also use some of his dog food rations for training.

If your puppy just sniffs around and does not go to the bathroom, just give lots of praise but no treats or food. If you know the puppy has to go potty, and he is not going, bring him back in the house and watch him like a hawk for 15 minutes, or put him back in his crate. Once 15 minutes has passed, take him to the potty area again. Repeat this method until you have success. This will teach bladder control and potty training at the same time.

If the puppy potties on the floor/carpet, use an enzymatic cleaner like Outright Stain/Odor Remover or Nature's Miracle. Follow the manufacturer's guidelines for the product. It is also safe to use these products in carpet cleaners (extraction machines). If you catch the puppy pottying in the house, just go to the puppy and say "outside, outside," take the puppy to the potty area and give your potty command, then praise and treat. Scolding a dog will only teach the puppy not to potty when you are there, and that will defeat the purpose of putting it on command. Rubbing the puppy's nose in the mess does not give the puppy any information about what you wanted the puppy to do, and is therefore ineffective. A mess in the house is just a missed opportunity for training, and next time you will know to watch the puppy much closer. Many of these guidelines are discussed in a book written by Dr. Patricia McConnell Ph.D. The Puppy Primer, is an excellent guidebook for owners trying to get through puppyhood and can be purchased from Moongazer.

**-Marge**

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## **PUPPY MOUTHINESS**

*Dear Marge,*

*I still seem to be getting chewed to bits by my young dog when he gets very excited. I know it's all sheer puppyhood but I'm running out of Band-Aids!*

*Missy-Chicago, IL*

**Dear Missy,**

Most puppies tend to be quite mouthy on their owner's hands and/or skin. It is very important when working with this issue that you teach an alternative behavior to mouthing on you. You must first teach the puppy to have a soft mouth anytime he touches you. You will need either peanut butter or cheese whiz. Sit on the floor with the puppy and smear some peanut butter or cheese whiz on the palm of your hand. Present your palm to the puppy and as he licks the peanut butter or cheese whiz off your hand say "Kisses, Nice Kisses" simultaneously and repeat as long as the puppy is licking. This method works because the puppy is only able to lick off the peanut butter nicely; he cannot physically bite it off.

Now after you have taught this behavior for a few days in numerous short sessions (little puppies have very short attention spans), and you are playing with your puppy, and he mouths your skin, first yelp and say "Ouch" or "Owww," then end the play/contact for a few seconds, and finally present your palm and say "Kisses, Nice Kisses." The puppy will then lick your palm. This method thus teaches the puppy not only does he not get you or play when he mouths, but he must demonstrate a soft mouth by licking before play will resume.

We do not recommend ever grabbing your dog's muzzle and shouting "No" because not only does this not teach a soft mouth, but you can harm the pet's mouth, cheeks, tongue, and/or gums. Also commands are only valuable if they have meaning, and the word "No" can have numerous meanings. We suggest teaching your puppy "Off" at puppy school or beginning obedience class because it is a less common word and your trainers at class will teach you how this command means, "remove yourself from whatever it is on." "Off" is a useful, multifaceted command for puppies and dogs. Proper puppy behavior is also discussed in two books written by Patricia McConnell, Ph.D. In The Puppy Primer and Beginning Family Dog Training, Dr. McConnell discusses proper puppy and dog behavior and how to redirect undesirable behaviors. A must for all dog owners and can be purchased from Moongazer.

**-Marge**

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## **WALKING ON A LEASH**



Dear Marge,

My dog, "Doolittle" and I are having a problem with walking. I really do not want to use a choke collar because of the tracheal damage my vet discussed with me and a using a pinch collar on "Doolittle" seems cruel. What options are left?

Max-San Diego, CA

**Dear Max,**

The Gentle Leader headcollar is an excellent way to be able to quickly train you dog to walk on a leash with out pulling. The number of behaviorists, trainers, and veterinarians that stand behind the Gentle Leader are too numerous to count. The idea behind the headcollar is that a dog can pull up to three times his body weight into his collar area, but only a small percentage into his head. I live with a 100 lb. Akita named "Charlie" who was able to break choke chains and drag multiple people around while wearing a pinch collar. Now with a Gentle Leader, he walks quietly and obediently with us down the street. Just like with a horse, most people do not try to control the animal with a collar, but with a headcollar of some type. Control the head, control the animal. The Gentle Leader does not hurt your pet in any way, unlike traditional methods that bank on the fact that the collar causes pain in order to work.

The Gentle Leader was designed with respect to the natural principles that govern dog behavior. As a result, it dramatically will change how your dog walks with you quickly. Some dogs will initially "buck" like a colt, but lots of redirecting with praise, treats and getting the dog moving will desensitize you pet to the Gentle Leader. It is truly a remarkable product that we sell here at Moongazer. We also highly recommend purchasing the Gentle Leader Training Booklet in addition to the headcollar in order to walk you through the ins and outs of this training tool.

-Marge

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