

3 Things Never to Do When Picking Up Your Dog

Do this wrong, and your pet might not bite or bark. But that doesn't mean you're not causing harm. Believe me, this is something countless well-meaning pet parents get wrong. And it can mean the difference between comfort and trust, or injury and great harm.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- It's important to pick up your dog the right way, no matter her size, and many well-meaning dog parents get it all wrong
- Dogs should never be lifted by the legs, the scruff of the neck, the collar or the tail
- If your dog is quite small, teaching him a verbal "lift-off" cue will help him prepare to be picked up
- Ideally, large dogs should be lifted by a two-person team
- When lifting a dog with a back problem, it's important to keep the back completely level at all times

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There are times in every dog parent's life, even owners of large and giant breeds, when it becomes necessary to physically lift their canine companion in their arms.

It could be a very ordinary occasion like a trip in the car, or it might be an extraordinary circumstance in which you have to pick up your pet to prevent a fight or traumatic injury of some kind.

Picking up a small- or even medium-sized dog wouldn't seem to present a big challenge, but you'd be surprised how many well-meaning people get it mostly wrong. And lifting a large or heavy dog is an even bigger project, especially if you're not very large or strong yourself.

Before I explain how to pick up your dog the right way, though, let's get the "don'ts" out of the way.

3 Don'ts When Picking Up Your Dog

1. **Don't involve your dog's legs** — Your dog's front and back limbs aren't intended as suspension devices, nor can they be expected to support the full weight of his body if, heaven forbid, he's lifted by them.

Children who don't know better tend to lift by the front legs, whereas adults are more apt to put their hands under the armpits and lift as they would a child. Picking up a dog in this manner strains the muscles in the front legs and spine, which can result in torn ligaments and even a dislocated shoulder or elbow.

There's also the risk of dropping the dog, and in older dogs with arthritis or degenerative joint disease, this type of lifting can be extremely painful.

2. **Don't "scruff" your dog** — Yes, mother dogs carry their pups by the scruff of the neck in their first few weeks of life. However, this happens only for a very brief period and doesn't continue as the puppies get larger.

"Scruffing" is an unnatural, uncomfortable and even painful way for larger puppies and certainly adult dogs to be lifted or carried.

3. **Don't hold his collar or tail when picking your dog up** — It should go without saying that pulling on a dog's collar, especially while lifting him, can cut off his air supply and cause him to choke. It's also a good way to do serious permanent damage to the very delicate organs located in his neck, including the throat, larynx and trachea.

Just as your dog's collar should never serve as a "handle" to lift him, neither should his tail. Damage caused by pulling your dog's tail can affect the nerves and muscles that move the tail as well as those that control elimination.

Significant injury can cause the tail to hang limply, no longer move or even affect your dog's ability to urinate or defecate on his own.

If you regularly pick up your dog incorrectly but she never complains, it doesn't mean she's okay with it or that she, for some reason, can be picked differently from other dogs. Many pets will endure a great deal of discomfort and even pain without yelping or crying.

Chances are your dog is sending you a signal, but you don't recognize it as a sign of distress, for example, yawning, lip licking, looking away or struggling to get free. These are all signs of a dog who is at a minimum feeling anxious, and may even be in pain.

How to Lift a Small- or Medium-Size Dog the Right Way

If your dog is less than 25 pounds, slide your dominant arm under his chest between his front legs, and tuck his back end between your arm and body as you lift him.

If your dog is in the 25- to 40-pound range, put your dominant arm behind his back legs, your other arm around his chest in front of the back legs and hold him against your chest as you lift.

This method will help him feel secure and comfortable as you pick him up, and will also insure you don't accidentally drop him.

If you put yourself in his place, imagining at any moment you will lose the ground beneath your feet, you can see why it could be a stressful event. That's why it's good to train your dog with a verbal cue that signals you're about to pick him up. Just make it a simple one-word signal.

To train your pet to the cue, put your hands on him, say the word and apply just a bit of pressure without actually lifting him. This gives him time to understand he's about to be lifted.

When you know he's aware you're about to pick him up, go ahead and do so. Consistent use of the cue will help him learn to prepare for "lift off."

How to Lift a Large Dog

The best way to lift a large dog is with two people, so depending on your size and health, I recommend getting help if your pet is over 40 pounds.

One of you should lift from under your dog's chest while the other lifts the abdomen and back end. Dogs tend to struggle more and risk being dropped when they aren't properly supported while being picked up.

Lifting a Pregnant or Injured Dog

If your dog is expecting, you should avoid the belly area if you need to pick her up. Put your hands under her chest and back end instead. If your dog has an injured or sore back, get help if necessary so that you can keep her back completely level as she's lifted.

One of my favorite techniques is the "dog taco wrap." While your dog is lying on her dog bed, you simply fold the edges up and pick her up in the bed. You can also use a beach towel for this purpose with smaller dogs. It's best to pick up your dog when he's relaxed, because it's much easier to lose your grip on a bouncy or wiggly dog. If your dog won't sit still and absolutely must be picked up, as a last resort, you can use a comforter or blanket to scoop him into your arms.

For dogs who are frightened or in pain, it's important to avoid the mouth area to prevent a bite. You might want to consider a homemade muzzle (as long as she's breathing normal), as well as sliding her onto a board for support.

Sources and References

[VetStreet December 15, 2016](#)
