

# How Often Should Your Dog Get a Potty Break?

What's the upper limit for leaving your dog home alone? And more importantly, how often should they get a potty break for their well-being and comfort? It's a far shorter time than you might think, for very important reasons.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Many pet parents today deal with worry and nagging guilt when their dogs are home alone
- Dogs need to interact with their pet parents several times a day to benefit their mood
- There's no one-size-fits-all timeframe, but 10 to 12 hours is considered too long to leave a dog alone; they also shouldn't go without a potty break every four to six hours
- When you do leave your dog home alone, it's important to dog-proof his environment, leave things for him to do and provide him with his own crate to rest in if he feels like it
- There are many alternatives to leaving your dog home alone all day while you work, such as coming home for lunch, finding a pet-sitter or dog walker or enrolling in doggy daycare

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Many pet parents worry about their home-alone dogs. They worry that their pets might get into something hazardous to their health, or choke on a toy or a treat, or destroy something valuable. They worry the dog might bark or cry during their absence or feel abandoned and lonely.

Not that long ago, many dog owners didn't give a second thought to leaving a dog home alone for a day or two with a doggy door, a supply of kibble and plenty of water to drink. It just didn't occur to pet owners to wonder how their dog felt being left alone, whether indoors or outside.

But the more we embrace our animal companions as furkids and cherished members of the family, the more concerned we become for their physical safety and emotional state when we aren't with them.

## How Long Is Too Long to Leave Your Dog Home Alone?

These days, it's quite common for dogs to be left home for eight or 10 or 12 hours, up to five or six days a week. And depending on the pet parent's lifestyle, he or she may arrive home after 10 hours, give the dog a quick walk and dinner, and then go back out for the evening.

*“Here's the thing,” writes certified professional dog trainer Nancy Tucker in Whole Dog Journal, “and I won't pull any punches: 10 to 12 hours is too long for a dog to be alone in a single stretch.”<sup>1</sup>*

Of course, as she goes on to say, there are plenty of people who argue they've always left their dogs, with no issues.

*“What this means,” says Tucker, “is that the dogs who appear to be fine have simply learned to cope with something that is entirely out of their control. Being left alone for long stretches of time is not a likely choice that they would make if it was up to them. They’ve adapted to our routines, but it’s far from ideal for them.”*

Dogs are social creatures who need opportunities to interact with people several times a day, and many benefit from interaction with other dogs as well. In addition, while there's no one-size-fits-all rule for the maximum amount of time a dog can be left alone in a single stretch, obviously, potty breaks are a necessity.

Like humans, most healthy adult dogs need a minimum of three to five opportunities each day to relieve themselves. Older dogs and those with certain conditions such as urinary incontinence need to go out more often. Generally speaking, dogs shouldn't go without a potty break for more than four or six hours. (Please note I'm only discussing adult dogs here, since it goes without saying that puppies — for a multitude of reasons — shouldn't be left alone.)

It's important to realize that while your dog may be able to “hold it” for longer periods, she really shouldn't have to. Beyond four hours without a potty break, and certainly beyond six, most home-alone dogs become uncomfortable.

## Tips for Keeping Your Dog Safe at Home Alone

- **Dog-proof your environment** — Having a dog is a great incentive to keep a neat, tidy home — especially if you'll be leaving him alone at times. The old saying “a place for everything, and everything in its place” is actually an excellent rule to follow in keeping your home dog-friendly and safe.

If you see something on the floor that doesn't belong there, pick it up right away. Dirty clothes go in the hamper; clean clothes go in the drawer. Shoes go in the closet. Purses, backpacks and briefcases are placed beyond the reach of your dog. Keeping things neat and orderly prevents last-minute dashing about. It also gives you peace of mind while you're away that your dog isn't finding dangerous temptations to investigate all over the house.

One of the more common issues with dogs left home alone is their propensity to get into the trash or **counter surf**. That's why your regular leaving-the-house routine should include securing all trash receptacles and ensuring there's nothing on your kitchen counters to tempt your dog.

You can either buy trash cans with latching lids or place them out of reach. It's also a good idea to purchase covers for your electrical wires or block your dog's access to them in some other way. Chewing electrical wires when no one is looking is a favorite pastime of some dogs.

If your pet tends to demolish stuffed toys, beds or mats, put those away as well to prevent him from swallowing the stuffing while you're gone. If he's able to open cabinet doors or drawers, you'll want to secure them with latches or child-proof cabinet locks. And be sure to put all toxic chemicals well out of your dog's reach, including household cleaning products.

- **Give her things to do while you're away** — Once you're confident there's nothing laying around your house your dog shouldn't have, it's time to think about things she can have to entertain herself during your absence.

Food puzzles and treat-release toys can provide her with mental stimulation and a handful of tiny, tasty snacks while you're gone. There are even chewing-type toys that can be filled with moist food. As she gnaws away, the food is gradually released. Try filling one and freezing it to really challenge her.

There are also dozens of remote-controlled, interactive treat dispensing toys and cameras on the market that allow you to check in on your pet, dispense treats throughout the day and even talk to them, all through your cell phone and the specialty device. Also consider playing some **soothing music** designed for dogs while you're gone, and open the curtain or drapes to allow in natural light to provide your pet with something to look at while you're away.

- **Crate train your dog** — The purpose of crate training isn't to confine your dog while you're out, but simply to provide him with access to it so he can go in it if he chooses to rest or play or feel secure.

*“A crate is no place for a dog to spend an entire day,” says Tucker. “If necessary, confinement in a small space should be temporary and for short periods of time, say, a couple of hours, tops.”*

Crate training is important, but it's not good to confine a dog for long periods. But providing your dog with his very own cozy space and making it a pleasant place to be has a number of advantages for both of you. A crate can help not only with housetraining, but also car or plane travel, and overnight stays with friends, family or at a pet-friendly hotel.

## Alternatives to Leaving Your Dog Home Alone While You Work

If you work full-time outside the home, finding alternatives to leaving your dog home alone will depend on your budget, your freedom to manage your time during the day, your family and social support system, and other factors.

- **See if your employer will let you work from home some or all of the time** — Depending on the kind of work you do, you may be able to do it effectively from home. If so, ask your boss if he or she would be amenable. You'll never know if you don't ask!
- **See if you can bring your dog to work with you** — Again, this depends on the kind of work you do, who you work for and whether your employer might be open to having dogs in the workplace. (Obviously, if you work for yourself, you can give yourself permission!)
- **Come home for lunch** — If your workplace is close enough, consider returning home at lunchtime to walk your dog and spend some time interacting with him.
- **Ask a stay-at-home family member or friend to dog-sit** — Is there anyone in your family or circle of friends who likes dogs (including yours), is home a lot and would be willing to care for your dog a few days a week? Perhaps you can offer the person something they need in return, such as pet- or babysitting services.
- **Arrange for someone to stop by and walk your dog** — This could be a friendly neighbor or anyone you know and trust who likes dogs and would be willing to give yours some attention a few days a week. You can also offer to pay a trustworthy neighborhood child or teen to do it.
- **Hire a professional dog walker** — There are a lot of dog walking services around these days, depending on where you live. If you decide to go this route, be sure to do your homework and find a reputable one.
- **Enroll your pet in doggy daycare** — If your dog enjoys interacting and playing with other dogs, a doggy daycare once or twice a week can be a godsend. “Look for clean, well-designed locations with qualified staff who will manage interactions between the dogs and provide necessary rest periods,” advises Tucker.

# Sources and References

[PetMD](#)

<sup>1</sup> [Whole Dog Journal, April 18, 2018](#)

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