Many adult dogs adopted from animal shelters were housetrained in their previous homes. While at the shelter, however, their housebreaking habits may have weakened. Additionally, scents and odors from other pets in the new home may stimulate some initial urine marking. Remember that you and your new dog need some time to learn each other’s signals and routines. Even if they were housetrained in their previous home, if you don’t recognize their bathroom signal, you might miss their request to go out, causing him to eliminate indoors.

For the first few weeks after you bring them home, you should assume your new dog isn’t housetrained and start from scratch. If they were housetrained in their previous home, the re-training process should progress quickly. The process will be much smoother if you take steps to prevent accidents and remind them where they are supposed to eliminate.

Establish a routine

* Take your dog out at the same times every day. For example, first thing in the morning when they wake up, when you arrive home from work, and before you go to bed.
* Praise your dog lavishly every time they eliminate outdoors. You can even give them a treat! You must praise them and give them a treat immediately after they’re finished and not wait until after they come back inside the house. This step is vital, because rewarding your dog for eliminating outdoors is the only way he’ll know that’s what you want them to do.
* Choose a location not too far from the door to be the bathroom spot. Always take your dog, on leash, directly to the bathroom spot. Take them for a walk or play with them only after they’ve eliminated.
* If you clean up an accident in the house, leave the soiled rags or paper towels in the bathroom spot. The smell will help your dog recognize the area as the place where he’s supposed to eliminate.
* While your dog is eliminating, use a word or phrase like “go potty,” for example, that you can eventually use before they eliminate to remind him of what he’s supposed to be doing.
* Feeding your dog on a set schedule, once or twice a day, will help make their elimination more regular.

Supervise, Supervise, Supervise

Don’t give your dog an opportunity to soil in the house. They should be watched at all times when indoors. You can tether them to you with a six-foot leash, or use baby gates, to keep them in the room where you are. Watch for signs that they need to eliminate, like sniffing around or circling. If you see these signs, immediately take them outside, on a leash, to their bathroom spot. If they eliminate, praise them lavishly and reward him with a treat.

Confinement

When you’re unable to watch your dog at all times, they should be confined to an area small enough that they won’t want to eliminate there. It should be just big enough for them to comfortably stand, lie down and turn around in. This could be a portion of a bathroom or laundry room blocked off with boxes or baby gates. Or you may want to crate train your dog and use the crate to confine him. If they have spent several hours in confinement, when you let them out, take them directly to their bathroom spot and praise them when they eliminate.

Oops!

Most dogs, at some point, will have an accident in the house. You should expect this, as it’s a normal part of your dog’s adjustment to their new home. If you catch your dog in the act of eliminating in the house, do something to interrupt them like making a startling noise (don’t scare him). Immediately take them to their bathroom spot, praise them, and give them a treat if they finish eliminating there. Don’t punish your dog for eliminating in the house. If you find a soiled area, it’s too late to administer a correction. Do nothing but clean it up. Rubbing your dog’s nose in it, taking them to the spot and scolding him, or any other type of punishment, will only make them afraid of you or afraid to eliminate in your presence. Animals don’t understand punishment after the fact, even if it’s only seconds later. Punishment will do more harm than good. Cleaning the soiled area is very important because dogs are highly motivated to continue soiling in areas that smell like urine or feces.

Other types of house soiling problems

If you’ve consistently followed the housetraining procedures and your dog continues to eliminate in the house, there may be another reason for his behavior.

* **Medical problems:** House soiling can often be caused by physical problems such as a urinary tract infection or a parasite infection. Check with your veterinarian to rule out any possibility of disease or illness.
* **Submissive/excitement urination:** Some dogs, especially young or old ones, temporarily lose control of their bladders when they become excited or feel threatened. This usually occurs during greetings, intense play or when they’re about to be punished.
* **Territorial urine marking:** Dogs sometimes deposit urine or feces, usually in small amounts, to scent-mark their territory. Both male and female dogs do this, and it most often occurs when they believe their territory has been invaded.
* **Separation anxiety:** Dogs who become anxious when they’re left alone may house soil as a result. Usually, there are other symptoms, such as destructive behavior or vocalization (see information on separation anxiety).
* **Fears or phobias:** When animals become frightened, they may lose control of their bladder and/or bowels. If your dog is afraid of loud noises, such as thunderstorms or fireworks, he may house soil when he’s exposed to these sounds.