

Potty Watch: How Often Should Your Dog Go?

Uncover the surprising truths about your dog's bladder health and the risks of waiting too long. This in-depth exploration offers vital insights for dog parents on understanding their furry friend's needs and preventing potential health issues.

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

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Most pet parents have had occasion to wonder just how long their dog can go without peeing — the question often arises as they're rushing home to give their furry family member a long overdue walk outside
- To answer the question, you can do some urine production/bladder capacity math to figure out how long is too long for a dog your dog's size, or you can go with the standard guideline: a normal, healthy dog needs to relieve him or herself every 4 to 6 hours
- Another concern many pet parents face is whether their dog is spending too much time alone at home; the truth is that 10 to 12 hours is too long, especially since dogs left alone for several hours a day can suffer from isolation distress
- There are many options that will limit your dog's time at home alone, including doggy daycare, a dog walker or sitter, and/or working from home or taking your dog to work with you

If you're a dog parent, chances are you've rushed home at least once after leaving your furry family member alone and un-walked for too long. It can happen to even the most conscientious owner, who then feels terribly guilty watching the poor dog take a forever pee when he's finally able to go. Adding to the guilt is knowing he's such a good boy he would never relieve himself in your house.

Of course, there are also times when a pet parent has been very diligent about walking their canine companion every few hours, but for some reason, on walk No. 2 or No. 3 of the day, there's a forever pee. This leads to the obvious question, "How long can my dog go without peeing?"

The 411 on Canine Pee Production

According to veterinarian Dr. Jennifer Bailey, writing for Whole Dog Journal, healthy dogs produce about 2 to 4 milliliters (mL) of urine per pound of body weight per hour. So, a 10-pound dog makes about 20 to 40 mL of urine each hour, or 480 to 960 mL (16 to 32 ounces) per day.¹

"The average dog's bladder will begin to expand once it contains about 16 to 22 mL of urine per pound of body weight," says Bailey. "When a bladder starts to expand, neurons in the bladder will send signals to the brain that say, 'Hey! I'm starting to fill up with urine! Tell the dog to go pee so I can be empty again.'"

Ten-pound Fido will start to feel the urge to pee when his bladder contains between 160 and 220 mL of urine. If his body produces urine at the maximum rate of 40 mL per hour, he may want to pee in as few as four hours (when his bladder contains 160 mL of urine). If, in contrast, he produces urine at the lowest average rate (2 mL per pound of body weight per hour), and he can withstand the urge to pee until his bladder is as full as possible (220 mL), he could go up to 11 hours before having the urge to urinate.

It's important to note that every dog's ability to withstand the discomfort of a full bladder is different!"

Bailey explains that an average dog's bladder can hold about 44 mL of urine per pound of body weight, which would be about 440 mL of urine for our 10-pounder. It would take between 11 and 22 hours for him to make that much urine.

"At this volume, Fido's bladder would be stretched to the point of being painful. If he can't go outside or use a pee pad, he is likely going to find a convenient place to relieve himself — like the living room rug! (And who would blame him?)," writes Bailey.

Dogs Need To Be Able to Relieve Themselves Every 4 to 6 Hours

Most healthy adult dogs need 3 to 5 opportunities each day to pee and/or poop. 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 4 or 6 hours. (Please note I'm only discussing adult dogs here.)

It's important to realize that while your dog can "hold it" for longer periods, she really shouldn't have to. Imagine how you would feel if you were dependent on someone else to give you permission to go to the bathroom, and often that person made you wait long past the point at which you became uncomfortable "holding it." Beyond four hours without a potty break, and certainly beyond six, most dogs become uncomfortable.

How Much Time Does Your Dog Spend Home Alone?

Full-time trainer and behavior consultant Nancy Tucker, CDBC, CPDT-KA, also writing for Whole Dog Journal, asks another important question many pet parents wrestle with:

"How much isolation a dog can and should endure are two different things. How much time does your dog spend home alone? Is your dog experiencing isolation distress?"²

I realize this is a sensitive issue for many dog parents, and for good reason. Many people who **adopt a dog from a shelter** or rescue work outside the home, go to school, or are involved in other activities that take them away from their houses for several hours, several days a week.

By necessity, they must leave their dogs behind, but since they've given an abandoned or unwanted dog a loving home, they feel it's unfair to criticize them for leaving their pet alone for long stretches.

I understand where these pet parents are coming from, and I agree that it's certainly better for a dog to be in a forever home than a shelter. I don't pretend to have all the answers to the problem of dogs left alone all day, but as a wellness veterinarian and animal advocate, I can't in good conscience just ignore the issue for fear of making someone angry or

hurting their feelings.

My goal is simply to help dog guardians see the home-alone situation through their pet's eyes, and hopefully offer some suggestions you may not have thought of as alternatives to leaving your canine family member at home alone all day. As Tucker points out:

"A lot of dogs might spend most of their waking hours home alone and seem to do just fine, but is it okay? Are they really fine? I sometimes wonder if, instead, this is something we say to ourselves to assuage our guilt, or to avoid taking a harder look at a cultural norm that could use an update."

Isolation Distress vs. Separation Anxiety

It's important to note that a dog can be distressed while home alone without developing full-blown **separation anxiety**. Distress is a milder form of stress and anxiety, whereas dogs with separation anxiety can have the canine version of a panic attack when their human isn't around.

According to Pat Miller, another animal behavior expert who writes for Whole Dog Journal:

"The distinction between 'isolation' and 'separation' is equally important. Isolation distress means the dog doesn't want to be left alone - any ol' human will do for company, and sometimes even another dog will fill the bill. True separation distress or anxiety means the dog is hyper-bonded to one specific person, and continues to show stress behaviors if that person is absent, even if other humans or dogs are present."³

10 to 12 Uninterrupted Hours Alone Is Too Long

Not so long ago, no one gave a second thought to leaving a dog home alone for a day or two with 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.

Fortunately, these days most people know better than to leave their dog alone for such a long stretch, but it's very common for dogs to be left home for 8 or 10 or 12 hours, up to five or six days a week. And depending on the owner'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. (Of course, on the flip side, there are also dog parents who turn down social invitations to spend evenings and weekends with their pet.)

"Here's the thing," writes Tucker, "and I won't pull any punches: 10 to 12 hours is too long for a dog to be alone in a single stretch." I agree. 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, though" 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." Again, I have to agree.

Tucker also writes, "We count on our dogs to be there for us when we're ready to interact with them, but in between those moments, we expect them to do nothing and wait. It's a tall order, but lucky for us, most dogs adapt incredibly well to anything we ask them to."

Options to Consider if Your Dog Is Home Alone During the Day

I recognize that the following suggestions won't be easy or even possible for everyone to do. 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 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 responsible 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

¹ [Whole Dog Journal, December 23, 2023](#)

² [Whole Dog Journal, April 18, 2018](#)

³ [Whole Dog Journal, June 9, 2008](#)
