

Dachshund FAQs

By Steven Michelson and Andra O'Connell



So, you want to learn about Dachshunds. Who could blame you? They're such characters, and so comically cute to look at, both in their unique physical proportions, and also in their spirited antics. This FAQ attempts to give you the background and characteristics of this breed, so you can decide if a Dachshund is the right breed for you.

Physical Characteristics and Temperament

Dachshunds are recognized by their long bodies and short legs. Their design is the epitome of form following function. They are low to the ground, which allows them to enter and maneuver through tunnels. Their senses are all well developed. They are very brave, somewhat stubborn, and have an independent tendency, especially when hunting.

Dachshunds like to enter into the spirit of everything you do, which isn't always the greatest help, especially when you are doing something like tying your shoes. They are playful dogs, but they insist on you following their rules of play, which may or may not coincide with the rules commonly used by their other canine cousins. For example, although they often like to chase balls, they don't necessarily see the need to bring them back to you. This is an example of a Dachshund rule of play, and is probably related to their curious, but independent nature.

Anyone who meets a Dachshund has no doubt about who's dog it is. They are often one-person dogs, meaning they bond very closely with their master. A Dachshund's master is never alone - they have a long, low shadow following them everywhere around the house. This is not to suggest that Dachshunds dislike other humans - quite the contrary, especially if they are well socialized at an early age. But they know which human is theirs.

General Care

It is extremely important to keep a Dachshund from getting fat, not only for the usual reasons of general good health, but also because their long back is susceptible to slipped or ruptured (herniated) disks through the additional strain placed on their spinal cord. This can result in partial or full paralysis but is often treatable through a variety of methods. Fortunately, a full recovery is likely if the problem is dealt with promptly (as soon as there's any evidence at all that the dog is having neck or back pain). In addition, to reduce the chance of disc problems, it is important to make sure a dachshund does not do things that put additional stress on his back, like jumping off furniture or running downstairs. This is not to suggest that that you can completely avoid such things all the time (after all, dogs will be dogs), but you can take steps to minimize how often they occur. For example, if you allow your dachshund access to the sofa or bed, it would be a good idea to get a ramp and teach him to use it when he is young; using a ramp to get on and off furniture, rather than jumping, reduces the shock on their discs that jumping can cause. Also, you should be careful, when holding a dachshund, to keep his back horizontal. Holding him like a football, with his rear quarters tucked under your arm, and your hands supporting his chest usually keeps the back in the horizontal position, thus reducing stress on the back. Don't interpret this to mean that dachshunds are fragile dogs - they're not (after all, they were bred for hunting). It's just that an ounce of prevention goes a long way. And if you accidentally hold one the wrong way, it's not like he will immediately develop back problems, either. But you might as well take reasonable precautions.

Dachshund FAQs, continued



Housebreaking

Housebreaking can be difficult with dachshunds. While most dachshunds do eventually get the hang of it, it is not totally uncommon to hear things like "she's 95% reliable." Most likely it is their independent nature that makes them a little difficult to housebreak. It's not that they don't know any better, or that they maliciously want to be disobedient; it's just that they don't always see the necessity of relieving themselves outside (especially in bad weather), and they are willing to accept the consequences. Unless you're a real ogre, the minute you see one look up at you with his inquisitive, adoring expression, capped off with his brown, almond shaped, soulful eyes, you'll understand why they often get away with things. Patience goes a long way with housebreaking a dachshund.

Trainability

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Dachshunds and Children

Dachshunds can be very good with children, provided they are socialized properly when they are puppies. It is a good idea to let your dachshund meet as many people as possible at an early age, including adults, teenagers, and children. Good experiences with people at an early age will make your dachshund a very good canine citizen, who gets along with almost everybody. Still, no matter how good any animal is with children, you should never leave them unsupervised.

Barking

Once they find their voice, they have barks that sound like they come from much bigger dogs, making them good watch dogs - not guard dogs (which will actually attack) but watch dogs, which only make a lot of noise.

Funny Habits

One peculiar thing they do is to roll around in smelly things when they encounter them. Rolling on earthworms or dead bugs, for example, is a popular dachshund pastime. This is due to their hunting instinct. While doing this, they are trying to "lose their scent" so that their prey cannot smell them. Another carry-over from their hunting instincts is their love of digging, and if left unsupervised, they can often be found digging for grubs in your lawn. Although this trait is usually seen outdoors, it also follows them into the house, where they like to tunnel through blankets until they get it "just right."

Dachshund FAQs, continued



Cleanliness

They are medium shedders, relatively clean, and they have little or no doggy odor. They don't need to be bathed often (less than once a month, unless, of course, they've gotten into something, which they're known to do).

Exercise

They require a modest amount of exercise. Two walks of moderate distance (each about 1/2 mile) a day should be pretty good. More if you're so inclined. They're a long-lived breed that can live up to 16 years or more with proper care. Because they are such social creatures, they don't do well as outdoor dogs - they need to be with their humans.

Fun Activities

Even though they were originally bred to go to ground to hunt badgers, Dachshunds have evolved to become a very versatile breed, and there are many types of activities you can do with them, that are fun for you and your dog. Besides being wonderful family pets, you can, of course, show them in conformation, do obedience work with them, enter them in field trials (tracking rabbits) or earthdog trials (where they enter tunnels to track rats), use them as pet therapy dogs (where you bring them to hospitals and nursing homes, provided they are properly evaluated for behavior and temperament). Many people have also done agility (think of it as an obstacle course for dogs) with their dachshunds. If you choose to do agility, please be especially careful with the jumps, so as not to injure your dachshund's back.

Best Age to Get a Puppy

If you are going to adopt a puppy, he should be at least 8 weeks old. This ensures that he is properly weaned from his mother and has had at least one vaccination.

Where to Find a Dachshund

If you decide that a Dachshund is the breed for you, you have several options. If you want to buy a puppy, then you should only buy from a reputable breeder. You should be able to talk to a breeder to learn more about the breed and meet at least one of the parents of the puppy, which is a good indicator (health-wise, temperament, and appearance) of how the puppy might turn out when it is full grown. You might be able to locate a reputable breeder by contacting the Dachshund Club of America breeder referral person located on the 'Find a Puppy' on this website. Don't rush; take your time to find a good breeder with a puppy available. This may require being placed on a waiting list; good breeders often have waiting lists. But the benefit to buying from a good breeder is to maximize your chance of adopting a healthy, well-socialized puppy with a predictable temperament and physical appearance. The only reason not to spay or neuter your dachshund is if you are going to show her in conformation and intend to breed her if she does well in the show ring. Otherwise, there are numerous health benefits to spaying or neutering your dachshund, including significantly reducing the risk of certain cancers and other life-threatening ailments later in life, as well as eliminating the chance of an unplanned pregnancy. Spaying or neutering does not alter your dog's personality, nor does it cause them to gain weight; overeating does that! Many reputable breeders will insist on a spay/neuter agreement when they sell a puppy or dog and will only allow a limited AKC registration (a puppy with a parent who has a limited AKC registration cannot be registered with the AKC). Don't be surprised if you are asked to sign such an agreement when you buy a dachshund from a reputable breeder.