

# Sleep hygiene for dogs

Why it matters for your best friend's health

By Anna Mouton

Is your dog getting a good night's sleep? And enough daytime naps? If not, your furry friend may be more likely to be anxious, depressed, grouchy and forgetful. Dogs need quality sleep just as much as humans do and they suffer similar problems when deprived. Dogs can also develop physical illnesses when they don't have suitable bedding.





Sleep hygiene includes all the things you need for optimal sleep quantity and quality. So how do you ensure sleep hygiene for your best friend? It turns out that there is plenty of research on sleeping dogs – and it's not all about letting them lie! MARKtoe! looked at the science to bring you some interesting facts.

### Sleep like a dog

Most people sleep in one long session every night. During this time, we alternate between different stages of sleep in cycles of about 90 minutes each. We start with a long transition from light to deep sleep. Our body cools down and our heart rate slows. As we leave deep sleep, we enter deep or paradoxical sleep, which is when we dream. After this, we wake up for a moment before we start a new sleep cycle.

Dogs tend to sleep in multiple sessions, mostly at night, but also during the day. Their sleep cycles are similar to ours but much shorter. A dog will sleep for about 15 to 45 minutes, followed by a period of wakefulness of 5 to 40 minutes. Dogs sleep for about three-quarters of the night and a third of the day. Studies on hunter-gatherer communities suggest that humans probably did much the same – before some fool invented work.

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When it comes to sleep, dogs seem to have similar tendencies as humans. Like babies, puppies sleep more than adult dogs. Elderly dogs are drowsier and sleep more during the day, but then struggle with insomnia at night. For this reason, sleep hygiene is especially important when caring for an older dog.



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Do dogs dream? Of course, we can never really know, but they do experience paradoxical sleep and they show signs of dreaming. Studies suggest that all mammals dream. Dogs and humans may dream for about 20 percent of their sleep time.

### Sweet dreams make good dogs

In dogs, as in humans, events during our waking hours affect how well we sleep. Stress leads to less time in deep sleep, more dreams and even seem to cause depression. Lack of sleep also causes anxiety, aggression, low tolerance, and frustration. Do any of these symptoms sound like you after a sleepless night?

Research done on dogs at a shelter discovered that those who slept better were more optimistic and relaxed and showed fewer behavioural problems. They also found that sleep quality was improved when dogs were able to socialise with people and other dogs and had frequent walks during the day. Other studies confirm that exercise promotes good sleep in dogs. The same applies to humans, too; so what better reason do you need to head outside with your best friend?

### *Studies on pet dogs showed that dogs sleep 80 percent of the night when they are kept indoors compared to 70 percent when they are kept outside in a confined space.*

Studies on pet dogs showed that dogs sleep 80 percent of the night when they are kept indoors compared to 70 percent when they are kept outside in a confined space. Dogs kept outside in an open area slept only 60 percent of the night. Like many people, dogs tend to sleep badly in an unfamiliar place. These findings tell us that dogs need to feel safe to sleep well. If your dogs sleep outside, be sure to provide a dry shelter with a comfortable bed.



We know that our ability to learn is affected by lack of sleep. Experiments in dogs demonstrate the same effect. Like humans, dogs process new information during sleep, when short-term memories are consolidated into long-term memories. Insufficient sleep might translate into forgetfulness and failure to learn. If your dog seems a little slow on the uptake, maybe he needs more shut-eye.

### Sleeping on the job

Sleep disturbances in people who work at night can lead to all sorts of health problems, including depression. How about working dogs? Researchers measured sleep patterns in sniffer dogs who were used for drug detection at airports. Turns out the dogs adapted more readily to changing shifts than their human handlers. This could be because their short sleep cycle makes it easier for them to catch up on lost sleep during the day.

On the other hand, guard dogs who worked alone spent most of their shift resting. They usually stayed close to the front fence of the premises, out of sight from people passing by. The dogs preferred to lie on soft material and used whatever was available, even sand. If you have a guard dog that lives outside, provide a kennel with a soft bed and place it where people can see it. The dog can only serve as a deterrent to scare off the bad guys if they know he's there.

The downside of keeping dogs for security is nocturnal barking. And, as you've probably noticed, barking is contagious. Dogs are more likely to bark in response to barking than any other sound – including loud voices or breaking glass. Like humans, dogs can sleep through noise, so don't count on your canine companion picking up on burglars climbing over the wall. However, when dogs sleep together, they wake up at different times, making them more effective at alerting their owners to trouble.



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### Bedtime with your dog

Many of us allow our furry friends to sleep in our bedrooms or even in our beds. Pets are company and they may help us feel safe. They may, however, also be lying between us and a good night's sleep. A patient survey by the Mayo Sleep Clinic found that more than half of people who slept with their pets were disturbed by them every night. This is partly because dogs have shorter sleep cycles and wake frequently.

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Some pet owners allow their dogs on the bed because they seem to be even more disruptive if kept off. Your dog will sleep more quietly if you give them plenty of attention and long walks, but don't do this too close to bedtime. Like small children, excited dogs tend to stay up until they become both tired and tiresome. Bright lighting before bedtime can also interfere with normal sleep patterns.



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If you want to entice your dog off your bed, you have to provide an alternative place to sleep. A comfortable bed of his own will go a long way toward a peaceful night. Most dogs like a soft mattress and many appreciate a bed with sides. A cold dog is guaranteed to be restless, so invest in blankets for those that feel the cold like puppies, older dogs, and breeds that are small or have short hair. Large adult dogs, especially those with thick coats, may find the inside of your house warm enough without a blanket. Experiment to find out what works for you.

Dogs that sleep outside need a bed that is sheltered from the elements. Mattresses should be raised off the ground, for example on a pallet. This keeps them from absorbing cold and damp. Be generous with blankets. You'll save money on treatment for respiratory and joint ailments down the line.

Large breeds and dogs with low body fat, like greyhounds, tend to develop calluses on pressure points such as their elbows. In time, the calluses become sores and the dogs start to lick them, making the condition worse. Pressure sores such as these are a nightmare to treat but can easily be prevented by giving the dog a soft bed to sleep on.



### How to avoid getting up with fleas

A quality bed for your best friend is just as important to their health as a good mattress is to yours. But only if you keep it clean. No one wants a smelly pile of dog bedding in their house – not even your canine companion. So remember to choose blankets and bedding that are easy to wash and quick to dry. Removable or waterproof covers on mattresses are a big plus. Waterproof covers are the obvious choice for outdoor use, but can also be the answer for an elderly dog that suffers from incontinence.

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Fleas are no fun for either you or your pet. Unfortunately, the most common household flea, the cat flea (*Ctenocephalides felis*), is happy to feed on cats, dogs, and humans. The dog flea (*Ctenocephalides canis*) is equally unselective. Adult fleas hitch a ride on their host to drink blood. Females lay thousands of eggs, most of which end up falling onto the floor or the ground or wherever your pet rests or sleeps. The eggs develop into larvae that can survive on any organic matter, including dead insects or dirt in cracks and crevices. Eventually, the larvae transform into adult fleas.



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Research has shown that humans affect the sleeping patterns of their pets. Dogs get less quality sleep because they live with us. We can help them – and ourselves – by practicing good sleep hygiene: developing habits that promote sound sleep. And we can give them warm, comfortable, secure beds. Surely that's the least we can do for our best friends, not so?



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Although there are many excellent products for controlling fleas, don't neglect basic hygiene. Only about 5 percent of the flea population consists of adults. Eggs represent about half and immature stages the rest. This means that fleas on your pet are the tip of the iceberg. The masses are in and around your home, especially in bedding. Luckily, they won't survive a warm wash or a session in the clothes dryer. Vacuuming also destroys them.

Enough quality sleep is a casualty of modern life. The Center for Disease Control in the United States of America has declared insufficient sleep to be a public health epidemic. People who sleep less than seven hours a night are more likely to suffer from chronic problems such as heart disease, stroke, arthritis, diabetes, and depression.



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