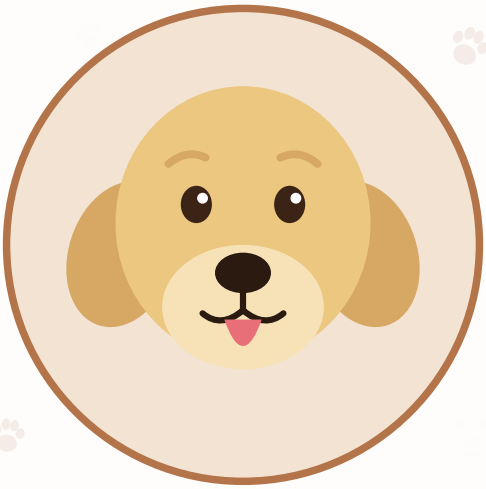


The Complete Labrador Guide

Loving & living with your Labrador.

Step-by-step training plans for real family life.

The Complete Labrador Guide

Before You Start

Congratulations. You share your home with one of the friendliest, most eager-to-please dogs in the world. You also share it with a dog who was bred to work all day in fields and lakes, carrying things in their mouth, and who still has all that energy and instinct inside them.

If your Lab jumps on every visitor, steals socks, mouths your hands, pulls towards every person on the street, or turns into a whirlwind at 7pm, none of that makes them a bad dog. It means a big, happy, clever retriever hasn't been shown what to do instead.

This guide shows them. Every chapter follows the same pattern, so you always know what to do next:

- **Why it happens:** what's going on inside your Lab's head.
- **The method:** a named, step-by-step plan, with how long, how often, and when to move on.
- **If this happens:** fixes for the most common problems.
- **Practice games:** short daily games that build the skill.
- **Your action plan:** exactly what to do today.

How long does this take? Most owners see a calmer Lab within 1–2 weeks of following the daily routines. Bigger habits like pulling, jumping and home-alone stress usually take 4–8 weeks. Little and often beats long and rare.

A quick safety note: if your dog has bitten, guards food or toys seriously, or panics to the point of injuring themselves, please work with your vet and a qualified behaviourist alongside this guide.

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

Topics Included

1. The Labrador Brain
2. The 14-Day Fresh Start
3. Surviving the Teenage Lab
4. Building an Off Switch
5. Mouthing, Chewing & the Retrieving Instinct
6. Crate & Sleep Made Easy
7. Home Alone Without the Stress
8. A Recall You Can Trust
9. Calm Greetings at the Door
10. Walks Without the Pulling
11. Food Drive & Counter Surfing
12. Brain Work & Retrieving Games
13. Exercise, Joints & Swimming
14. Keeping Your Lab Lean
15. Coat, Ears & Paws
16. Health Through the Years

Plus: 20 Popular Questions Answered.

The Labrador Brain

In this chapter, you'll learn why your Labrador carries everything in their mouth, why endless ball games can make them *more* hyper, and what type of Lab you actually live with. You'll also learn the daily "Retriever Menu" that gives a busy Lab brain exactly what it needs.

Once you understand how a Lab thinks, every other chapter in this guide gets easier.



Bred to Work in the Water

Labrador Retrievers come from Newfoundland, on Canada's east coast, where their ancestors (the St. John's water dogs) worked alongside fishermen, hauling nets and retrieving fish from icy water. In the 1800s, the breed was developed further in Britain as a gundog, retrieving birds over land and water and carrying them back gently.

That history explains a lot of what you see at home:

- **The mouth is everything.** Labs are happiest with something in their mouth. Socks, slippers, sticks and your hands are all fair game until they learn otherwise.
- **They love people.** A working Lab had to cooperate closely with their handler. That's why Labs are so friendly, and why they want to greet *everyone*.
- **Food is a big deal.** Labs are famously food-motivated. That makes training easier, and counter surfing more likely.
- **Water is irresistible.** That thick tail and waterproof coat were built for swimming. Many Labs can't walk past a puddle.
- **They mature slowly.** Many Labs behave like puppies until they're 2–3 years old.

The Fetch Trap

The most common advice for an energetic Lab is "throw the ball." So owners throw it 50, 100, 200 times a day.

The problem is that endless fetch is more like a sprint training

session than a calming activity. Your Lab gets fitter, more excited and more obsessed with the ball, and needs even more to feel tired. You end up with an athlete who can't switch off.

Physical exercise matters, but what really tires a Lab is **using their nose and brain**: sniffing, searching, carrying and learning. Ten minutes of sniffing or training tires a Lab more than half an hour of chasing a ball.



Working Lab or Show Lab?

- **Working (field) lines** are often leaner, with longer legs, a narrower head and a lot of drive. They need more daily activity and a strong off switch.
- **Show lines** are often stockier, with a broader head and a thick "otter" tail. They're often a little calmer, but still need daily brain work.
- **Black, yellow or chocolate?** Coat colour doesn't decide personality. Breeding lines, training and daily routine matter far more.
- **Not sure?** Watch your dog. How fast do they calm down after excitement? How obsessed are they with balls and food? That tells you more than a pedigree.

Whatever type you have, the plan below works. You simply adjust the amounts.

The Method: The Retriever Menu

Every day, give your Lab four simple "courses." Together they take about 30–40 minutes, and they meet the needs that cause most problem behaviour.

Step 1: The Sniff Course (10–15 minutes)

Scatter breakfast in the garden, or use a snuffle mat. On walks, give your Lab time to sniff. Sniffing is calming, satisfying work.

Step 2: The Carry Course (5 minutes)

Give your Lab a legal thing to carry: a soft toy at the front door, a toy on walks, or a game of "bring it" with a favourite toy. Carrying satisfies the retriever instinct, and a dog who has something to carry is less likely to grab your sleeve.

Step 3: The Thinking Course (2 × 5 minutes)

Two short training sessions a day. Use the games in this guide, or practise sits, downs, "leave it" and "look at me." Stop while your Lab still wants more.

Step 4: The Rest Course (planned rest)

Adult dogs need around 16–18 hours of rest a day, puppies even more. Plan rest just like you plan walks: crate time, a quiet room, or the Off Switch mat (Chapter 4). Many "hyper" Labs are actually over-tired.

Step 5: Check the Results

After 7 days, ask yourself:

- Is my Lab settling faster after walks?
- Are they grabbing things less?
- Are evenings calmer?

Even small improvements mean the menu is working. Keep going, and make the courses a little harder each week.

If This Happens

"My dog is obsessed with the ball." Put the ball away for two weeks. Replace it with sniffing and carry games, then bring it back for short, structured sessions only.

"My dog grabs things and runs off." It's the retriever instinct plus a fun chase game. Don't chase. Swap the item for a treat (see Chapter 5).

"My dog won't settle at all." Look at rest first. Most Labs need much more sleep than owners think.

Practice Games

Game 1: Bring It Home

Throw a toy a short distance. When your Lab picks it up, run backwards, clapping. When they reach you, swap the toy for a treat, then throw it again. This builds a happy, reliable retrieve, and a dog who brings things to you instead of running off with them.

Game 2: Which Hand?

Hide a treat in one fist. Hold both fists out low. When your Lab sniffs or paws the correct hand, open it. If they pick the wrong one, show them the empty hand and try again. Play 5–10 rounds.

Game 3: The Carry Walk

Give your Lab a soft toy to carry on part of the walk. Praise them for carrying it. Many Labs walk more calmly, and greet people more politely, when their mouth is busy.

Your Action Plan

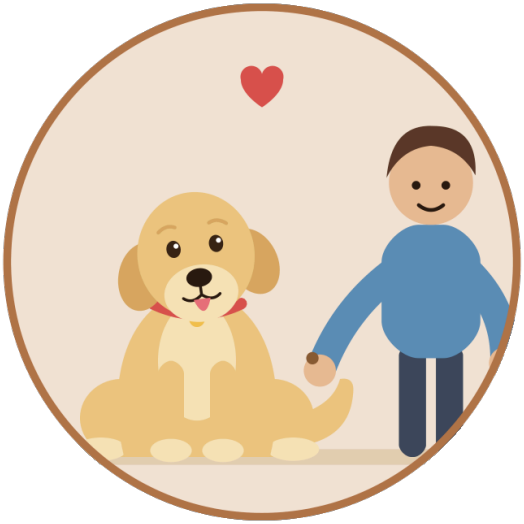
- ☐ Feed breakfast as a Sniff Course starting tomorrow.
- ☐ Add a daily Carry Course.
- ☐ Do two 5-minute training sessions every day.
- ☐ Plan rest blocks into your Lab's day.
- ☐ Replace some ball throwing with sniffing and carry games.



The 14-Day Fresh Start

In this chapter, you'll learn why many Lab habits come from too much freedom too soon, how to run a two-week "Fresh Start" that resets your relationship, and how to build a bond based on trust, not telling off.

Whether you have a new puppy or a five-year-old rescue, this is your foundation. Many owners say it's the chapter that changed everything.



It's Never Too Late to Start Again

Many owners feel that because their Lab is 2, 3 or 6 years old, their habits are set in stone. They're not. Labs are quick learners. Change the patterns around them, and they'll learn new ones surprisingly fast.

Too Much Freedom, Too Soon

Most adult Lab problems like stealing socks, counter-surfing, chewing furniture and jumping on guests happen because the dog has had the run of the house before they were ready. A Lab with free access to every room and every surface is going to explore all of it, with their mouth.

The answer isn't punishment. It's giving your Lab a smaller, easier world for a while, where good choices are easy and bad habits can't be practised, and then slowly giving freedom back.

Soft Dogs Need Kind Training

Labs are sensitive. Shouting, pushing or harsh corrections often make them worried, and a worried Lab becomes clingy, mouthy or "deaf." Reward-based training, clear routines and calm handling get far better results.

The Method: The 14-Day Fresh Start

For the next two weeks, you're going to change a few simple things about your Lab's day.

Step 1: Shrink the World (Days 1–14)

Close bedroom and bathroom doors. Use baby gates to block the kitchen or keep your dog in the room you're in. When you can't supervise, use the crate or a safe, dog-proofed room. Fewer opportunities to steal and chew means fewer bad habits.

Step 2: The House Line (Days 1–14)

Clip a light lead (without a handle) to your Lab's harness while you're home and watching. If they head for the kitchen counter or grab a shoe, you can calmly step on the line and guide them away, without a chase. **Never leave a house line on when you're not supervising.**

Step 3: Meals Become Paychecks (Days 1–14)

Measure your dog's food each morning. Use about a third of it through the day to reward good choices: lying calmly, sitting at doors, coming when called, four paws on the floor when someone arrives. Feed the rest as normal meals.

Step 4: Attention for Calm (Days 1–14)

Labs love attention, so use it. Give praise, strokes and treats when your dog is calm. When they're pestering (pawing, barking, nudging), turn away and wait for calm. It may get worse for a day or two before it gets better.

Step 5: Handling = Treats (Days 1–14)

Every day, touch one body part briefly, then give a treat: ears, paws, collar, mouth, tail. One touch, one treat, five times. This makes vet visits, grooming and ear cleaning easy.

Step 6: Give Freedom Back (Days 15+)

After 14 days, start giving back freedom one room at a time. If old habits return, shrink the world again for a few days.

Growls Are Information

If your Lab growls, **never punish it.** A growl is a warning. Calmly give space, then work out why: pain, fear, being disturbed while resting, or guarding food or toys.

> **Guarding food or toys?** Some Labs guard stolen items, chews or their food bowl. Never chase or grab. Use the Approach & Add game below and the Trade game in Chapter 5, and speak to a qualified behaviourist if it doesn't improve within a couple of weeks.

If This Happens

"My dog cries when shut out of rooms." Use a baby gate instead of a closed door, so they can see you.

"The house line gets chewed." Spray it with a bitter-tasting spray made for dogs, or swap to a thin, light chain lead.

"My dog gets bored with less freedom." Add more Sniff and Thinking courses from Chapter 1.

Practice Games

Game 1: Approach & Add

While your Lab eats, walk past and drop a tasty extra into or near the bowl, then walk away. Do this a few times each meal for two weeks. Your dog learns that people near their food means *more* food.

Game 2: The Collar Grab Game

Gently touch the collar, then treat. Hold it for one second, then treat. Build up to a gentle three-second hold. In an emergency, you'll be able to take hold of your dog without them ducking away.

Game 3: Follow Me

Walk around the house or garden with treats in your pocket, changing direction often. Every time your Lab catches up and walks beside you, say "yes!" and reward. It builds the habit of choosing to stay with you.

Your Action Plan

- ☐ Set up baby gates and close off rooms for 14 days.
- ☐ Use a house line when you're home and supervising.
- ☐ Use a third of daily food as Paychecks.
- ☐ Give attention for calm, not for pestering.
- ☐ Do five handling reps every day.



Surviving the Teenage Lab

In this chapter, you'll learn why your sweet Lab puppy suddenly seems to have forgotten everything, why teenage Labs jump, pull and steal more than ever, and the "Rewind Rule" that gets you through adolescence without losing your progress or your patience.

If your Lab is somewhere between 6 months and 2–3 years old, this chapter is for you.



Surviving the Teenage Lab

The Teenage Lab Brain

Around 6 months, many Lab owners notice a change. The puppy who came running now ignores you at the park. Jumping gets worse. Socks disappear. Walks turn into a tug-of-war. Some teenage Labs even become worried by things that never bothered them before.

This is adolescence. Your Lab's body is growing fast, hormones are changing, and the part of the brain that controls impulses is still developing. Labs also mature slowly; many don't fully settle until they're 2–3 years old.

The Two Big Mistakes

When training seems to stop working, owners often:

- **Get stricter:** more telling off, more frustration. With a soft breed like a Lab, this often leads to a worried, clingy or "deaf" dog.
- **Give up:** "she knows it, she's just being silly," so practice stops and bad habits set in.

The answer is in between: **go back a step, make it easy, and keep paying.**

The Method: The Rewind Rule

The moment a skill falls apart, rewind it to the last stage your Lab could do easily, and rebuild from there.

Step 1: List the Slips

For one week, note every time a skill fails. Most owners find it's only 3–4 skills: recall at the park, pulling, jumping on people, or stealing.

Step 2: Rewind Each Skill

- **Recall failing at the park?** Rewind to the garden, on a long line.
- **Pulling again?** Rewind to five-minute lead sessions on a quiet street.
- **Jumping on people?** Rewind to practising greetings with family.
- **Stealing?** Go back to the 14-Day Fresh Start from Chapter 2.

Practise at the easy level for 3–5 days, until your Lab gets it right 8 out of 10 times. Then move up one small step.

Step 3: Pay More, for Now

Teenage Labs are distracted by everything. Use better rewards for the next month: small pieces of chicken, cheese or sausage for the skills on your list.

Step 4: Manage the Gaps

Stop your dog practising bad habits while you rebuild: long line at the park, baby gates at home, a house line when you're supervising, and toys handed over at greetings.

The Teenage Fear Period

Some teenage Labs go through a short "fear period" where they suddenly bark at or back away from new things. If this happens:

1. **Don't force it.** Never drag your dog towards something scary.
2. **Add distance** until they can look calmly.
3. **Pair it with food:** calm look, treat.
4. **Keep it short** and end on a good note.

Most fear-period worries fade in a few weeks with calm, positive experiences.

> **Watch for new guarding.** Adolescence is when some Labs start guarding stolen items, food or toys. Never chase or grab. Use trades (Chapter 5) and ask a qualified behaviourist for help if you see stiffening, growling or snapping.

If This Happens

"My dog listens at home but not outside." Practise outside at quiet times first, and build up slowly.

"She's started humping or marking." Common in adolescence. Interrupt calmly and redirect. Talk to your vet about the right neutering timing for your dog; it can affect joint development in large breeds.

"Everything is going backwards." Check the basics: enough sniffing, carrying, training and rest (Chapter 1)?

Practice Games

Game 1: The Two-Second Sit

Ask for a sit before everything good: doors opening, the lead going on, the ball being thrown, the food bowl going down. Wait for two seconds of stillness, then release with "OK!"

Game 2: Restart the Name

Say your dog's name once, cheerfully. When they look at you, say "yes!" and reward. Ten times a day in different places.

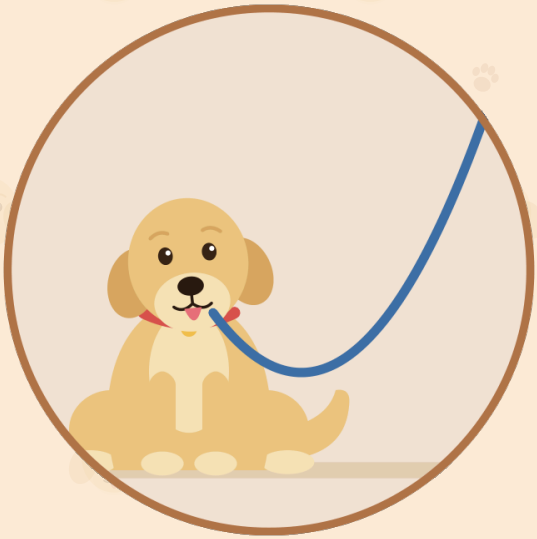
Game 3: Easy Wins Walk

Once a week, take a quiet, "boring" walk. Reward every check-in, every loose lead moment and every calm look at the world.



Your Action Plan

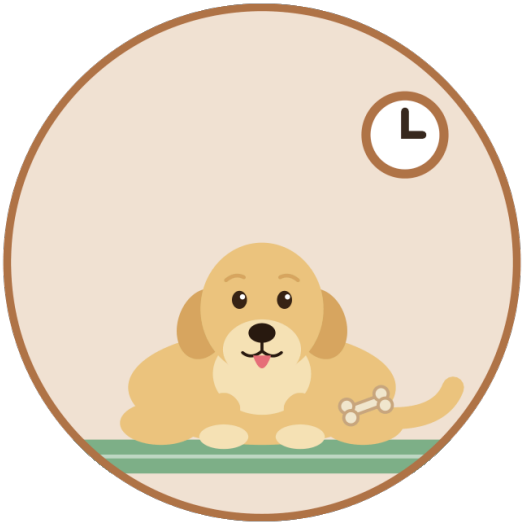
- ☐ List the 3–4 skills that have slipped.
- ☐ Rewind each skill and rebuild over 3–5 days.
- ☐ Use higher-value treats for one month.
- ☐ Use gates, a long line and a house line to prevent bad habits.
- ☐ Ask for a Two-Second Sit before everything good.



Building an Off Switch

In this chapter, you'll learn why many Labs can't relax even after a long walk, how much rest your Lab really needs, and the "Off-Switch Routine" that teaches your dog to settle on cue at home, in cafés, and when visitors arrive.

This is the chapter most owners skip, and it's the one that makes the biggest difference.



Building an Off Switch

Why Labs Struggle to Switch Off

Labradors are enthusiastic about everything. People, food, toys, water, other dogs; it's all exciting. Many Labs go from one exciting thing to the next all day, without ever being taught how to relax.

Adult dogs need around **16–18 hours of rest a day**, and puppies even more. A Lab who doesn't get enough rest becomes **over-tired**, and an over-tired Lab looks "hyper": mouthy, jumpy, barky and unable to settle. The evening "zoomies" are often a sign of an over-tired dog.

A Lab-Friendly Day

- **Morning:** toilet, sniffy walk, breakfast as a Sniff Course.
- **Mid-morning:** rest in a crate or quiet room.
- **Midday:** toilet, a short training session, a carry game.
- **Afternoon:** rest, then a chew on the mat.
- **Late afternoon:** walk or play, plus a brain game.
- **Evening:** dinner, then the Off-Switch Routine while you relax.
- **Bedtime:** last toilet trip, then bed in the same place every night.

The Method: The Off-Switch Routine

This routine teaches your Lab: **"When I'm on my mat, nothing exciting happens, so I may as well relax."** It takes about two weeks of short daily sessions.

Step 1: Choose the Mat (Day 1)

Pick a mat or bed that will become the off switch. Put it somewhere quiet, away from the front door and busy walkways.

Step 2: Pay for Stepping On (Days 1–2)

The moment your Lab steps on the mat, say "yes" and drop a treat on it. Toss a treat off the mat to reset. Do 10 reps, twice a day.

Step 3: Pay for Lying Down (Days 3–5)

Now wait. When your Lab steps on the mat, pause. When they lie down, reward between their front paws. Keep sessions to 3–5 minutes.

Step 4: Pay for Relaxing (Days 6–10)

Reward signs of calm: rolling onto one hip, resting the head on the paws, a big sigh, soft eyes. Place the treat quietly between their paws and say nothing. Slowly increase the time between treats.

Step 5: Take It on the Road (Days 11–14+)

Use the mat while you cook, eat and watch TV, then at friends' houses and quiet cafés. The mat becomes a portable relax button.

If This Happens

"My Lab keeps bouncing off the mat." Go back to rewarding more often, and add a long-lasting chew.

"My dog lies down but stares at me, wagging." Reward only when their eyes look away or their head goes down. Read a book or look at your phone.

"The zoomies hit every evening." Plan a calm brain game and a rest before the zoomies usually start.

Practice Games

Game 1: Treats for Nothing

Keep treat pots around the house. Whenever you catch your Lab lying calmly, quietly place a treat between their paws and walk away.

Game 2: Up and Down Switch

Play tug for 10 seconds, then stop and ask for a down on the mat. Reward and wait 10 seconds. Play again. Repeat 5 times. This teaches your Lab to go from excited to calm quickly.

Game 3: The Lick Mat Wind-Down

After dinner, give a lick mat smeared with wet food on the Off-Switch mat. Licking is naturally calming.

Building an Off Switch

Your Action Plan

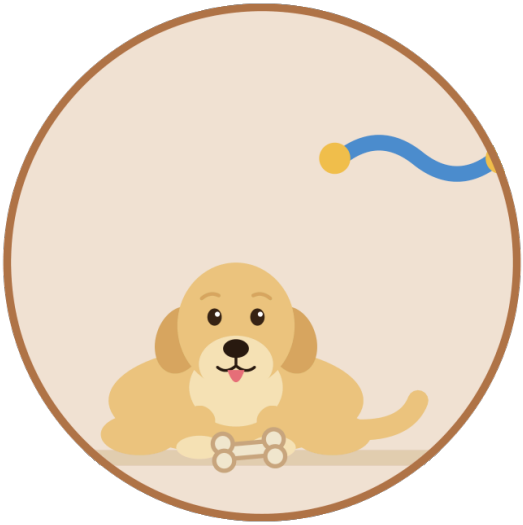
- ☐ Write out your Lab's day with rest blocks planned in.
- ☐ Do two short Off-Switch sessions a day.
- ☐ Reward calm with a quiet treat.
- ☐ Plan a calm activity before evening zoomies.
- ☐ After two weeks, use the mat somewhere new.



Mouthing, Chewing & the Retrieving Instinct

In this chapter, you'll learn why Labradors are so mouthy and love to chew, why yelping and pushing them away often makes it worse, and the "Soft Mouth Plan" that teaches your Lab to keep their teeth off skin and clothes.

If your arms are covered in little scratches, or your Lab grabs sleeves every time you walk past, start here.



Why Labs Mouth

Labs were bred to retrieve and carry things in their mouths, all day, and many are enthusiastic chewers well into adulthood. Their mouth is how they explore, play and greet people. Add teething (puppies lose their baby teeth between about 3 and 7 months), excitement and tiredness, and you get a lot of mouthing.

Common triggers:

- **Play:** Labs wrestle with their mouths.
- **Teething:** gums are sore and chewing helps.
- **Greetings:** grabbing hands and sleeves is a way of saying hello.
- **Over-excitement:** zoomies, visitors and rough play.
- **Over-tiredness:** a tired Lab gets bitier, not calmer.

Why Pushing Away Backfires

Pushing your dog away, waving your hands or squealing can turn mouthing into a fun game. Holding the mouth shut or tapping the nose can make some Labs worried, or more excited.

We want a calm, clear rule: **teeth on skin means the fun stops.**

The Method: The Soft Mouth Plan

Step 1: Toys Everywhere (Day 1)

Put a basket of soft and rope toys in every room. Every time you interact with your Lab, have a toy in your hand. Give the mouth a legal job before it finds an illegal one.

Step 2: Redirect Early (Days 1–7)

When you see your Lab getting excited, offer a toy *before* teeth arrive. Wiggle it along the floor. Praise when they grab the toy.

Step 3: Teeth on Skin = Game Over (Days 1–14)

If teeth touch skin or clothes:

1. Go still and quiet.
2. Offer a toy.
3. If teeth come back, say "oops" and calmly step behind a baby gate or out of the room for 20–30 seconds.
4. Come back calmly and offer a toy.

Be consistent. Every person in the house must follow the same rule.

Step 4: Plan Naps (Days 1–14)

Puppies need around 18–20 hours of sleep a day. If mouthing gets worse at certain times, plan a crate nap just before.

Step 5: Teach Gentle Takes (Weeks 2–3)

Hold a treat in your closed hand. If your Lab nibbles or paws, keep your hand closed. The moment they back off or use a soft mouth, open your hand. Your Lab learns that gentle is the way to get things.

Step 6: The Trade (Weeks 2–3)

When your Lab picks up something they shouldn't, don't chase. Offer a treat or a better toy, say "trade," and swap. Then give the item back if it's safe, or put it away. Your Lab learns that bringing things to you pays.

If This Happens

"It's getting worse." Check sleep first. Over-tired puppies mouth more.

"My dog grabs my clothes on walks." Bring a tug toy and offer it before they grab.

"My adult Lab still mouths." Adults learn too. Use the same rules for three weeks.

> **When to get help:** if bites are hard, frequent, or come with stiffening, growling or a hard stare, please speak to your vet and a qualified behaviourist.

Practice Games

Game 1: Toy Greeting

Keep a toy by the front door. Every time you come home, hand your Lab a toy before saying hello. A full mouth can't grab you.

Game 2: Tug With Rules

You start the game. Teeth on skin means the game stops for a few seconds. Ask for "drop" by offering a treat, then start again. Rules make tug a great self-control game.

Game 3: Hold It

Give your Lab a soft toy. Say "hold" and reward while they hold it calmly for one second, then two, then five. This builds on the natural soft mouth Labs were bred for.



Your Action Plan

- ☐ Put a toy basket in every room.
- ☐ Agree the "teeth on skin = game over" rule with the whole family.
- ☐ Plan naps before mouthy times.
- ☐ Practise Gentle Takes and the Trade daily.
- ☐ Keep a toy by the front door for greetings.



Crate & Sleep Made Easy

In this chapter, you'll learn how to make the crate your Lab's favourite den, why so many Labs whine at night, and the "Den Builder" plan that gets your dog sleeping soundly in about two weeks.

A Lab who sleeps well is calmer, less mouthy and learns faster.



Crate & Sleep Made Easy

Why a Crate Helps a Lab

Used kindly, a crate is:

- a **safe den** where your Lab can rest without being disturbed
- a **management tool** that prevents chewing, stealing and toilet accidents when you can't supervise
- a **familiar bed** for vet stays, holidays and car journeys

A crate should never be used as a punishment, and adult dogs shouldn't be crated for more than about four hours at a time during the day.

Setting Up the Den

- **Size:** big enough for your Lab to stand, turn around and lie flat on their side. Most adult Labs need a large crate. For a puppy, buy the adult size with a divider.
- **Cover:** drape a blanket over the top, back and sides.
- **Bedding:** a comfy bed. If your Lab shreds bedding, use a tough mat for now.
- **Location:** a quiet spot away from the front door. For the first few weeks, puppies often settle better near your bedroom.

The Method: The Den Builder

Step 1: Treasure Hunts (Days 1–3)

Leave the crate door open. Secretly drop treats or a chew inside several times a day. Let your Lab discover them.

Step 2: Meals in the Den (Days 2–7)

Feed every meal in the crate, moving the bowl further back each day. Once your Lab walks in happily, close the door while they eat, then open it when they finish.

Step 3: Door Closed, You Nearby (Days 5–10)

Give a stuffed food toy in the crate and close the door. Sit nearby. Open the door after 5 minutes, before your dog starts to fuss. Build to 20–30 minutes.

Step 4: Short Steps Away (Days 8–14)

Leave the room for 30 seconds, then come back. Build up slowly: 1 minute, 3, 5, 10. Open the door only when your dog is quiet.

Step 5: The Bedtime Routine (from Day 1)

A calm evening, a last toilet trip, a small chew in the crate, lights down, a quiet "goodnight." Young puppies usually need a night-time toilet trip. Keep it boring: out, toilet, back to bed.

The Whining Question

When your Lab whines, ask what they need:

- **Toilet?** Take them out quietly on a lead, then straight back.
- **Too hot?** Labs have thick coats. Check the room isn't too warm.
- **Lonely or worried?** Move the crate closer for now, and go back a step.
- **Demanding?** If all needs are met, wait for a few seconds of quiet, then open the door.

> **Crate panic:** if your Lab drools heavily, injures themselves trying to escape or panics even with you nearby, stop crate training and use a pen or dog-proofed room instead. Speak to your vet, and see your Home Alone Blueprint bonus.

If This Happens

"My puppy cries at night." Put the crate next to your bed for the first couple of weeks.

"My dog won't go in." Take the door off for a few days, and go back to treasure hunts.

"My dog wakes at 5am." Darken the room, cover the crate fully, and only get up if they truly need the toilet.

Practice Games

Game 1: Crate Dash

Toss a treat into the crate and say "bed!" When your Lab runs in, throw another treat in. Call them out and repeat 5 times.

Game 2: Door Zen

Start to open the crate door. If your Lab pushes forward, close it gently. When they stay still, open it more. Release with "OK!" when the door is fully open.

Game 3: Surprise Visitor

While your Lab relaxes in the crate, walk past and drop a treat through the side. Walk away without a word.



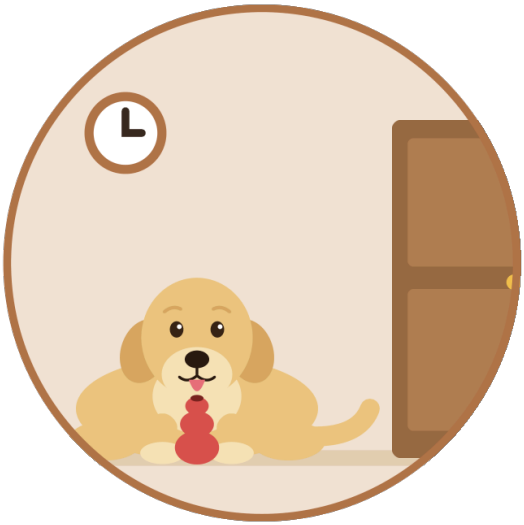
Your Action Plan

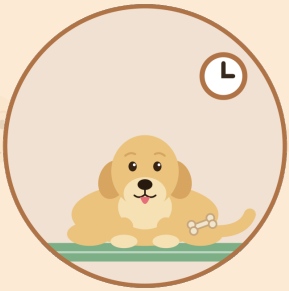
- ☐ Set up a covered crate in a quiet spot.
- ☐ Do treasure hunts for three days.
- ☐ Feed every meal in the crate for two weeks.
- ☐ Build up closed-door time with you in the room.
- ☐ Start the bedtime routine tonight.



Home Alone Without the Stress

In this chapter, you'll learn why such a people-loving breed can find being alone so hard, how to tell boredom from real worry, and the "Little Exits" plan for building calm, confident time apart.





Why Labs Find Being Alone Hard

Labradors were bred to work side by side with people. Many follow their owners everywhere, which is lovely, until you need to leave the house.

Common mistakes make it harder:

- your Lab is with someone every moment at weekends, then alone for hours on Monday
- goodbyes are emotional and drawn out
- your keys, coat and bag always mean "they're leaving now"

Boredom or Worry?

Record your Lab for 30 minutes after you leave.

- **Boredom:** settles for a while, then chews or digs later. Relaxed when you return. Needs more exercise, brain work and things to do.
- **Worry:** whining, pacing, panting, scratching at the door or howling in the first few minutes. May not touch food left for them. Needs a gradual plan.

The Method: Little Exits

Your Lab should only experience absences they can cope with. Each success builds confidence for the next one.

Step 1: Independence at Home (Week 1)

Use the Off-Switch mat. Take one step away and come back. Build up to leaving the room for a few seconds. Use baby gates so your Lab can be on the other side of a gate with a chew.

Step 2: Break the Departure Cues (Weeks 1–2)

Pick up your keys, put on your shoes or coat, then sit down. Do this 5–10 times a day until your Lab stops reacting.

Step 3: The First Real Exits (Week 2)

Give a special frozen food toy that only appears when you leave. Walk out, close the door, and come back after 10–30 seconds. Come in calmly and say hello once your dog is calm.

Step 4: Build Up Slowly (Weeks 3–6)

30 seconds, 1 minute, 2, 5, 10, 15, 20, 30 minutes, then longer. Only move up when your Lab is calm at the current time.

Step 5: Mix It Up

Mix short and long absences so your dog doesn't brace for a long one every time.

While You're Training

Try not to leave your Lab alone for longer than they can manage. A dog walker, friend, daycare or taking your dog with you all help.

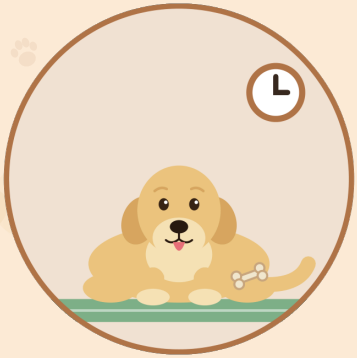
> **Severe panic:** if your Lab injures themselves, destroys doors trying to escape, or is in distress the whole time you're out, please speak to your vet. Your Home Alone Blueprint bonus has a detailed day-by-day plan.

If This Happens

"My dog won't touch the food toy." Your absences are too long. Go back to 10–30 seconds.

"My dog chews things only when I'm out." Check the camera. Straight away means worry. Later on means boredom.

"My dog is fine with my partner but not me." Have the favourite person practise more of the exits.



Practice Games

Game 1: Door Peekaboo

While your Lab is on their mat, step behind a door for 2 seconds. Come back and reward calm. Build to 60 seconds.

Game 2: The Fake-Out

Pick up your keys, then sit on the sofa. Put your coat on, then take it off. Make your departure routine boring.

Game 3: Scatter and Go

As you leave, scatter kibble on the floor or in a snuffle mat. Your Lab is busy sniffing as the door closes.



Your Action Plan

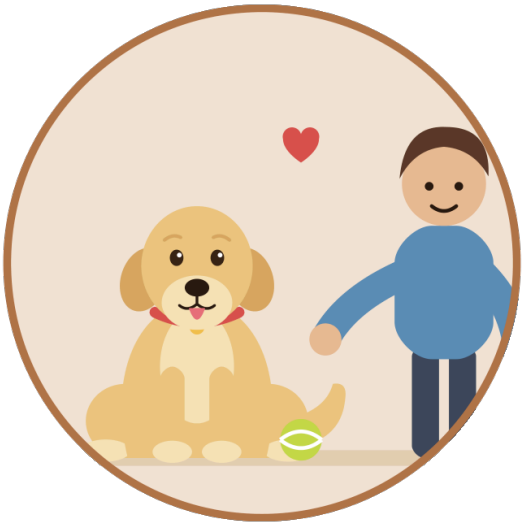
- ☐ Record your Lab alone for 30 minutes.
- ☐ Practise independence on the mat and behind a gate.
- ☐ Do 5–10 fake departures a day.
- ☐ Start Little Exits at 10–30 seconds.
- ☐ Arrange help for longer absences.



CHAPTER 8

A Recall You Can Trust

In this chapter, you'll learn why your Lab comes every time in the kitchen but vanishes at the park (usually towards a person, a dog or a pond), how to build a "Jackpot Recall" word, and the games that make you the most exciting thing in your dog's world.



A Recall You Can Trust

Why Lab Recall Breaks Down

- **Everything is exciting.** Other people, other dogs, water and smells.
- **The word has been ruined.** Calling for baths, to leave the park, or repeating "come, come, COME" teaches your dog the word means nothing.
- **It was tested too soon.** Recall taught in the kitchen doesn't automatically work in a busy park.

The Method: The Jackpot Recall

Step 1: Choose a New Word (Day 1)

Pick a word or whistle you've never used: "Here!", "Pronto!" or two short whistle pips. Only use it when you're sure your dog will come.

Step 2: Charge the Word (Days 1–3)

With your Lab right next to you, say the word once, then give a jackpot: 3–5 tasty treats one after another. Ten times a day for three days.

Step 3: Short Distances (Days 4–7)

Call from a few steps away, then across the room, then from another room. Jackpot every time. Don't repeat the word.

Step 4: Outside on a Long Line (Weeks 2–3)

Clip a 10-metre long line to a harness. In the garden or a quiet field, let your Lab sniff, then call once. Jackpot, then let them go back to sniffing. **Being called shouldn't mean the fun ends.**

Step 5: Add Distractions Slowly (Weeks 3–6)

Practise in places with a bit more going on. Keep the long line on until your Lab comes back 9 out of 10 times.

Lab Distractions

- **People:** practise recall away from people first. Reward your dog for coming back to you instead of greeting strangers.
- **Other dogs:** call before your dog gets too close. If they're already running, go and get them.
- **Water:** many Labs head straight for ponds and rivers. Keep the long line on near water, and use swimming as a reward once your recall is reliable.

> **Water safety:** check water is safe before letting your dog swim. Avoid fast-flowing rivers, ice, and water with blue-green algae, which can be deadly to dogs.

A Recall You Can Trust

The Recall Rules

- **Call once.**
- **Never call for bad things.** Go and get your dog instead.
- **Always reward.**
- **Release them again** after most recalls: "go play!"

If This Happens

"My Lab comes halfway then runs off." Run backwards as they come towards you.

"My dog dodges when I reach for the collar." Practise the Collar Grab Game from Chapter 2.

"My dog only comes for food." Use life rewards too: sniffing, a swim, a throw of the ball.

Practice Games

Game 1: Ping-Pong Recall

Two people take turns calling your Lab and rewarding. Move further apart, then into different rooms.

Game 2: Hide and Seek

Hide behind a tree or door, then call once. Celebrate when they find you.

Game 3: The Check-In Walk

On walks, reward every time your Lab looks back at you. Jackpot when they come back on their own.

Your Action Plan

- ☐ Choose a brand-new recall word.
- ☐ Charge the word for three days.
- ☐ Get a 10-metre long line and harness.
- ☐ Play Ping-Pong Recall and Hide and Seek this week.
- ☐ Check water safety before swims.



CHAPTER 9

Calm Greetings at the Door

In this chapter, you'll learn why your Lab greets every visitor like a long-lost friend, why kneeing and pushing don't stop jumping, and the "Four Paws Welcome" method for calm, polite hellos at home and on walks.

A 30kg Lab launching at a toddler or an elderly neighbour isn't cute. The good news: this is one of the most fixable habits in this guide.



Calm Greetings at the Door

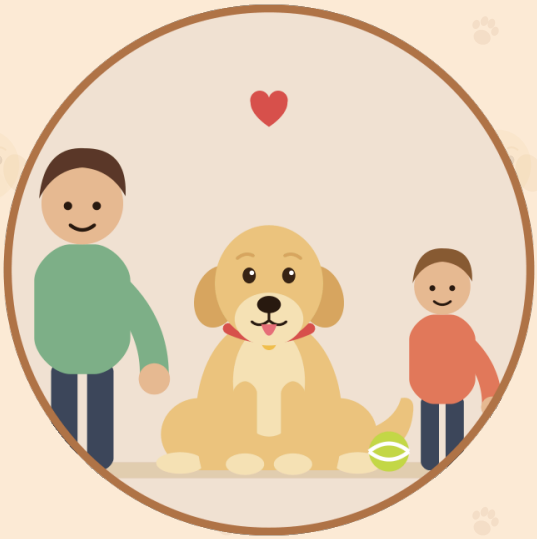
Why Labs Jump

Puppies greet by reaching up to lick faces. People's faces are high, so Labs jump. Then we look, talk, laugh or push them away, and all of that is attention. Jumping works.

Labs also simply love people. A knock at the door means a new friend is arriving, and that's the most exciting thing in the world.

Why Pushing Down Doesn't Work

Pushing, kneeing or grabbing paws is still attention, and many Labs think it's a game. Instead, we make jumping boring and make **four paws on the floor** the fastest way to get a hello.



Calm Greetings at the Door

The Method: The Four Paws Welcome

Step 1: Prepare the Doorway

Before guests arrive, put up a baby gate in the hallway, or have your Lab on a lead. Your dog shouldn't be able to rush the door or launch at visitors while you train.

Step 2: Treats Low and Early

As someone comes in, drop treats on the floor between your Lab's front paws, one after another. Their head goes down instead of up. Say hello while they're eating from the floor.

Step 3: The Turn Away

If your Lab jumps, fold your arms, turn away and look at the ceiling. Say nothing. When four paws touch the floor, turn back, praise calmly and reward low.

Step 4: Sit to Say Hi (Week 2)

Once paws are staying down, ask for a sit as people arrive. Attention happens only while sitting. If your dog pops up, the person stands straight and waits.

Step 5: The Greeting Toy

Keep a toy basket by the front door. Hand your Lab a toy as people arrive. Many Labs love to carry a "gift" to visitors, and a full mouth makes jumping and grabbing less likely.

Step 6: Practise, Practise, Practise

Set up practice greetings: family members go out of the front door and come back in, using the same rules. Five practice greetings a day are worth more than fifty real ones where the rules are forgotten.

The Guest Rules

Share these with visitors:

- Ignore the dog until they're calm.
- Turn away if they jump.
- Say hello only when four paws are on the floor.
- Keep greetings calm and short.

Greetings on Walks

Labs often want to greet everyone they pass. Teach your dog that walking past people calmly pays:

1. Start at a distance where your Lab can stay calm.
2. Reward calm looks at people.
3. Only allow greetings if your dog is sitting or calm, and the person agrees.
4. If your dog pulls or jumps, calmly walk away.

Calm Greetings at the Door

If This Happens

"My Lab jumps and grabs sleeves." Hand over a toy straight away, and use a gate or lead for greetings.

"It works for me but not for guests." Use a gate or lead every time guests arrive.

"My dog cries and barks behind the gate." Give a long-lasting chew behind the gate, and bring them out once they're calmer.

> **Children:** a jumping Lab can knock a child over. Always supervise, and teach children to "be a tree": stand still, fold their arms and look at their feet.

Practice Games

Game 1: Knock Knock

Ask someone to knock quietly on an inside door. Drop treats on the floor. Repeat until the knock means "look at the floor for treats."

Game 2: Pop Up, Pop Down

Get your dog excited with a happy voice, then stand still and wait for a sit. Reward, then repeat. This teaches calm while excited.

Game 3: The Gift Game

Hand your Lab a toy and praise them for carrying it to you. Practise at the front door until they grab a toy whenever someone arrives.

Calm Greetings at the Door

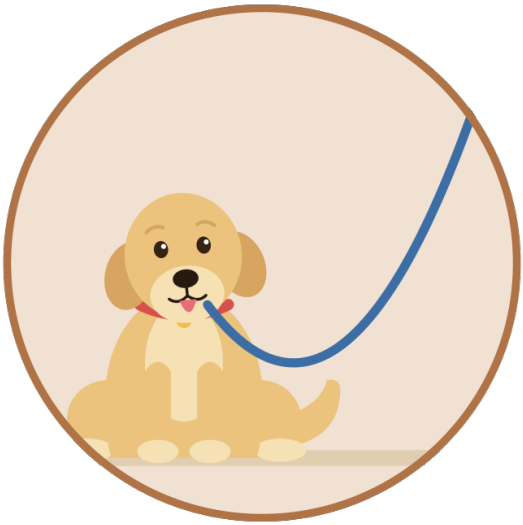
Your Action Plan

- ☐ Set up a gate or lead for every arrival.
- ☐ Drop treats low and early at greetings.
- ☐ Practise five greetings a day with family.
- ☐ Keep a toy basket by the front door.
- ☐ Share the guest rules before visits.



Walks Without the Pulling

In this chapter, you'll learn why your Lab pulls even after years of walks, the right gear to use, and the "Loose Lead Rule" that turns walks into time together instead of an arm workout.





Walks Without the Pulling

Why Labs Pull

- **Everything is exciting:** people, dogs, smells and water.
- **Pulling works:** it gets them where they want to go.
- **We're slow:** a Lab's natural trot is much faster than our walk.
- **Opposition reflex:** when the lead pulls back, dogs lean forward into it.

The Right Gear

- **A well-fitted front-clip harness:** when your Lab pulls, it gently turns them towards you.
- **A fixed lead of about 1.8–2 metres.** Retractable leads teach dogs that pulling makes the lead longer.
- **Small, soft treats** in a pouch.
- **A long line (5–10 metres)** for sniffy, relaxed walks.

Avoid choke chains, prong collars and slip leads. They can hurt the neck and throat.



The Method: The Loose Lead Rule

A loose lead means we go forward. A tight lead means we stop. Everyone who walks your dog must follow it.

Step 1: Find the Reward Zone (Days 1–3)

In the house or garden, reward your Lab every time they're next to your leg. Take a step, reward. Two steps, reward.

Step 2: Red Light, Green Light (Days 3–7)

On a quiet street, walk forward. When the lead goes tight, stop and stand still. When it goes slack, say "yes" and walk on. Short sessions of 5–10 minutes.

Step 3: Turn and Go (Week 2)

When your Lab surges ahead, say "this way!" and turn around. Reward when they catch up.

Step 4: Sniff as a Reward (Weeks 2–3)

After 10–20 steps of nice walking, say "go sniff!" and let them explore. Walking nicely earns sniffing.

Step 5: Add Distractions Slowly (Weeks 3–6)

Move to busier places gradually. If your Lab can't take treats or keep the lead loose, add distance.

Walks Without the Pulling

Two Kinds of Walks

- **Training walks:** short and focused, with the Loose Lead Rule.
- **Freedom walks:** on a long line in a field, with plenty of sniffing, swimming (where safe) and exploring.

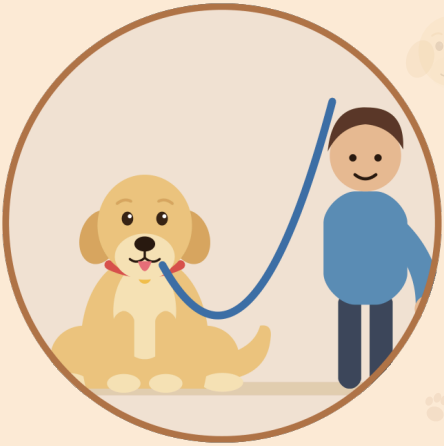
If This Happens

"We stop so much we never get anywhere." Normal at first. Keep training walks short.

"My Lab drags me to every person." Practise calm walking past people at a distance (Chapter 9).

"My dog picks up everything on walks." See "Leave it" and "Drop" in Chapter 11, and bring a toy for them to carry.

See your Loose-Leash Blueprint bonus for a full 3-week plan.



Practice Games

Game 1: Follow Me

In the garden, walk in random directions. Reward your Lab every time they choose to follow you.

Game 2: The Treat Line

Drop a line of treats, one every big step. Walk your dog along it on a loose lead.

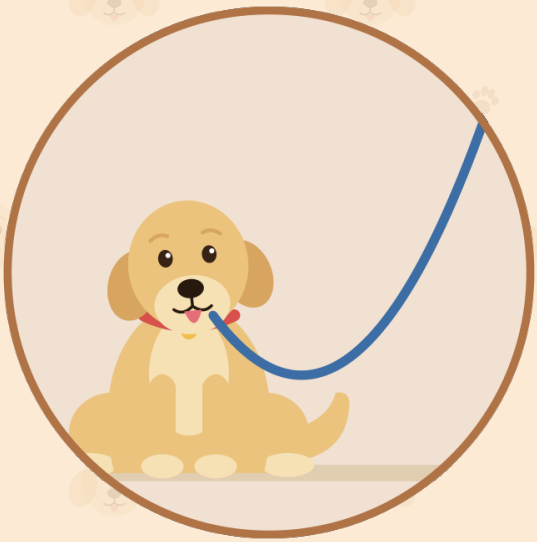
Game 3: Stop and Start

Walk five steps, then stop. Wait for a sit or a look at you, reward, and walk on.



Your Action Plan

- ☐ Get a front-clip harness and a fixed lead.
- ☐ Practise the Reward Zone at home.
- ☐ Use Red Light, Green Light on training walks.
- ☐ Use "go sniff" as a reward.
- ☐ Plan one freedom walk a week on a long line.



Food Drive & Counter Surfing

In this chapter, you'll learn why your Lab steals food from worktops, tables and bins, why telling them off rarely works, and the "Clean Counter Plan" that teaches your Lab to stay calm around food.





Food Drive & Counter Surfing

The Self-Rewarding Habit

Labs are tall enough to reach worktops easily and food-loving enough to try. Every time they find a crust, a butter wrapper or a sandwich, they're rewarded, often more than any treat you could give. That's why counter surfing is so hard to stop: **it pays, sometimes, and that keeps the habit alive.**

Telling your Lab off after they've stolen something doesn't help. They just learn to steal when you're not looking.

The Always-Hungry Lab

Many Lab owners say their dog acts as if they're *always* starving. There's a reason. Research has found that some Labradors carry a gene variant linked to feeling hungrier and burning fewer calories. These dogs aren't being greedy on purpose; their body is telling them to find food.

That means:

- **Management matters more** for Labs than for most breeds. Clear counters, secure bins, and gates around the kitchen.
- **Use their food drive for good.** Paying for good behaviour with part of their daily food makes training fast and easy.
- **Watch their weight closely** (see Chapter 14). Hungry Labs gain weight easily.

Danger Foods

Some foods are toxic to dogs, including chocolate, grapes and raisins, onions, garlic, xylitol (a sweetener found in some sugar-

free foods), macadamia nuts and cooked bones. Counter surfing isn't just annoying; it can be dangerous.

> **If your Lab eats something toxic,** call your vet straight away, even if they seem fine.



The Method: The Clean Counter Plan

Step 1: Remove the Jackpots (Days 1–30)

For the next month, keep counters and tables completely clear. Use a dog-proof bin or keep it in a cupboard. If there's nothing to find, the habit starts to fade.

Step 2: Manage the Kitchen (Days 1–30)

Use a baby gate to keep your Lab out of the kitchen when you can't watch. When you're cooking, put your Lab on their mat with a chew, or behind the gate.

Step 3: Teach "Leave It" (Week 1)

1. Hold a treat in a closed fist. Let your Lab sniff and nudge.
2. When they back off, say "yes" and give a *different* treat from your other hand.
3. Repeat until they back off straight away.
4. Add the words "leave it" just before you present your fist.
5. Progress to an open hand, then a treat on the floor, then a treat on a low table.

Step 4: Mat at Mealtimes (Weeks 1–3)

While you eat or cook, ask your Lab to lie on their mat. Drop treats on the mat every so often for staying there. Never feed from the table or the kitchen counter.

Step 5: "Off" (Weeks 2–3)

If your Lab puts their paws on the counter, say "off" and toss a treat on the floor. Reward four paws on the floor.

Scavenging on Walks

Many Labs hoover up anything they find on walks. Teach:

- **"Leave it"** (as above) before your dog picks something up.
- **"Drop"** if they already have something: offer a high-value treat, say "drop," and reward when they let go.
- **A carry toy** to keep their mouth busy on walks.

Never chase your dog to get something out of their mouth; it turns into a game, and they may swallow it quickly.

If This Happens

"My dog only steals when I leave the room." Management first: gate the kitchen whenever you're not there.

"My dog raids the bin." Use a lockable or cupboard bin.

"My dog won't drop things." Practise the Trade from Chapter 5 every day with toys.



Practice Games

Game 1: The Fist Game

Practise "leave it" with a closed fist for 2 minutes a day, then progress to an open hand.

Game 2: Floor Treats Test

Place a treat on the floor and cover it with your foot. Reward your Lab from your hand when they look away from the foot.

Game 3: Dinner Party Mat

During family meals, reward your Lab for staying on their mat. Start with treats every 30 seconds, and slowly space them out.



Your Action Plan

- ☐ Clear counters and tables for 30 days.
- ☐ Gate the kitchen when you can't supervise.
- ☐ Teach "leave it" this week.
- ☐ Use the mat at every family meal.
- ☐ Learn the danger foods list.



Brain Work & Retrieving Games

In this chapter, you'll learn why brain work is the fastest way to calm a busy Lab, how retriever instincts can be turned into fun games, and the "10-Minute Brain Menu" for every day of the week.





The Underemployed Lab

Labradors were bred to solve problems all day: find the bird, remember where it fell, bring it back. Most pet Labs have nothing to solve. So they invent jobs, like stealing socks, digging, barking or emptying the recycling.

Brain work gives your Lab a real job. It's also one of the best ways to tire them out without overloading growing joints.

Types of Brain Work

- **Sniffing:** scatter feeding, snuffle mats, scent trails.
- **Problem-solving:** puzzle feeders, boxes, toys to unpack.
- **Retrieving:** finding and bringing back named toys.
- **Training:** learning new tricks and cues.
- **Chewing and licking:** calming activities after excitement.



The Method: The 10-Minute Brain Menu

Choose one or two brain activities each day.

Monday: Snuffle Breakfast

Scatter breakfast in a snuffle mat or across the lawn.

Tuesday: Box Party

Put some treats in cardboard boxes and egg cartons (remove tape and staples). Let your Lab rip them open. Supervise so they don't eat the cardboard.

Wednesday: Find the Toy

Show your Lab a toy, then hide it in another room. Say "find it!" Make it harder each week.

Thursday: Trick Time

Teach a new trick: paw, spin, bow, or "tidy up" (putting toys in a basket).

Friday: Scent Trail

Drag a treat along the floor or lawn to make a trail, with a jackpot at the end.

Saturday: Name Game Retrieve

Teach your Lab the names of two toys. Ask for one by name. Celebrate when they bring the right one.

Sunday: Lick and Relax

Frozen lick mat or stuffed toy on the mat, for a calm end to the week.

Teaching the Named Retrieve

1. Hold one toy, say its name ("Duck!") and reward when your Lab touches it. Repeat 10 times.
2. Put the toy on the floor. Say "Duck!" and reward when they pick it up.
3. Add a second toy a little way away. Ask for "Duck!" and reward only the correct one.
4. Slowly add more toys.

Some Labs learn the names of dozens of toys.

If This Happens

"My dog gets frustrated with puzzles." Make them easier at first, so they succeed quickly.

"My dog destroys toys in seconds." Choose tougher toys, and supervise.

"My dog is still hyper after brain games." Add more rest and the Off Switch from Chapter 4.

Practice Games

Game 1: Cup Shuffle

Hide a treat under one of three cups. Let your Lab choose. Slide the cups around as they get better.

Game 2: Tidy Up

Teach your Lab to drop toys into a basket. Reward each one. It's useful and great brain work.

Game 3: Sniff Walk

Once a week, let your Lab choose the route and sniff as much as they like.



Your Action Plan

- ☐ Plan a Brain Menu for this week.
- ☐ Use a snuffle mat or scatter feeding daily.
- ☐ Teach one new trick.
- ☐ Start teaching a named retrieve.
- ☐ Finish each day with a calming lick or chew.



Exercise, Joints & Swimming

In this chapter, you'll learn how much exercise your Lab really needs at each stage of life, why too much of the wrong exercise can harm young joints, and the "Fetch With Rules" approach that keeps ball games fun and safe.



Puppies (up to about 12–18 months)

Labs grow fast, and their joints are still developing. During this time:

- Choose short walks and free play on soft ground.
- Avoid long runs, repeated jumping, lots of stairs, and jumping in and out of the car.
- Let your puppy sniff, explore and rest.
- Ask your vet when it's safe to increase exercise.

Adults (about 1–8 years)

Most adult Labs need 1–2 hours of activity a day, mixed between:

- sniffy walks
- swimming, where safe
- training and brain games
- some play with toys or other dogs

Seniors (about 8+ years)

- Shorter, gentler walks, more often.
- Swimming or hydrotherapy is great for stiff joints.
- Keep the brain busy with easy games.

The Method: Fetch With Rules

Labs love to retrieve. The trick is to make fetch a calm, thinking game instead of a frantic sprint.

Step 1: Sit and Wait

Ask your Lab to sit before you throw. If they leap up, put the ball behind your back.

Step 2: Mark and Send

Throw the ball. Wait a second, then say "get it!" to send them.

Step 3: Bring and Drop

When your Lab returns, ask for "drop" and reward with a treat or another throw.

Step 4: Keep It Short

Five to ten throws, then stop. End with a sniff or a chew.

Step 5: Keep It Low

Roll or throw the ball low along the ground. Avoid high throws and sudden twists that can strain joints.

Exercise, Joints & Swimming

Swimming

Many Labs love water. Swimming is excellent, low-impact exercise.

- Check water is safe: no strong currents, ice or blue-green algae.
- Start in shallow water.
- Rinse and dry your dog afterwards, especially the ears (Chapter 15).

Warning Signs

Stop and check with your vet if you notice:

- limping or stiffness
- reluctance to walk or play
- heavy panting or slowing down in warm weather

Heat: Labs have thick coats and can overheat. Walk early or late in warm weather, carry water, and never leave your dog in a car.

Practice Games

Game 1: Two-Ball Game

Throw one ball. When your Lab comes back, show the second ball and throw it when they drop the first. This builds a good "drop."

Game 2: Hide the Ball

Hide the ball in long grass and let your Lab find it with their nose, instead of chasing.

Game 3: Cool-Down Sniff

After exercise, spend 5 minutes on a slow, sniffy walk before going home.

Your Action Plan

- ☐ Check your Lab's exercise suits their age.
- ☐ Use Fetch With Rules, 5–10 throws per session.
- ☐ Add sniff walks and brain work.
- ☐ Check water safety before swims.
- ☐ Walk at cool times in warm weather.



Keeping Your Lab Lean

In this chapter, you'll learn why Labradors are one of the breeds most prone to weight gain, how to tell if your Lab is carrying extra weight, and the "Lean Lab Plan" for getting to, and staying at, a healthy weight.

Keeping your Lab lean is one of the kindest things you can do for them. Studies in Labradors have linked a lean body to a longer, healthier life.



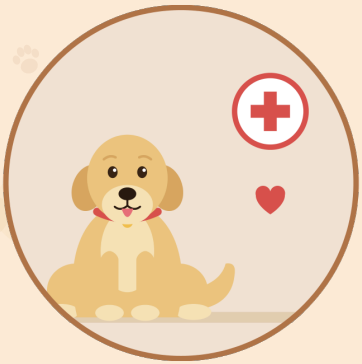
Keeping Your Lab Lean

Why Labs Gain Weight

- **Big appetites:** many Labs are food-obsessed, and some carry a gene variant linked to increased hunger.
- **Treats add up:** training treats, chews and table scraps can easily add hundreds of calories.
- **Less exercise than their ancestors:** working Labs burned huge amounts of energy. Pet Labs often don't.
- **Neutering:** neutered dogs often need fewer calories.
- **"Puppy dog eyes":** Labs are experts at persuading people to share food.

Why It Matters

Extra weight puts pressure on joints, makes arthritis more likely and more painful, and is linked to other health problems. Overweight Labs also find it harder to exercise, which makes weight gain even more likely.



Keeping Your Lab Lean

How to Check Your Lab's Shape

- **Ribs:** you should feel them easily with light pressure, like the back of your hand.
- **Waist:** looking down from above, you should see a clear waist behind the ribs.
- **Tummy tuck:** from the side, the tummy should tuck up behind the ribs.

If you can't feel the ribs easily, or your Lab looks like a tube from above, it's time to talk to your vet.

The Method: The Lean Lab Plan

Step 1: Weigh In

Weigh your Lab at the vet (most practices let you use the scales for free). Ask your vet what a healthy target weight is for your dog.

Step 2: Measure Everything

Use kitchen scales to weigh every meal. Cups and scoops are often inaccurate.

Step 3: Count the Treats

Take your training treats *out of* your dog's daily food allowance. Use part of their kibble as rewards, and choose low-calorie treats like small pieces of carrot or cucumber (check with your vet).

Step 4: Slow Down Meals

Use puzzle feeders, snuffle mats and scatter feeding. Your Lab eats more slowly and burns more energy finding their food.

Step 5: Move a Little More

Add an extra sniffy walk, a swim or a brain game. Small, steady increases are better than sudden long runs.

Step 6: Weigh Monthly

Weigh your Lab every month and write it down. Healthy weight loss is slow and steady. Your vet can advise on a safe rate for your dog.

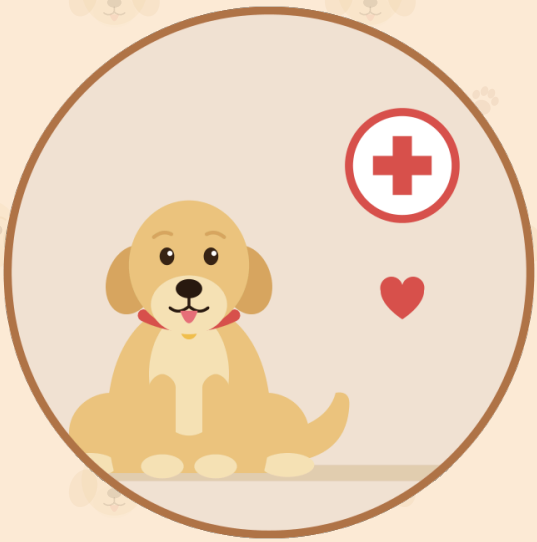
Beg-Proofing Your Home

- **No feeding from the table, ever.** Ask the whole family and visitors to stick to it.
- **Mat at mealtimes:** your Lab lies on their mat during family meals (Chapter 11).
- **Bins and food out of reach.**
- **One person feeds** meals, so your Lab doesn't get fed twice.

> **Sudden weight gain or loss,** or a big change in appetite or thirst, can be a sign of a health problem. Please see your vet.

Your Action Plan

- ☐ Weigh your Lab and ask your vet for a target weight.
- ☐ Weigh every meal with kitchen scales.
- ☐ Take treats out of the daily food allowance.
- ☐ Use puzzle feeders and snuffle mats.
- ☐ Weigh your Lab monthly.



Coat, Ears & Paws

In this chapter, you'll learn how to manage your Lab's shedding, why Lab ears and skin need extra care, and the "After-Swim Routine" that helps prevent hot spots and ear infections.

This chapter is general information, not veterinary advice. Always speak to your vet about your own dog.



Coat, Ears & Paws

The Labrador Coat

Labs have a short, dense double coat: a soft, waterproof undercoat and a slightly harsher outer coat. It's built for swimming in cold water. Labs shed all year, and heavily once or twice a year.

Coat care

- **Brush once or twice a week,** and daily during heavy shedding.
- **Use a rubber curry brush or undercoat rake** to lift loose hair, then a bristle brush to finish.
- **Bathe only when needed,** using a dog shampoo. Too much bathing strips the natural waterproofing oils.
- **Never shave a Lab** unless your vet advises it. The double coat protects against heat and sun.

Lab Ears

Labs have floppy ears that trap warmth and moisture, which can lead to ear infections.

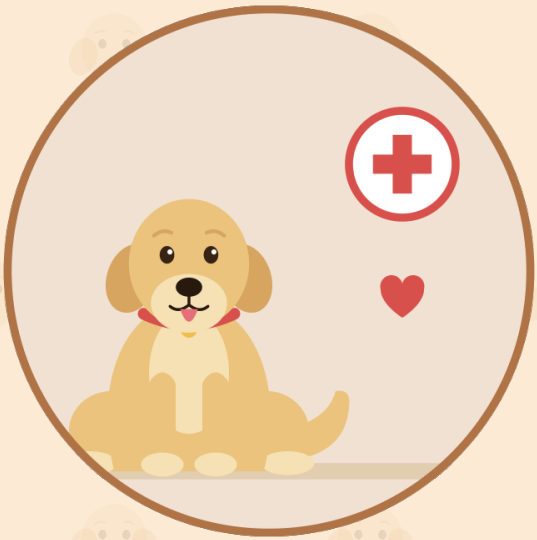
- Check ears weekly.
- After swimming or bathing, dry inside the ear flap gently.
- Clean with a dog ear cleaner your vet recommends, if needed.
- See your vet if you notice redness, smell, discharge, head shaking or scratching.

Lab Skin

Coat, Ears & Paws

Labs can be prone to skin allergies and "hot spots," which are red, moist, sore patches that can appear quickly, often after the coat stays damp.

- Watch for scratching, licking, chewing or red skin.
- Keep up with flea treatment.
- See your vet for skin problems early; they're easier to treat.



The Method: The After-Swim Routine

Step 1: Rinse

After swimming in a lake, river or the sea, rinse your Lab with fresh water.

Step 2: Collar Off

Take off the wet collar so it doesn't trap moisture against the neck.

Step 3: Towel Dry

Towel dry thoroughly, especially the neck, armpits and under the ears.

Step 4: Ears

Gently dry inside the ear flaps with a soft towel or cotton wool.

Step 5: Brush When Dry

Once dry, brush out the coat so the undercoat doesn't stay damp against the skin.

Nails, Teeth & Paws

- **Nails:** trim every 2–4 weeks, or when they click on the floor.
- **Teeth:** brush a few times a week with dog toothpaste.
- **Paws:** trim the fur between the pads, and check for grass seeds after walks.

Your Action Plan

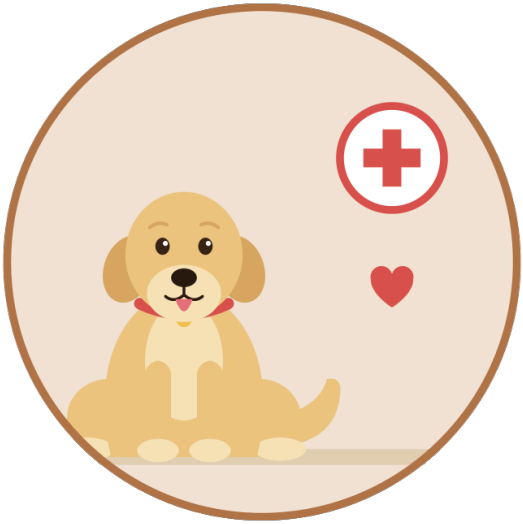
- ☐ Brush 2–3 times this week.
- ☐ Check ears weekly.
- ☐ Start the After-Swim Routine.
- ☐ Check skin for redness or hot spots while brushing.
- ☐ Trim nails and check paws.



Health Through the Years

In this chapter, you'll learn the health issues that are more common in Labradors, the warning signs to watch for, and the "Monthly Lump Check" that helps you spot changes early.

Most Labradors live around 10–12 years. Good care helps you make the most of every year. This chapter is general information, not veterinary advice.



Common Lab Health Issues

- **Hip and elbow problems:** look for stiffness, limping, "bunny hopping" or difficulty getting up.
- **Knee (cruciate) injuries:** sudden lameness in a back leg, especially after running or twisting, needs a vet check.
- **Weight-related problems:** extra weight makes joint problems, arthritis and other conditions more likely (Chapter 14).
- **Exercise-induced collapse:** some young, fit Labs develop wobbly back legs or collapse after very intense exercise. Stop exercise straight away and see your vet. A DNA test is available.
- **Ear infections:** floppy ears trap moisture (Chapter 15).
- **Lumps:** Labs often get fatty lumps as they age, but any new lump should be checked by your vet.
- **Eye problems:** cloudiness, redness or bumping into things should be checked.

Keep Your Lab Lean

See Chapter 14 for the full Lean Lab Plan.

The Method: The Monthly Lump Check

Step 1: Pick a Date

Choose the same day each month.

Step 2: Head to Tail

Run your hands slowly over your Lab's whole body: head, neck, chest, legs, belly, armpits and tail.

Step 3: Write It Down

Note any lumps, with their size and location. Many owners take a photo.

Step 4: Check Changes

Compare with last month. Any new, growing or changing lump should be checked by your vet.

Step 5: Look and Listen

Check eyes, ears, teeth and gums. Notice appetite, thirst, breathing and energy.

> **See your vet promptly** for new lumps, unexplained weight loss, pale gums, a swollen belly, collapse, breathing problems or sudden lethargy.

Life Stages

Puppy (up to about 12–18 months)

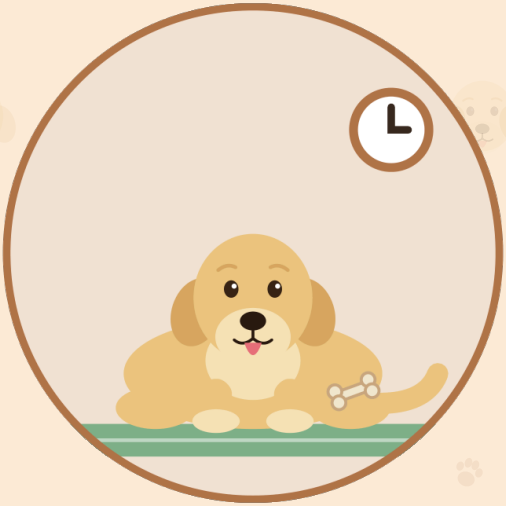
Vaccinations, parasite control and microchipping as your vet advises. Gentle exercise while joints grow.

Adult (about 1–8 years)

Yearly check-ups. Lean weight, daily brain work, and regular grooming.

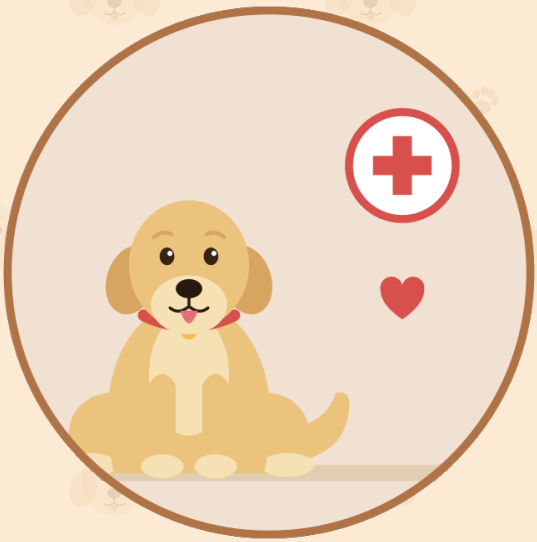
Senior (about 8+ years)

Many vets recommend check-ups every 6 months. Soft beds, rugs on slippery floors, ramps for the car, shorter walks, and plenty of gentle brain games.



Your Action Plan

- ☐ Do your first Monthly Lump Check this week.
- ☐ Do the rib and waist check.
- ☐ Book your Lab's next vet check-up.
- ☐ Measure meals and count treats.
- ☐ Add rugs to slippery floors for older dogs.



20 Popular Questions Answered

1. Why does my Lab follow me everywhere? Labs were bred to work closely with people. Build independence with the mat and gates (Chapters 4 and 7).

2. Why does my Lab carry everything? It's the retriever instinct. Give them legal things to carry (Chapter 1).

3. When will my Lab calm down? Many settle between 2 and 3 years old. Teach calm with the Off Switch (Chapter 4).

4. How much exercise does my Lab need? Most adults need 1–2 hours a day of mixed activity, including sniffing and brain work.

5. Why does my Lab bite my hands? Mouthing is normal in Labs. Use the Soft Mouth Plan (Chapter 5).



20 Popular Questions Answered

6. Is it too late to train my adult Lab? Never. Start with the 14-Day Fresh Start (Chapter 2).

7. Why does my Lab jump on everyone? They love people. Use the Four Paws Welcome (Chapter 9).

8. Should my Lab sleep in a crate? A covered crate in a quiet spot helps many Labs rest well (Chapter 6).

9. Why does my Lab pull on the lead? Excitement and the opposition reflex. Use the Loose Lead Rule (Chapter 10).

10. Why does my Lab steal food? Because it pays. Follow the Clean Counter Plan (Chapter 11).



20 Popular Questions Answered

11. Is ball throwing bad? Not in moderation. Use Fetch With Rules (Chapter 13).

12. Can Labs live with cats? Many do, with slow, careful introductions and supervision.

13. Are Labs good with children? Often, with supervision and clear rules.

14. How often should I brush my Lab? Two to three times a week, daily during heavy shedding.

15. Why does my Lab get ear infections? Floppy ears trap moisture. Dry ears after swimming (Chapter 15).



20 Popular Questions Answered

16. Why is my Lab always hungry? Many Labs have a big appetite, and some carry a gene linked to hunger. Use puzzle feeders and measure meals.

17. Is my Lab overweight? If you can't easily feel the ribs or see a waist, follow the Lean Lab Plan (Chapter 14).

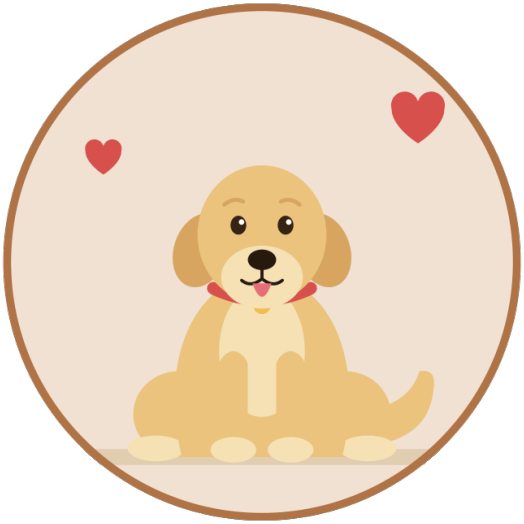
18. What should I do if I find a lump? Note it and get it checked by your vet.

19. Why does my Lab roll in smelly things? It's natural dog behaviour. Practise recall and "leave it" on walks.

20. When should I see a behaviourist? If your dog growls, snaps, bites, guards seriously, panics when alone, or isn't improving after several weeks.



A Final Word



Take a moment to look at your Labrador. Maybe they're carrying a slipper around, wagging that thick otter tail, or snoring on your feet.

Everything they do comes from a dog who was built to work with people, to carry things gently, and to love their family with their whole heart. None of the jumping, mouthing or stealing is your dog trying to be naughty. It's a happy, clever retriever waiting to be shown what to do.

Pick one chapter. Follow the method. Play the games. Tick off the action plan. Then pick the next.

Small steps, done every day, build a calm, gentle Lab, and a friendship that lasts a lifetime.