



Caring for your pet greyhound

Thank you for wishing to share your home with a retired greyhound and welcome to the pet greyhound community!

This booklet aims to support you in your journey with your new family addition to help with the transition period to successfully settle your greyhound in at home and to provide you with an outline of how best to care for your greyhound throughout their life with you. Please keep it in a safe place as it may be useful to refer to again and again over the coming months and years.

For further information about the Irish Retired Greyhound Trust and our work, how to support us and about greyhounds as pets, please visit our website at www.irgt.ie or contact us via irgt@grireland.ie or 061 448089.

Your responsibilities as a dog owner

- To keep your greyhound in a sound and healthy condition, ensuring qualified veterinary treatment is given when necessary, and appropriate regular veterinary healthcare.
- To be responsible for the welfare of your greyhound at all times and not cause or permit anybody else to cause the greyhound unnecessary suffering.
- To abide by all other requirements of the law relating to dogs including:
 - a. Picking up after your greyhound in public areas.
 - b. To have a dog license for your greyhound at all times.
 - c. To ensure your greyhound wears a collar with your address and contact details on at all times.
 - d. To ensure your contact details as the registered keeper of your greyhound are kept up to date with the Irish Coursing Club (ICC) with regards their microchip should you change address/phone number etc (these will be changed over to your contact details by IRGT at the point of adoption).

Introducing your greyhound to your home

When you first come home with your greyhound, take them for a short walk before taking them indoors, especially if you've had quite a distance to travel. This gives them a chance to go to the toilet and begin getting a feel for their new surroundings.

When you come home, bring them inside and keep them on the lead whilst they explore their new home. After a few minutes, take them out to the garden (if you have one, or take them outside) and when they toilet, give them lots of praise and a small treat. Once indoors again, let them off the lead to explore by themselves.

Once an hour or so, let them out into the garden (or take them out on the lead again if you don't have a garden) to give them opportunity to toilet. Repeat this throughout their first day or two at home and give them lots of praise, and a small treat, every time they relieve themselves outdoors. This helps them to learn where they should 'go' and gives ample opportunity for them to get it right, avoiding any accidents in the home.

If you do have the odd accident, NEVER punish your greyhound. If you catch them doing it and can get them to stop, immediately take them outside and when they 'go' give them lots of praise and a treat. If you cannot get them to stop, as soon as they are finished, take them outside, and if they go again at that point, give them lots of praise and a treat. Greyhounds are not generally difficult to housetrain as they are very clean in their kennels once they know the routine. They are keen to please people and will learn quickly where they should toilet. Punishing a dog could make them fearful of you and make the issue worse. Developing a trusting bond with your greyhound, especially during these early days, it's extremely important.

Like us, each greyhound is an individual and will settle in their own time, getting used to household items they may never have come across before, such as the TV, washing machine, vacuum cleaner, and doorbell. For most greyhounds who won't have been in a home before, they are getting to know a whole new way of life in a completely new environment, with new people, and a whole new routine. Patience and kindness are key to helping them settle and find their way. Signs of anxiety can include panting, pacing, whining, not wanting to eat or drink, an upset stomach, and potentially destructiveness. However, these signs should begin to settle during the first day or two and for overnight, some greyhounds respond well to a night light being left on for them, or a radio on low volume to help them adjust where they aren't sleeping with a person or another dog in the room with them.

Collars and harnesses

You will have been provided with a collar and lead as part of your rehoming pack with your greyhound, which will either comprise a martingale collar, or a leather 'fishtail' collar. These are special collars used with sighthounds owing to the nature of their long necks and ability to generate great power and speed over a short distance. These collars are wider than a regular dog collar, and need to be fitted carefully to ensure they cannot slip over the greyhound's head. A fishtail collar should be positioned at the top of the neck behind the ears and jaw, tight enough so as not to be able to come over the ears, but also ensuring the greyhound can breathe and swallow. The Care Centre team will show you how to fit your dog's collar correctly.

IRGT does not support the use of extendable leads as these can be extremely dangerous both to dogs and to people and have been known to cause significant injuries. If you would like to give your greyhound more freedom on a walk together we recommend the use of a long line, which come in a variety of lengths, used together with a harness. A long line should never be used with a collar.

If you decide to buy a harness for your greyhound at any stage, these can be a great tool to use as an alternative, or in addition, to a collar (used with a double ended lead – one end attached to the harness and the other to the collar). When choosing a harness, be sure to buy a design that does not affect the dog's movement. Many harnesses have horizontal straps across the chest which limit shoulder movement and can cause physical issues and pain. It is also important to consider the length of a greyhound's body and any straps coming down behind the foreleg, making sure the strap isn't rubbing or cutting into a greyhound's delicate skin. There are lots

of great options available, and if in doubt, please do contact IRGT, speak to your vet, a canine physiotherapist, or a dog trainer.

We have found the following brands to be well designed for greyhounds: Haqihana (in particular their long length and 'Double H' options which work well with a greyhound's body shape), Perfect Fit, and Blue-9 Balance harness.

Muzzles

As a retired greyhound, your dog will be used to wearing a muzzle, and may equate it with positive activities such as going out for a walk.

IRGT strongly recommends that your greyhound should wear a muzzle in situations where they may come across unfamiliar dogs, such as your local park, until they are well socialised with other breeds of dogs of all sizes.

The Care Centre team will show you how to fit a muzzle for your greyhound.

Food and water

Water

Fresh water should be available at all times for your greyhound and should be changed or topped up as needed but at least daily. Water bowls/vessels should be kept clean.

Feeding

Pet greyhounds can eat a complete commercial dog food just as other pet dogs do and there are many options available in pet stores to match the individual needs of a greyhound and the lifestyle and budget of greyhound's owner. The Care Centre team will advise you on what your greyhound has been fed whilst in their care.

We advise the use of raised food and water bowls. It's a long way to reach down to the floor for these tall dogs, and it can become a greater challenge for them as they age. Pet stores offer a range of raised bowl stand options, or an upturned plant pot, bucket or a step can also be perfect to put a bowl on.

Treats

We all love a treat from time to time! Treats can be great to use in training, and to help in building the bond with your greyhound so that they associate you with positive things. They're also great to use as part of enrichment activities for your greyhound, scattering small treats in a snuffle mat, or inside a rolled up towel for them to find – or thrown into an unwanted cardboard box full of scrunched up paper and loo rolls, etc (if you don't mind a bit of mess if they rip up the paper and the box). Kongs and lickimats can also be great to keep your dog occupied while not sleeping or engaging with you. As with us humans, don't forget to factor treats into your dog's daily food intake as too many treats could cause them to gain weight, or could upset their stomach.

How much to feed

Feeding the correct amount of food is vitally important to maintain your greyhound's health. Being overweight can cause health issues just as being underweight can, not least through joint issues and added strain on the heart and lungs.

Commercial dog feeds provide a guide of how much to feed based on a dog's weight, however, as every dog is an individual this is just a guide. On a greyhound with an ideal body condition score you will just about be able to make out their last 3 ribs towards their hind end and be able to feel but not see those closer to their head when resting your hands on their rib cage. If in any doubt, always check with your vet. If your greyhound seems to be losing or gaining a lot of weight quickly do contact your vet for a check up.

Just as with humans, an individual dog's nutritional needs do change over time, and unlike other breeds of dog who generally gain weight as they age, greyhounds will usually lose weight as they have so little body fat and will lose muscle mass as they get older.

Warning – Be careful not to allow your greyhound to eat onions, chocolate, raisins, grapes, or any medicines. Depending on the individual greyhound, just one raisin could kill even a large dog. If you think your greyhound may have eaten something they shouldn't, call your vet IMMEDIATELY.

Never allow dogs to go through bins or scavenge whilst out and about and don't leave food out on counter tops/tables as a greyhound may be able to reach and could eat things they shouldn't.

Changing your greyhound's food/diet

Changing your dog's diet to a new feed can be necessary for a variety of reasons, not least to help keep them interested in meal times (who wants to eat the same thing all the time?!). If feeding a dry kibble diet, adding some wet food can make meals more interesting, or mixing in some tinned sardines (in tomato not brine so as not to be too salty) can be a great way to also support a dog's joints, coat and skin health.

If feeding a commercial dry or wet food, always transition from one feed to the new one gradually over the course of a few days to a week, to support your dog's digestive system in getting used to the new food. Switching straight from one to the other, or switching too quickly, could cause an upset stomach and loose stools.

House Training your greyhound

Further to the guidance given under the section 'Introducing your greyhound to your home' it is important to anticipate when your greyhound may need to go to the toilet. These may include first thing in the morning, immediately following a meal, after playing, and at bedtime as well as regular intervals throughout the day.

Like us, greyhounds will struggle to hold their bladder for prolonged periods, which can lead to accidents in the home if they are left too long without a toilet break and could also lead to health issues long term. As well as being social animals, this is one of the reasons IRGT recommends greyhounds are not left for more than four hours without a break.

Behaviours your greyhound may exhibit when they need to toilet may include restlessness, pacing, whining, circling, passing wind, intense sniffing, staring at or scratching at the door. Any accidents in the home should be cleaned thoroughly to remove the mess and smell and to deter your greyhound from repeating the behaviour in that spot. There are a range of products available in supermarkets and pet stores, or you can use a solution of biological washing liquid.

'Freezing' behaviour

There is a huge amount for our greyhounds to adapt and get used to as they settle in at home with us – a new home, new people, a new routine and lifestyle, and many new things out and about in the environment for them to see and learn not to be worried about.

Initially, there is so much that is new to a greyhound when they first go into a home that they don't always see or react to objects or situations that might later concern them, and it can be months after going into a home that adopters report a greyhound 'freezing' during a walk when a greyhound plants their feet and refuses to move, or does not wish to walk in a certain direction. Please note, this is not 'stubbornness' or 'dominant' behaviour as we sometimes hear, but actually a fear response as there is something your greyhound is concerned about and is uncomfortable walking towards or past. You may never know what it is but it's important to always be patient and kind with your greyhound. The body language guide below will help you identify how they might be feeling.

Remain calm, relaxed, and confident as your greyhound will use your behaviour also as a guide (one of the reasons it is so important to build a strong and trusting bond with your greyhound) and encourage them to continue (unless they appear very frightened – again, please see below). If they remain reluctant to move, and you can see what concerns them, try and move them away from it and see if they are happier to walk around or past it from a greater distance, or give them some time to look at it and understand that whatever it is, it's not a threat to them. If, after some time, they still don't want to move in that direction, try moving in a different direction. As they gain confidence and their relationship with you continues to develop, this issue should gradually ease. If it doesn't, please see the section below with regards where to seek support. Never drag or try to force your greyhound into a situation they are clearly very frightened of or uncomfortable in – you could seriously damage the trust and bond with your greyhound and may provoke a strong response from them (think 'fight or flight' – freeze is the third aspect of a fear response, especially if there is no way of escape if a greyhound is on a lead).

Communication – body language and behaviour

Greyhounds are fantastically intelligent dogs that love to do things with their families/owners. They tend to learn differently from many other breeds of dog and are occasionally accused of being 'stubborn' by some people. However, once your greyhound understands why you need them to do something, i.e. what's 'in it for them,' they are often very quick learners, and you may find you inadvertently teach your greyhound (and they you!) many things as you share your lives together.

As dogs are unable to speak the same language as us and communicate mainly through their body language it's important to have some basic understanding of some of the signals we might see. It will also help you interact safely and appropriately with other dogs you might see or meet outside of your home. Establishing a good understanding of canine body language is important to:

- Build a stronger bond with your greyhound
- Help you in better communicating with them
- Avoid potential misunderstandings which could lead to conflict with your dog
- Identify signs of stress or discomfort for your dog so that you can give them the right support/space needed to help them in a situation, supporting their overall health and quality of life.

Each dog is an individual, just like we are, so watching your own dog and learning the cues they use will teach you a lot about your greyhound as they settle in at home with you. Canine body language is not an exact science, so it is important to take a holistic approach, considering a dog's whole body language in context to gauge any tension, what they are focusing on, etc. to gain an understanding of how they might be feeling. Below are a few signs that could give clues as to how a dog is feeling:

Feeling relaxed/neutral

- Body is soft and relaxed rather than tense and guarded
- Ears are in a relaxed, neutral position
- Eyes are soft, whites of the eye can't usually be seen
- Tail is in a neutral position, generally static (many greyhounds are not big 'tail waggers')
- The mouth is soft and relaxed, it can be closed or partially open, or the dog may be panting if they are warm. The tip of the tongue may be seen over the bottom teeth if the mouth is open.

Feeling playful

- The body is in a soft posture, with the mouth soft and open and tongue lolling.
- Ears are usually neutral or may be pinned back depending on the level of excitement during play.
- To initiate or continue play behaviour, a dog will often go into a play bow position, with the front of their body bowing down low with the front paws out in front of them and their bottom up in the air.
- Tail may be wagging in broad sweeping wags (watch out for the whip action if it catches you!)

Feeling stressed or nervous

- The dog may be lean their weight backwards, away from what is causing the stress or concern they may turn their body or head away from it.
- You may see repeated quick licks of the lips or nose with the tongue.
- Tail is usually held low, the tip may wag.
- Eyes are wide and the whites of the eyes may be visible (known as 'whale eye').
- Ears may be pinned flat to the head and pulled back if the greyhound is very nervous/fearful or may be help forward if they are fixing their attention on whatever it is that is worrying them.
- They may exhibit 'displacement' behaviours to ease tension from a situation, such as suddenly finding a very interesting place to sniff, or stopping to toilet, if they are unsure in a situation.
- They may pace up and down.
- Panting can also be a sign of pain or stress.

Fearful or in pain:

- You may see repeated quick licks of the lips or nose with the tongue.
- Eyes are wide and the whites of the eyes may be visible (known as 'whale eye').
- Ears may be pinned flat to the head and pulled back if the greyhound is very nervous/fearful or may be help forward if they are fixing their attention on whatever it is that is worrying them.
- They may exhibit 'displacement' behaviours to ease tension from a situation, such as suddenly finding a very interesting place to sniff, or stopping to toilet, if they are unsure in a situation.
- Their tail may be tucked between their back legs, possibly all the way up and under their body.
- They may pace up and down.
- Panting can also be a sign of pain or stress.

Aggressive or angry:

- The body is held in a tense posture and the dog may be preparing to spring forward (or may already be lunging forward).
- Depending on the level of emotion, the mouth may tightly closed and tense and you may see a very brief tongue flick over the teeth. Or the lips could be lifted, baring the teeth and the dog may also be growling or barking.
- The dog may have a direct, hard, stare in the direction of what is making them angry or aggressive.

Where to find the right help if you feel you need it

Should you need any help with regards your adopted greyhound's behaviour please contact IRGT in the first instance, dropping a line either to the Care Centre from which you adopted your greyhound, or the IRGT office.

Challenging behaviours can also be discussed with your vet who may be able to help or recommend a local dog trainer or behaviour consultant.

Please note, dog trainers and behaviour consultants are not regulated in Ireland, so it is extremely important to find a professional with relevant training who will work with you and your dog using appropriate methods based on the latest scientific understanding. No dog should ever be set up to fail in a training or behaviour situation, and IRGT does not endorse or support the use of outdated aversive 'dominance theory' training methods which have long since been replaced with kinder, safer, and more effective methods of training and behaviour modification. Any dog trainer or behaviourist who is affiliated with the IMDT (Institute of Modern Dog Training) or IAABC (International Association of Animal Behaviour Consultants) will have demonstrated their continued commitment to continuing their development and training to ensure they use the latest scientifically proven methods to work with you and your greyhound.

Greyhounds and children

Many greyhounds are used to being around children and love to play and have fun with them. Their gentle and fun nature can make them ideal for family life, and our greyhounds are carefully assessed to consider their suitability for living with children of different ages. It is important to remember though that greyhounds haven't likely lived in a home with children before, so it is very important that greyhounds have a space of their own that is respected by all members of the family that they can go to for rest and quiet time without being disturbed.

Warning – young children should NEVER be left unsupervised with a dog.

It is very important to ensure that play does not become too rough between a child and a greyhound, and that both adults and children in a home are mindful of a dog's body language to avoid situations of unwanted attention to a dog from a child.

We would advise children not be allowed to play with a dog's toys and to try and keep their toys away from your greyhound. Should your greyhound pick up a toy belonging to your child it is important to swap the toy for something more exciting to them, for example a treat or one of their own toys. It can be easy to act without thinking and try and force the toy (or other object) from your greyhound's mouth, however, they might see it as a game and refuse to give the toy, or they could view it as confrontational which could lead to a conflict situation such as biting or snapping behaviour.

Greyhounds and cats

Greyhounds have been bred for thousands of years for their chase instinct and are fast enough to catch small animals such as cats, or birds such as chickens, if a chase situation does arise. With careful, positive, and appropriate training some greyhounds can be trained to live with the right cat. However, this is not the case for the majority of greyhounds and so cat/other small animal trainable greyhounds are in the minority.

Each greyhound is an individual and we work to assess them on that basis, working to match their needs and characters to the home and lifestyle being offered by potential adopters.

IRGT will work to safely and responsibly expose those individual greyhounds we believe may be cat trainable to cats in a variety of situations whilst they are in our care. If you are adopting a greyhound from us and you have a cat at home, we advise the following careful steps to help your greyhound and your cat settle gradually and happily together once we believe we have found the suitable greyhound for you:

Initially, introductions need to be carefully managed and controlled. It's much easier to ensure a good start than try and repair a damaged relationship from a poor start. A greyhound joining a home with an existing cat should have a space of their own away from the cat initially. Avoid shutting them in one room or giving them too small a space so as to avoid potential issues with frustration. Likewise, do not force your cat to remain indoors.

Pheromone diffusers can potentially help keep both a cat and a greyhound calm during this process and are available to buy – please note, however, that cats and dogs need different products. Do liaise with your vet or local pet store for further details.

Scent swapping

Scent swapping gives opportunity for each animal to gradually acclimatise to each other's scent without being overwhelmed by the presence of the unfamiliar animal. To begin the process, take two clean cloths – one for your cat and one for your greyhound. Rub the cloth along your cat's scent glands in their cheeks. For the greyhound, rub the other cloth along their flanks and in their armpits. Place each cloth with the other animal, so put the cloth wiped over the cat's cheeks in the space with the greyhound and vice versa, allowing them to sniff the cloth. Gauge their reactions as this will give an indication of how an introduction might go.

Don't be tempted to rush this process, undertaking it daily for a number of days, keeping the scents topped up by repeating the rubbing process once per day until each animal is responding calmly to the smell of the other on the cloth in their space.

Introduction behind a barrier (such as a glass door or baby gate)

Ensure two people are present, one for the cat and one for the greyhound. The greyhound should be on a lead and wearing a muzzle for safety as added precautions. Ensure the cat has an escape route if they wish to run away such as an open window, or somewhere to climb or hide. Never force the cat to remain in the situation in a closed room or in a cat carrier etc as this is likely to make it a negative experience for them.

The cat with one person would be one side of the glass door or baby gate, and the greyhound and the other person, holding the lead, should be on the other so that both animals can see each other, but not get to each other. These interactions should be short and built up over time as the animals get used to seeing each other. Calm, relaxed, quiet reactions to each other are what is needed.

To avoid the greyhound fixating on the cat, the greyhound helper can distract and engage with them as needed. Try to end each session on a positive note, even if it is only 1 or 2 minutes long. As the reactions of the cat and the greyhound go well as the process is repeated over several days, so the length of these sessions can be increased by a little each time.

Introduction with no barrier

Again, two people are needed, one for the cat and one for the greyhound. This time, remove the barrier (baby gate or open the glass door) and keep the greyhound on the lead and wearing a muzzle as a precaution. Keep the situation calm and relaxed and look for signs of stress from either the cat or the greyhound.

Signs of stress in a cat include: backing away, ears down, hissing or swiping, wide pupils.

Signs of predatory behaviour in greyhounds include: vocalisation, lunging, snapping, fixating on the cat, especially any movement from the cat.

Again, keep these interactions very short initially and build them up over time giving both the cat and the greyhound treats and gentle praise. Repeat the process over several days, increasing the duration if all is progressing well, removing the muzzle when you are confident it is appropriate to do so, and eventually allowing the greyhound off the lead with the cat if both continue to exhibit calm and relaxed behaviour during sessions.

Signs of relaxed behaviour in a cat: ears forward, relaxed body posture

Signs of relaxed behaviour in a greyhound: slow moving, relaxed body posture, not fixating/staring, ears in a neutral position (i.e. not pulled back or alert).

Greyhound Health and health checks

Maintaining your greyhound's health and welfare is a key responsibility as their owner. Below we outline some of the key areas to consider. You should always seek veterinary advice if you have any concerns about your greyhound's health.

Neutering

All IRGT dogs are neutered prior to adoption to avoid unwanted litters and behaviours, and to also safeguard against a range of health issues.

Vaccinations, parasite control and regular health checks

Greyhounds adopted via the IRGT will be fully vaccinated and will come with their pet passport containing details of their vaccinations and expiry dates. It is important to keep your greyhound's annual booster vaccinations up to date with your vet, who can also undertake a full health check for your greyhound when you visit to check for any potentially underlying health concerns. For further information please visit our website at www.irgt.ie.

Parasite control is extremely important as parasites can affect the health and welfare of your greyhound, and in many cases they can be passed on to humans and other animals your greyhound comes into contact with. Please do view the videos available on www.irgt.ie for further details. Parasites can include:

- **fleas** (you may see tiny black bugs jumping off your dog or on you/your furniture or 'flea dirt' – little black bits in your dog's coat as you separate their fur). Hoovering your house, washing pet bedding on a hot wash, and various sprays and other products are available from pet stores to help rid your home of fleas, in addition to spot on treatments available from your vet.
- **Ticks** are usually grey/brown in colour and burrow into your dog's (or human/other animal's) skin. They can look a bit like little seeds or tags and must never be pulled off as the head will likely be left embedded in the dog's skin which could cause an infection. Special tick tools are fairly cheap to buy from pet stores or your vet, and slot under the tick's head. Twist the tool anti clockwise until the tick comes away from your dog's skin. As ticks can carry Lyme's Disease, another condition that can be passed to humans and other animals, it's very important to be vigilant checking your dog and removing them as soon as you can.
- A variety of species of **worms** can affect your greyhound's health, and can be transferred to humans and other animals. You may see worms in your greyhound's faeces when they toilet, or you may notice they are very hungry but are losing weight.

Do liaise with your vet as there are a variety of options available to work to prevent, and to treat these unwanted passengers.

Regular checks to undertake at home

It is important to ensure your greyhound sees the vet at least once per year to keep their booster vaccinations up to date, and to check for any underlying issues as well as providing any advice as needed regarding your

greyhound's health and any changes you might be seeing as they get older (please see the section on 'The Aging Greyhound' later in this booklet).

Whilst greyhounds are generally low maintenance when it comes to grooming, it is important to check your greyhound regularly and ensure their nails aren't getting too long, ears are clean, etc. Dental hygiene is also very important and is discussed in the next section.

Ears

Ears can get dirty and so to clean them we gently wipe around the folds inside and the flap of the ear with ear wipes from a pet store or using cotton wool balls with a little bit of salt water on them (note: don't soak a cotton wool ball in water as the water will travel down the ear canal causing discomfort and a rigorous head shake from your dog!).

If the ears smell, have a lot of dirt in them or any discharge, if your greyhound is shaking their head or trying to scratch at their ears, this could signal a health issue and the need for your greyhound to see the vet.

Always be gentle handling the ears as they can be very sensitive.

Eyes

Eyes should be clear with some occasional clear discharge/crust. If the eyes are cloudy, have any redness or an unusual, excessive or opaque discharge, or if your greyhound is trying to scratch their face more than usual, we would advise you to book an appointment with your vet for them to take a look.

Skin/Coat

Once settled in a home, greyhounds rarely need to be bathed (regular bathing can also strip important oils from a dog's coat so unless they have rolled in something smelly this shouldn't be a regular need – most greyhounds don't like to get wet never mind dirty!). If you do bathe your greyhound, do ensure they are dried as quickly as possible and have somewhere nice and warm to be, to ensure they do not get cold owing to their thin coat and lack of body fat.

After they lose their fluffier and thicker kennel coat/fur after coming home, often greyhounds will only need brushing when the seasons change, to remove their slightly thicker coat from winter to warmer weather and going into the winter months. A weekly brush during these periods is usually sufficient. When choosing a brush do consider they have a thin, short coat and have a few bony points to avoid so try not to use a brush with hard bristles, or some greyhounds love a grooming mitt which can also work well to remove excess fur.

Should your greyhound's skin have any sore areas or very flaky skin all the time (note: some greyhounds will become a bit 'flaky' and have dandruff temporarily if they are a bit stressed – whilst they are at the vet for example), or if their coat is dull even after any excess fur has been brushed away, and/or if your greyhound has a 'doggy' or yeast-like smell, do discuss this with your vet.

Bald patches on the thighs and belly are common, and can sometimes alleviate over time as the greyhound settles in at home, and/or with fish supplements such as salmon oil or tinned sardines (in tomato sauce not brine as it's too salty) in their food.

Feet/Nails

Do check your greyhound's feet regularly for cuts on their pads or anything stuck between their toes, any dry skin etc. Their pads may need moisturising occasionally to avoid cracks and splits depending on how much road/pavement walking they do. Paw balm products are available in many pet stores or Sudocrem can also help (be mindful not to use too much as your greyhound will likely lick it too!).

Ensuring nails are the correct length is extremely important so that your greyhound can stand and move correctly without affecting their weight distribution (too long nails pushes them onto the backs of their paws and can affect their health long term). Like us humans, if the nail is cut too short it can be very painful and bleed, so it's important to take small amounts (as little as 1-2mm) off the nail regularly. As the nail gets shorter so the sensitive part, the quick, recedes and becomes smaller. In a white nail it is possible to see the quick (it's the pink area near the base of the nail), but in dark nails we cannot see it. Nail clippers or battery powered nail grinders are available from pet stores, but if in doubt, or if your greyhound is nervous having their nails cut, do seek advice from your vet or from a dog groomer, who can cut your dog's nails for you, and/or show you how to do it yourself at home.

Dental hygiene and teeth cleaning

Just as for us humans, a greyhound's dental health is vitally important.

- Dental disease in greyhounds is very common, particularly amongst older dogs.
- Dental disease is caused by the numerous bacteria that live in the mouth and their interaction with the greyhound's immune system.
- As with humans, dental disease can be extremely painful.
- Infection in the mouth can be spread around the body through the bloodstream leading to major health problems if dental issues are left untreated.

The best way to prevent dental disease and keep your greyhound's mouth healthy is by brushing their teeth every day - and don't forget to brush the teeth at the back of their mouth too! Whilst a human toothbrush is ideal for greyhounds, don't use human toothpaste to clean your dog's teeth as it can be toxic, there are lots of options for doggie toothpastes at your local pet store.

As your greyhound settles in at home with you and you develop a bond and trust between you, you can begin getting them used to you brushing their teeth.

Signs of poor dental health in dogs

- If your greyhound has poor dental health you might find that they are not keen on engaging or participating in activities - they may have gradually become more grumpy over time.
- Your greyhound may exhibit bad breath.
- Your greyhound's teeth may have brown stains or the build up of plaque, especially at the gum line.
- The gums may appear pink and puffy, with brighter pink areas or redness at the base of the tooth. Such gum disease can be present even if the teeth themselves look nice, clean and white.
- You may notice the gum line receding, and the teeth seeming to grow longer - it's actually the root of the tooth becoming visible.
- When brushing your greyhound's teeth you might notice blood on the toothbrush or in your greyhound's mouth - or when they play with their toys you may notice spots of red or pink where they have been holding the toy in their mouth.

Poor dental health does not always result in a greyhound being unwilling to eat or drink so if you see any of the signs above it's time to visit your vet with your greyhound to seek advice.

Bones and teeth

There are many views around giving dogs bones to help clean their teeth and whilst bones can be a tasty treat for dogs and do help keep teeth clean there are potentially significant hazards to consider. Raw, meaty bones can be messy, and cooked bones can fragment and cause internal damage. Other potential issues include dental fractures, constipation, and internal blockages. Dogs should always be supervised if given a bone to chew, and in multi-dog households, dogs should be separated from each other when bones are given to avoid potential conflicts between individual dogs.

If you're keen to give your greyhound a bone, do seek advice from your vet. Ultimately, the most reliable way to keep teeth clean is to brush them daily or as often as you can each week.

How to brush your Greyhound's Teeth

As with all handling and training activities, take things slowly and gently with your greyhound and make it a positive experience. If at any stage your greyhound pulls away, is consistently looking away and/or licking their lips, panting, or yawning, these are signs of stress and it is time to stop and take a break. When you start your next session, try to begin at a stage at which they were comfortable in the last one.

If you find you're really struggling, do speak to your vet or a qualified behaviourist for advice.

Do undertake the activity in each stage below several times across a number of days until your greyhound is comfortable before moving on to the next stage:

Step 1 - touching their face and around their mouth

- Gently touch your greyhound under their jaw and hold a tasty little treat for them to take from your other hand. Don't forget to give them lots of praise.
- Once your greyhound is comfortable with this, move on to gently touching the side of their face, stroke along the side of their mouth and cheek, all while offering a little titbit or two.

Step 2 - lifting their lips

- Once they are comfortable and used to you touching their face and around their mouth, gently try lifting their lip each side of their face, slipping your finger beneath the lip to run it along the outside of their teeth. NOTE: If you're nervous of your finger accidentally getting nipped just go as far with this stage as lifting their lips. Don't forget to give lots of praise and treats here too!

Stage 3 - introducing the toothbrush

- Most dog toothpastes come in flavours designed to entice your dog, so they should taste nice to them. Put some toothpaste on your dog's toothbrush and let them have a sniff. Hopefully they will start licking at it and be happy to put the toothbrush in their mouth. If they don't, try the same thing with something tasty for them on there, such as a little bit of cream cheese.

Stage 4 - brushing the teeth

- Once your greyhound is comfortable with having a toothbrush in their mouth, gently lift their lip and begin brushing the teeth in a circular motion. Begin initially brushing just a few teeth before ending the session and build up over a number of sessions until you can brush all of your dog's teeth, taking short breaks as you go within the session.

Once you've ended a session, give your greyhound lots of praise and a little tasty treat for doing so well!

Hot and Cold Weather (greyhound coats/jackets)

With very little body fat and a thin coat of fur, it is important to consider temperatures and the elements and how they affect our pet greyhound.

Like us, greyhounds can feel the cold and as a general rule of thumb, if we need to wear a coat when the temperatures are cooler, so will our greyhound. A waterproof coat is also needed when it rains to prevent them getting cold because they have gotten wet, so a quality waterproof coat is a good idea to help with the cooler temperatures and any rainy days out.

For draughty winter nights when it can get cold indoors, a fleece jacket can also provide warmth for your pet greyhound. Signs your greyhound may be getting chilly at night may include becoming restless and waking you up during the night wanting to go out to the toilet, or potentially soiling inside the house during the night.

During the winter months it is important to check your greyhound's feet after a walk on roads and give them a quick wash to rinse off any antifreeze or grit that could be on the road (antifreeze is very tasty to dogs and cats and is toxic).

In hotter temperatures we need to consider the temperature of the road/pavement surface as these can be much hotter in the sun than the air around us. If in any doubt, put your hand on the ground and if you can't hold it there for around 15 seconds then it is too hot for your greyhound to walk on and could burn their pads. It's also important not to leave your greyhound in a hot car – even with a window open a car can reach high temperatures quickly, and dogs are not as efficient at cooling down as we humans are and can quickly overheat with devastating results.

The Aging Greyhound

Living with our greyhounds and seeing them every day it can be easy to miss the subtle signs of aging that signal a need for some lifestyle changes to support your greyhound's quality of life as they get older. Any greyhound over the age of 8 years old is generally considered to be a 'veteran' or an elderly dog.

Signs your dog may need some extra support:

- Slowing down on walks, particularly towards the end.
- Finding it harder to get up from laying down, appearing stiff when they do.
- Coat changes – such as going grey around their face and neck area.
- Weight loss – greyhounds have very little body fat, so as they lose muscle mass with age they become thinner, unlike other dog breeds who tend to gain weight as they age. They can also have a reduced appetite as they grow older which means it's extremely important to ensure their diet works for them to give them the nutrition they need to support their health.
- Behaviour changes – an older greyhound will tend to sleep more, they might become more clingy or insecure, or they may even become grumpy.
- Need more toilet breaks during the day and/or night as they struggle to 'hold it' as well as they used to.
- Be less able to cope with warmer or colder temperatures than they used to.

It's important to remember that as dogs don't live as long as we do, they age much quicker than us and often being very stoic, it's not always easy to spot the signs that our greyhound needs some extra support. Just as we often need a variety of support, understanding, and kindness as we get older, your greyhound will also benefit from your gentle understanding as their needs change in their later years.

What you can do:

Visit your vet – Regular visits to your vet are very important throughout your greyhound's life to keep them healthy and support their quality of life as they get older. Discussing joint supplements and other potential support such as massage therapy or pain relief with your vet can help support stiff and arthritic joints.

Lifestyle adjustments - Small changes such as shorter walks and more of them, to help keep our greyhound fit and active can be beneficial; a change in their diet or the amount of food/treats given to them if needed to help maintain their good condition can also support them during their older years. Your greyhound may feel more vulnerable as they become older, and if they have aching joints etc. it is important to consider whether allowing younger and/or more boisterous dogs and children to be around them and/or play with them is still appropriate. Your greyhound may prefer more calm and quiet interactions with others and should always have a quiet place they can go to rest in peace away from noise and other dogs, children etc.

Home adjustments – making some adjustments at home and for when you are out and about with your dog can make a big difference to your greyhound's quality of life. Slippery floors around the home, even ones your greyhound might have coped well with in the past, could be more comfortable for them to walk on without fear of slipping and potentially injuring themselves by putting down some rubber backed mats or rugs, which can be bought cheaply online or from a home/DIY store.

If your greyhound struggles to control themselves going up and coming down your stairs at home and always flies up and/or down them at speed, this suggests they lack the strength to manage them safely and encouraging them to remain downstairs using training and potentially a baby gate to block access to the stairs may be helpful to protect them from harm.

With regards car journeys, jumping in and out of the car can be struggle for older dogs and can be painful for them. Lifting them in and out can be an option if you're strong enough to do so safely or training them to use a dog ramp or steps to get in and out of the car can be a great alternative.

Engage your greyhound's brain - Keeping a dog mentally active is also key as they grow older especially if they are not as physically active as they used to be – take a look at the activities included in the 'Food and Water' section under 'Treats' for some ideas of what you could do with them at home. There are also a growing number of fun and low impact activities you can do with your dog that are becoming popular around the world such as Mantrailing (greyhounds might be sighthounds but they love to use their noses too!), and Hoopers etc. It isn't true that you can't teach an old dog new tricks, so you could even try teaching them some new tricks (please see the section on 'Teaching your greyhound life skills' for details of science based training techniques and where to find appropriate support if you'd like to join a training class etc.).

Remember, greyhounds love doing things with us, so sometimes even the little things like sitting with us at a café or in the park watching the world go by can make all the difference to them, deepening our bond with them, and supporting their ongoing wellbeing (as well as ours too).

About the IRGT

Founded in 1997 by Rásaíocht Con Éireann/Greyhound Racing Ireland, the Irish Retired Greyhound Trust is funded by contributions from the sport of greyhound racing and through private donations, and promotes retired racing greyhounds as pets, supports their transition and preparation for life as a family companion, and works to find homes for them both within Ireland and overseas through collaboration with responsible partner rehoming organisations.

To find out more about our work and how you can support us, please visit: www.irgt.ie

RCN 20034849, CHY 12127

Information provided is for general guidance purposes only and is not intended to replace professional advice specific to your greyhound and/or circumstances. If in any doubt, always seek formal advice from your vet or appropriate veterinary professional. IRGT does not accept any liability for the contents of this guide or for the consequences of any action taken on the basis of the information herein.