

# Shih Tzu

CARING  
FOR  
YOUR



## Step by step guide to caring for your Shih Tzu

The typical Shih Tzu can be described as a 'love sponge'.

They are extremely appealing dogs that will give you years of unconditional love and affection. Part of their appeal is their beautiful coat, big round eyes and sweet expressions. They may be little dogs however it is important to remember that these little bundles of joy require a lot of care. The purpose of this brochure is to help you care for your Shih Tzu. It includes guidance on bringing your new family member home, nutrition, exercise, grooming, health care and other useful information. Following these guidelines will help you have a happy healthy dog that will be your faithful companion for many years to come.

Before going into the detail of caring for your Shih Tzu it is important to understand the temperament of these wonderful dogs. The average Shih Tzu is

outgoing, affectionate, happy and trusting towards all. However as with all breeds the Shih Tzu has its own specific needs. If you are looking for a jogging buddy or an assertive guard dog the Shih Tzu is not for you. He is more inclined to lick a stranger than warn them off, however they have great hearing and will bark to notify you when somebody comes to your door.

As with all companion dogs the Shih Tzu does not do well being left alone for long periods of time. If you are out at work all day the Shih Tzu is not for you. These affectionate dogs need the company of its human friends or another equally sized canine companion. The maximum period of time your Shih Tzu (or any dog) should be left alone is four hours. Anything longer than this will warrant a dog sitter.

Never leave your Shih Tzu alone with a dog who is substantially bigger than he is. It is advised that Shih Tzu are homed with dogs of equal size to avoid injury.

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Unlike other breeds the Shih Tzu usually gets along well with same-sex and opposite-sex dogs of all breeds.

Finally always remember that these dogs have been bred for human companionship and should be treated accordingly. They depend on you for everything and in return for your love and affection you will always have a happy little friend that will be dedicated to you for their lifetime.



This guide was produced by pooch Dog Spa, Hampshire's finest dog grooming salon and Spa. Situated in Farnborough, Hampshire and within easy reach of towns & cities in Surrey and Berkshire, we welcome all breeds of dog and are experienced in working with aged, nervous, and disabled dogs. Whether your pooch needs a bath, haircut, skin treatment, or just a day of pure indulgence we offer a comprehensive range of grooming and spa treatments to make all our clients look and feel like a totally pampered pooch.

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01252 216 100

## Brining your Shih Tzu home

Changing homes can be a very traumatic experience for adult dogs, particularly if they have lived with one person all their lives and perhaps been poorly socialised. The process means they lose their companions and familiar surroundings. To ensure you are prepared for your new family member it is imperative you do everything you can to help him settle in smoothly and start off right from the beginning. Remember that these little dogs have had a major upheaval in their lives and most will need your love and understanding to adjust to their new home.

Most adult dogs feel comfortable in their new homes within a month. During this initial period it is important to show him that yours is his new home and he is a loved member of his new family. Have a sleeping area prepared where your new Shih Tzu can feel safe, equipped with a dog bed, blanket and cushion as well as water and food bowls. This provides a time out place for the dog to escape to. Ensure family members and friends are advised not to bother the dog when he is in this space.

When rescuing your Shih Tzu you may be provided with a bed, cushion, toys etc when you take him in. It is important to use these for the first month so your new friend has some of his own belongings which he is familiar with. This makes settling in easier so he does not feel he has been plucked away from everything he knows. Once he is settled into his new home it is okay to swap his bed/cushion if you need to.

If you are introducing an adopted dog to another adult dog don't assume they will get along immediately. Let them get to know each other gradually, initially with both dogs on leads in case of conflict, and always give the resident dog plenty of attention so the new companion isn't seen as a threat, while reassuring both that there is nothing to worry about. When introducing your new Shih Tzu to a resident cat the path to social harmony often takes longer but is achievable in most circumstances. It is recommended to seek advice on this type of introduction as it must be done correctly from the first meeting.

Try also to create consistency in the feeding routine they have become accustomed to; feed from the same type of bowl, at the same times of day, and incorporate any specifics like putting the bowl on newspaper if this has happened before. The rescue centre can advise you of the brand of food your Shih Tzu has been eating. Purchase these in advance of bringing your new friend home so you can welcome him with a lovely meal. Please see the section on [Nutrition](#) for further information on feeding your Shih Tzu.

Other items to have ready include an ID tag with your contact details engraved, grooming products as detailed under

[Grooming](#), a crate for your car to transport your new Shih Tzu home, puppy training pads (to help with house training), and poop bags for when out on walks.

## Nutrition

The food you feed your Shih Tzu is his main source of nutrition and it is vital to a long and healthy life.

You might think that all pet food manufacturers have your dog's best interests in mind when it comes to formulating their dog food products. This is not always the case. The current pet food regulations allow manufacturers to use ingredients that you would never knowingly feed your Shih Tzu. You would probably be shocked to learn exactly what some pet food manufacturers actually put into their foods. Many pet food manufacturers include by-products like feet, bones and intestines, chemical preservatives like BHA and BHT, and grains like corn, wheat, gluten and soy, that are used instead of protein sources, but are most often difficult to digest. All these "wrong" kind of ingredients can put unnecessary stress on your pet's system and can lead to an unhealthy Shih Tzu as well as shorten his lifespan. Approximately 25 percent of all Shih Tzu dogs have some type of allergic reaction due to the dog foods that they are fed. Which is why choosing a premium holistic dog food is essential for the health and vitality of your Shih Tzu.

Recommendations for a proper and nutritious Shih Tzu diet is to feed a premium, human grade, dog food. Holistic dog food manufacturers use high quality, healthy and scientifically-tested human grade food sources. Instead of using animal by-products, these premium dog foods contain real meat or specific meat meals (concentrated meat proteins). On the ingredients label, you will actually see the following: chicken, lamb, herring, salmon, beef, turkey or chicken meal, lamb meal, herring meal, etc. Whole grains such as rice, barley and oatmeal are used instead of corn and wheat. Insecticide-free, fresh fruits and vegetables such as blueberries, sweet potatoes, carrots, peas, apples and tomatoes are common ingredients in the best dog foods. Healthy fats and oils from quality, specific sources are included as well. Examples include chicken fat, herring oil, lamb fat, and sunflower oil. These fats are essential in maintaining your Shih Tzu metabolism, organ function and shiny coat.

Instead of using synthetic preservatives and artificial colorings, holistic dog foods use natural preservatives and antioxidants to supplement their products. Vitamin C, vitamin E, vitamin A and mixed tocopherols are what you will find in premium dog foods and on their ingredients label. As an added bonus, some of these dog food manufacturers incorporate yogurt, healthy enzymes and minerals into their dog foods.

On collection of your new companion the rescue centre may recommend what to feed him. Depending on the length of stay and diet on arrival the carer may have already changed his diet. If you plan to change his food to a holistic brand you may want to wait a few weeks until he is properly settled-in. You may need to manage the transition even more gradually than normally advised. Start by mixing a little of the new food into the old type, and over 10-14 days increase the amount of new content, until the dog is eating only the new food. If any gastrointestinal upsets occur and persist then consult your vet.

If your dog has recently been neutered, be aware of the tendency to gain weight because of changes in metabolism and a likely drop in activity levels. Carefully monitor their body condition and be prepared to cut out unnecessary extras like table scraps.



pooch Dog Spa  
8 Alexandra Road  
Farnborough  
Hampshire  
GU14 6DA  
01252 216 100  
[www.poochdogspa.com](http://www.poochdogspa.com)  
[www.facebook.com/poochdogspa](https://www.facebook.com/poochdogspa)





## Grooming

Care and grooming of the Shih Tzu needs particular attention. Keeping the coat short and manageable does reduce grooming time although there is still grooming required depending on the style that your Shih Tzu is groomed in.

If you wish to keep your Shih Tzu coat in good condition it is important to get him used to being brushed regularly. Spending around 15 minutes daily of gently brushing will help him to become used to this. The best time of day to do this is when your Shih Tzu has had time to eat and play and also when you have time yourself to spend with him. Grooming can be done on a table with a firm non-slip surface as this will enable the him to become used to the table when attending the grooming salon for clipping and when grooming yourself as it will prevent you from crouching.

For grooming you will need a pin brush and comb. Starting at the head taking extra care around the eyes gently brush the hair away from the eyes with the comb. If the hair is falling into the eyes this can be trimmed with scissors or if you are going to take your Shih Tzu to a grooming salon, your groomer will do this for you. Care must be taken when working around the eyes at all times. It is important that the hair is kept away from the eyes as it can irritate the eye and cause infection or ulceration.

The next stage is to brush his ears, tangles do occur more frequently on and behind the ears so it is important to brush this area regularly. Again the hair can be trimmed short and if you prefer again can be carried out at the grooming salon. The hair inside the ear must be removed also, again this should be carried out by someone who is experienced.

When grooming the face it is good to get into a routine of checking eyes, ears and mouth for any sign of irritation. If you do

discover anything unusual do contact your vet as soon as possible as this may prevent any infection setting in. The hair around the mouth should also be kept short as this will enable him to eat and drink more easily; it also prevents the hair around the mouth gathering food.

On completion of grooming the face continue first with the pin brush and then comb down the neck and body ensure there are no tangles. Getting your Shih Tzu used to having his legs and feet groomed is important as nails and hair between the pads needs the most frequent attention. Start by gently brushing the legs with the pin brush then comb ensuring the inside of the legs are also groomed will help him get used to this. It will also make life easier for everyone including your Shih Tzu if this is done, especially when at the grooming salon it causes less stress for everyone. Nails and hair between the pads must be kept short. Care must be taken if you trim the nails yourself as they can bleed if trimmed too short. This task is better being carried out by someone who is experienced.

The last stage is grooming around your Shih Tzu bottom area and tail. The tail should be brushed through with the pin brush followed by the comb and again the hair can be trimmed short at the base of the tail. The hair around his bottom should be kept short so that your he can go to the toilet easily. The hair can be trimmed with scissors to keep this area free from hair. It is a good idea to check this area daily to ensure that no excrement has become attached.

How often will clipping be required? Again this depends on the rate that the hair grows and what style you like to have your Shih Tzu trimmed in. On average probably about every six to eight weeks but your dog will still need to be bathed and brushed in between times.

## Foods NEVER to feed your Shih Tzu

### 1. Chocolate

The cocoa bean contains a chemical called theobromine, a long lasting, very potent toxin that can cause death in dogs. Darker chocolates have the highest concentration of dangerous substances but milk chocolate can still make your dog sick. For gardeners - cocoa bean shells are a popular mulch so beware.

### 2. Grapes and raisins

Just a handful of grapes or raisins can cause kidney failure in some dogs.

### 3. Coffee

Drinking coffee can lead to serious heart and neurological problems for your Shih Tzu.

### 4. Alcohol

A very small amount can cause alcohol poisoning in your Shih Tzu. Its never clever or humorous to give any dog alcohol.

### 5. Avocados

The toxic component persin can kill your dog. The dose is not known so don't let your Shih Tzu eat any avocado.

### 6. Onions

Onions cause severe anemia in dogs. Garlic can have the same effect. The good news is the anemia goes away when onions are stopped being eaten.

### 7. Macadamia nuts

As few as 6 nuts can kill a dog.

### 8. Mouldy food

Some moulds cause neurological problems in some dogs. Keep your Shih Tzu out of the rubbish.

If your dog eats any of the above call your vet immediately.

## Leadership

Real leaders aren't violent. They don't yell, threaten or hit. They show through calm actions and cues that dogs understand, that they are benevolent leaders. Dogs with gentle human leaders in the household are more secure, happier and more obedient

# Shih Tzu ownership

Before you decide on whether a Shih Tzu is right for you, you need to consider what is required to care for this lovely little dog. Here are some typical items required to keep your Shih Tzu happy and healthy.

## Healthcare

### Checkups

At least one check up per year at the vet.

### Healthcare

A vaccination plan is required.  
Flea treatment.  
Worming.  
Annual vet check.  
Regular grooming.

### Maintenance

Regularly check your Shih Tzu all over for lumps, bumps, cuts, sore skin etc. This can be incorporated into the grooming routine.

## Grooming

### Grooming

Shih Tzu need professional grooming every 6-8 weeks. Nail clipping can be done during this grooming. Complement with daily grooming at home.

### Home grooming supplies

Brush, detangling comb, scissors, dog shampoo & conditioner, body wipes., pad wax, and conditioning spray for tangles.

### Ears, teeth, eyes

Eyes wipes (or saline and cotton wool), ear cleaner, dog toothpaste, and dog toothbrush.

## General

### Insurance

To cover vets bills for any unexpected illnesses.

### Pet sitters

Shih Tzu do not do well in kennels. Find a good dog sitters who will take your dog into their home while you are away.

### Essentials

Bed, cushion, blanket, grooming tools, chew toys, ball, lead, collar, soft harness for smaller Shih Tzu, crate for car travel, food bowl, and water bowl.

How often should you bath your Shih Tzu? Again this is dependent upon a number of factors. For example if your Shih Tzu is walked across fields and countryside, bathing will be required more frequently compared to a Shih Tzu who is walked in town. On average probably a full bath would be once a month and is again dependent on the style your Shih Tzu is groomed in, the longer the clip the more frequently the dog will require bathing.

When removing a tangle, first begin by using the pin brush and then holding the tangle firmly between your fingers gently begin to tease it out using the comb, beginning at the bottom of the tangle working towards your Shih Tzu skin. NEVER pull the tangle as this causes great discomfort to the dog and will result in your Shih Tzu objecting to being groomed in future. Always treat your Shih Tzu hair the same way as you would treat your own.

Another important part of grooming is teeth brushing. It is important teeth are checked regularly to avoid gum disease. A special dog toothpaste and brush is required, these can be purchased from your vet or pet shop. It may take some time for your dog to get used to having his teeth brushed. Once he becomes used to this it is important to brush his teeth daily.

Regular ear cleaning is also required as some Shih Tzu are prone to waxy ears which if left untreated can lead to an ear infection. Your vet can recommend an ear cleaning solution suitable for your Shih Tzu. This can be complemented by gently cleaning around the entrance to the ear canal a few times a week with ear cleaning wipes to maintain good ear hygiene.

A Shih Tzu who is not groomed regularly can develop skin problems owing to matted and tangled hair, not to mention dirty. It is important to make grooming as pleasant an experience as possible. It is an opportunity for you give your dog one to one attention so always ensure that you have the time to spend rather than making it a rushed job. Making it as pleasant an experience as possible will cause less stress for everyone, your Shih Tzu included.

### Hold on tight

Picking up your Shih Tzu by holding him around his ribs and having his back legs dangling in the air can be painful for your dog. Always support his rear end and chest when you pick him up.



pooch Dog Spa  
8 Alexandra Road, Farnborough  
Hampshire GU14 6DA  
01252 216 100  
[www.poochdogspa.com](http://www.poochdogspa.com)  
[www.facebook.com/poochdogspa](http://www.facebook.com/poochdogspa)

## Interesting facts

### Getting to know the breed

#### 1. Age

The life expectancy of the Shih Tzu is typically between 13-15 years or more.

#### 2. Weight

Average weight is between 4.5 - 11 kgs however this will differ if you have a Shih Tzu crossed with another breed.

#### 3. Intelligence

They are intelligent little dogs, but can be quite independent. They enjoy learning and like to please. They can be obstinate at times and can give the impression, with their dignified attitude, that some tasks are beneath them. With patience and consistency they can become relatively obedient.

#### 4. Ailments

They are prone to eye problems as they protrude. Due to this they are susceptible to lacerations and their eye lids and lashes can grow in such a way as to irritate the eye. The tear ducts may produce too much or too little and need to be treated

#### 5. Shedding

The Shih Tzu is a low shed breed so can be a good companion for those suffering from pet allergies.

#### 6. Coat

Shih Tzu have a double coat that is relatively long and straight on the outside. The inner coat is thick and soft to the touch.

## All in the nose

The short snub nose of the Shih Tzu can lead to various breathing difficulties. Some tend to suffer from an elongated soft palate (a flap of tissue that is located at the upper back part of the throat). Problems from this can manifest in wheezing, snorting, snoring, and coughing when the dog is running. The elongated soft palate does not always become a serious condition but do consult your vet if your dog begins to experience any of these symptoms.



## Exercise and training

The Shih Tzu will be as active as you wish him to be. He can obtain some of his exercise around the house and garden but can cope with, and will enjoy, quite a lot of exercise. A brisk daily walk will present interesting sights and new smells to keep his mind stimulated and will also help keep him trim. He will enter in to playing games with an infectious enthusiasm and will be happy to have the opportunity for a little free running and exploration in a secure area.

All dogs, of whatever size, should have at least basic obedience training. Such training sets boundaries for acceptable behaviour and will instill respect for the owner, make for a pleasant household companion and provide nourishment for that smart brain. The Shih Tzu is a very intelligent dog, willing to please and thus not difficult to train if positive methods, which depend on kindness, firmness and consistency are employed. Being a proud and sensitive breed any harsh training methods will have negative results. Either his stubbornness will come to the fore or he may become fearful that any action will displease his handler and will therefore 'shut-down'. Training should be made fun and motivational with ample praise and rewards for good efforts or a job well done. Socialisation to accustom the dog to various people, places, other dogs, novel sights and sounds is essential to prevent any tendency to shyness or aggression developing.

## Healthcare

The following must be provided as part of your Shih Tzu healthcare.

Vaccination plan

Heartworm prevention

Flea and tick prevention (natural where possible)

A safe environment in which the dog cannot run away.

A Shih Tzu is very sensitive to the heat. Some owners may be surprised just how dangerous this is until it happens. Most people know to never keep their dog in the car when parked; however there are also other considerations required to protect your Shih Tzu from heatstroke. Take sensible precautions in hot weather. Take your dog on brief walks early in the morning and in the evening, rather than during the day. Be especially careful about exercising your dog outside when the temperature and humidity are high, as exercise increases the oxygen demands of the muscles. Excitement also makes breathing more difficult.

Never leave your dog in a parked car in warm weather—the temperature in a closed car can rise to deadly levels in a matter of minutes, even when the windows are partially open. Be sure your Shih Tzu has cool fresh water available at all times. When you travel, take along cooling packs to help keep your pet cool, be sure there is good air circulation around his crate, and use a light-coloured towel to provide shade.



# Shih Tzu Healthcare Checklist

Everyday health care for the Shih Tzu includes prevention.

- The eyes - while a clear and clean discharge is normal a heavy and thick discharge from the eyes should equal an appointment with the vet.
- The nose - one can tell quite a bit from the nose of a Shih Tzu. A dog's nose should always be a bit cool and a bit damp. If there is any type of discharge: white, coloured, thick or otherwise this may be a sign of a medical condition.
- Glands - swollen testicles on a male or mammary glands on a female are a sign that the body is reacting to something; a vet check will be required.
- Odour - while the Shih Tzu may not always be able to smell like cologne or perfume this dog should not have a bad odour. Therefore any smell emitting from the ears, nose or mouth is a sign that you should bring your Shih Tzu to the groomer or the vet.



When transporting your Shih Tzu over long distances, acclimate it gradually to higher temperatures. If you groom your Shih Tzu yourself, keep the temperature setting on your drier cooler than usual in warm weather. Fans and air conditioning to circulate and cool indoor air help your dog transfer heat from its body to the environment.

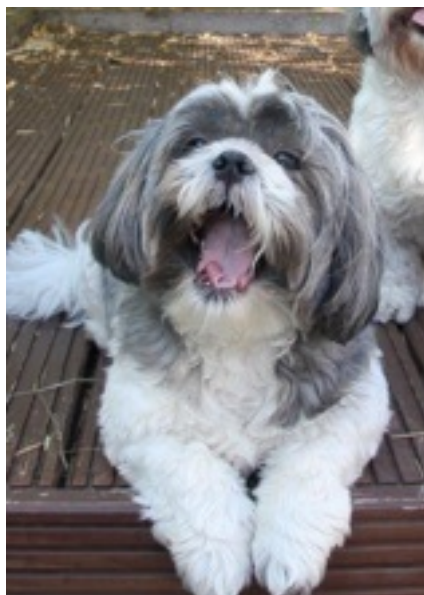
Watch for excessive panting, particularly when coupled with a wide-eyed, panicked expression and/or thickened saliva, a deep red coloured tongue, vomiting, or diarrhoea. All of these could be signs of heat stroke. In a vicious cycle, the more the dog exerts itself struggling to cool down, the more its internal temperature rises. Elderly or ill dogs, or dogs with compromised breathing, are particularly susceptible to heat stroke. Heat stroke is an emergency requiring prompt veterinary attention. Until you reach your veterinarian or an emergency clinic, apply cool compresses (not ice) to the head, neck, armpits, and groin areas to try to reduce his body temperature.

## Bonding and Care

All Shih Tzu need love and lots of it. Spend time playing and bonding with him each day. He will like nothing better than cuddling up with you, as being lap dogs they are more comfortable asleep on the sofa than on the floor.

As detailed in this brochure the Shih Tzu needs a particular level of care. Providing this is essential to having a happy and healthy companion. If you cannot give a dog this level of care the Shih Tzu is not the right companion for you. This is perfectly okay and realising this will help reduce the number of dogs that go through the traumatic experience of not fitting in in their new home and having to go into care at a later date.

The most important general aspect of Shih Tzu care you can give this dog is yourself and your time. If you can offer your new companion the required level of care your efforts won't go unrewarded. You will share your life with a beautiful little dog who will be your best friend and adore you unconditionally.



## Good to know

### Call for Help

Not all toxic poisonings are treated the same. Sometimes it's best to have the dog throw up - other times that the worst treatment. Best course of action is immediate care at a veterinary surgery.

### Dog Products are best

Most 'people' shampoos will leave a dog's skin dry, itchy and flaky. Use a good quality shampoo and conditioner formulated just for dogs.

### Training treats

Shih Tzu have a tendency to gain weight, so be careful with training treats. Use tiny amounts, a bite size treat is plenty.

### Be Gentle

Never train your Shih Tzu to walk with you by jerking on the lead. This is a terrible idea for any dog, especially a Shih Tzu whose little neck can be damaged by the jerking motion. Instead lead through verbal commands. It is also advisable to have your Shih Tzu wear a padded harness and attach the lead to this rather than their collar.

### Dental problems

Dental problems are a lot more serious than just 'dog breath'. Bacteria in your dog's mouth can circulate throughout his body and can lead to heart, liver and kidney disease, among other serious health concerns. Speak with our vet if you notice any unusual odour from your dog's mouth.