

# *Congratulations on your new* **Shih Tzu**

## **About the Shih Tzu**

Lion-like dogs like the Shih Tzu (pronounced “sheed-zoo”) existed in China for many centuries. In fact, the Chinese characters for “Shih Tzu” mean “lion.” Although their early history is obscure, Shih Tzu are probably descended from lion-like dogs sent from Tibet to the Chinese imperial court in Beijing. The lion was closely associated with Buddhism, and as the lion was not indigenous to China, mythical creatures known as Foo or Lion Dogs and the small living creatures that resembled them came to symbolize the Buddhist guardian lion. The Shih Tzu was developed as a distinctive breed by the Dowager Empress Cixi (1835-1908), who reduced size and prized distinctive markings and colors that matched the gowns of the ladies of the court. As all Shih Tzu in China were probably killed as symbols of royalty when the Communists seized power, all Shih Tzu today are descended from 14 Shih Tzu that were taken to England and Scandinavia before this time, plus one Pekingese later crossed with the breed in England. Today the Shih Tzu’s sole purpose is to be a companion, as it was in the Chinese royal court long ago.

## **Appearance and Temperament**

The Shih Tzu is lively, intelligent, and alert. The AKC breed standard that describes the ideal Shih Tzu calls for a small but sturdy and heavily-coated dog. All colors and markings are acceptable. One of the most distinctive features of the breed is its head, which is large and round, with wide-set eyes, an undershot jaw, and a square, short muzzle set no lower than the bottom of the eye rims. This head structure gives the breed its delightful warm, sweet, and affectionate expression; because this expression is based on a complex collection of recessives, it is easily lost through careless breeding or crosses with another breed. As a “big dog in a small package” both structurally and temperamentally, the ideal Shih Tzu weighs 9 to 16 pounds at maturity and is deceptively heavy for its size because of its heavy bones. There is no such thing as an AKC-recognized “imperial” or “teacup” Shih Tzu. These terms are sometimes used to describe undersized Shih Tzu that do not conform to the breed standard and may not be able to whelp normally. While any breeder may occasionally produce an undersized Shih Tzu, such puppies should be sold as pets.

## **Shih Tzu and Children**

Shih Tzu love people and other dogs, and would probably give a burglar a guided tour. Nevertheless, it is still a small dog. Be sure to supervise children when they play with your Shih Tzu. Chasing, teasing, poking, and screaming should never be allowed. Because a Shih Tzu puppy can easily



squirm out of someone’s arms, it is best to teach children to sit on the floor when holding the puppy. Everyone can practice what we call the “puppy shuffle”—sliding your feet along the floor to avoid tripping over or stepping on a puppy that seems to always be underfoot.

## **Training Your Shih Tzu**

Training a Shih Tzu can be both an amusing and a frustrating experience. Your dog will probably try to charm and kiss you into letting him have his own way, which can result in a chubby, less-than-completely-housebroken pet that is difficult to groom. Because Shih Tzu are such people dogs, praise and rewards are more effective than punishment. Introduce desired new behaviors a bit at a time, be firm, and never give in while your dog is misbehaving. If he nips or jumps up on you, ignore him until he settles down, then praise him.

If you decide to socialize your Shih Tzu by taking him to puppy kindergarten or obedience classes, be sure the



training methods are based on praise. Teaching your dog basic commands such as “sit,” “come,” and “stay” could one day save his life. Even if you don’t choose to show your dog, or participate in

performance events or pet therapy, remember that your Shih Tzu will love you just as much if you teach him to be well mannered—and you will love him more!

It also helps to identify a lost pet if it has a permanent microchip or tattoo registered with the AKC’s Companion Animal Recovery; call (800) 252-7894 for more information.

## Shih Tzu Health

The Shih Tzu is generally a long-lived and healthy breed, and regular grooming and annual veterinary checkups will help keep your pet in tip-top condition. Nevertheless, because of their heavy coats and short faces, Shih Tzu do not tolerate heat well and are not good swimmers. Shih Tzu puppies often bubble and snort while teething, but if this problem persists and is so severe that your dog is spending most of its time struggling for air, seek veterinary attention. When you travel with your pet, be sure to take along plenty of fresh water and frozen ice packs. You must be careful to avoid eye injuries in a breed with large eyes and no muzzle to protect them, and seek prompt veterinary attention if you suspect an eye problem. One rare but serious health problem in this breed is juvenile renal dysplasia, in which the kidneys fail to develop normally; you might suspect this if your dog is not thriving and drinks excessive amounts of water. Many Shih Tzu owners support health research through the AKC Canine Health Foundation ([www.akcchf.org](http://www.akcchf.org))—a nonprofit charitable organization devoted to helping ensure a healthy future for all dogs.



## Feeding

Shih Tzu are not picky eaters—unless they are teething, ill, or spoiled. Please do not feed your puppy table scraps. A good quality small-sized kibble mixed with a bit of meat or canned dog food for flavoring is much healthier. Puppies are generally fed three times a day until they are about six months old, then two meals a day until they reach their first birthday. After that, you may continue twice-daily feedings or cut back to one meal a day. Using a water bottle rather than a bowl will help keep your Shih Tzu's face clean and dry between baths. Small dog biscuits make much better treats than rawhide chews or greenies, and Shih Tzu love to chew on soft plush and hard rubber toys.

## Grooming

Like you, Shih Tzu have hair instead of fur. If their coats are not brushed frequently and kept clean, they tangle and mat. Mats should be removed before bathing, or they will set in like concrete. It is especially



important to keep the face clean and mat-free. Toenails and the hair on the belly, around the anus, and between the pads of the feet need regular trimming. The long, flowing coats on Shih Tzu in the show ring require much time and effort. Many pet owners prefer to scissor or clip the coat short, or take their dog to a groomer regularly to be trimmed in the latest style.

## Spaying or Neutering vs. Breeding

The American Shih Tzu Club recommends that you spay or neuter your pet Shih Tzu as it increases the chances of your dog leading a longer healthier life. Breeding dogs is a great responsibility and can be very costly. You should breed only if you have a top quality dog healthy in body and mind and have done your homework. Your goal should be to improve the breed, avoid genetic defects, and produce puppies that are not only better than their parents but one step closer to the ideal Shih Tzu described in the breed standard. You have an obligation to place all of your puppies in loving homes, answer the new owners' questions, and take back any dog you have bred if its new home does not work out.



## The American Shih Tzu Club

The ASTC is the parent club for our breed. It promotes responsible dog ownership and advocates for the Shih Tzu as a family companion and show dog. It also supports breed-related health research through the ASTC Charitable Trust. Much of the club's educational effort is conducted through its website, <http://www.americanshihtzuclub.org>. Here you will find many articles about the breed, its care and training, health issues, and other topics. You will also find contacts for local Shih Tzu clubs and Shih Tzu rescue, and information about the annual ASTC specialty show. This is a great place to see lovely Shih Tzu and contact knowledgeable breeders.

## *Welcome to the wonderful world of the Shih Tzu.*

**You have taken on the responsibility of providing love, food, housing, care, and training for the life of your canine companion. May your partnership be a long and happy one. And remember that the ASTC and the AKC are here to help.**