

Facts About Akitas

Taken from Akitas4U website (Barbara Bouyet)

The Akita is a Japanese breed. In his native country the Akita has been declared a "national treasure." An Akita in a home is believed to be a symbol of good health, prosperity and good fortune. Helen Keller brought the first Akita to the United States in 1937. The breed did not come again to American shores until after WW2 when returning GIs brought Akitas to America. They are a wonderful, magnificent breed but certainly not a dog for everyone.

The following Facts sheet is NOT written in stone. More and more, breeders are selecting for good temperament, and Akitas are far less aggressive now than they were a decade ago. The information below is a heads up to so you understand the breed, and why they may have had a reputation for aggression. Throughout this website, I have tried to emphasize the importance of early and ongoing socialization, obedience training using positive reinforcement and your role as a pack leader. Those are the most important factors in developing the foundation for your Akita. If your kids run wild and rarely pay attention to you, please, don't get an Akita!

Akitas are large, males can weigh over 100 pounds; they have great body strength and can have willful temperaments, definitely not grandma's dog! All puppies are cute, including Akita puppies, but before you purchase a cuddly puppy that grows into a grizzly bear, read the FACTS.

Akitas do not bark unless there is a good reason. When an Akita is barking, pay attention. They are silent hunters who hunt low to the ground without growls or noise, similar to cats.

Akitas unused to other animals may consider small animals as prey and hunt them. This includes cats, rodents, birds, small wildlife and small dogs. Akitas can be raised to accept animals in residence. Some adult Akitas can even be trained to fit into a home where other animals are already established. It is, however, imperative that the Akita be closely watched around the other animals until you have established a peaceful co-existence. Chickens, ducks and other birds are a meal for an Akita, do not expect the dog to befriend fowl, though some Akitas have accepted them without a problem.

Akitas are natural guardians of the home and do not require any training to turn them into guard dogs. When there is a reason to protect family and property, your Akita will act to do so. Guests welcome in your home when you are present will NOT be welcomed by the Akita when you are not home. Your gates should be padlocked to protect the Akita and any neighborhood children who may enter your property.

Don't leave an Akita or any dog alone with an infant. Imagine a baby suddenly crying to get attention from its mother. A dog can misinterpret the situation and in an attempt to bring the baby to the mother, the baby can be tragically injured. Dogs are not really nannies.

Do not tie an Akita outside where strangers can approach. Many dog bites occur with this scenario—the dog's space extends from one end of the leash to the other. A child or toddler has no idea about canine boundaries and moves into the dog's space. Most dogs will defend their territory and you now have a situation that can be tragic for two families and fatal for the dog. If you cannot house your dog properly, then don't own one until you can provide a safe sanctuary for the animal when you're not home.

Akitas are inherently dominant towards other animals and for this reason, they should not be allowed to run free or roam at will in the neighborhood. You can exercise your Akita off leash when you are in an area where it's unlikely there will be much contact with other animals and people.

Male Akitas show aggression toward other male dogs, and female Akitas usually will not tolerate another female. Akitas can live peacefully with a dog of the opposite sex, though some Akitas prefer being an only dog!

Akitas are VERY food possessive. If you have other pets, you will want to be certain the Akita is given its own food bowl or treat well away from any other animals and that no other animal is allowed near the Akita until the food is gone. It's common sense to keep visiting children away from an Akita at dinnertime. Akitas not raised with children are not always tolerant of small children. The Akita should never be left alone with a child even if you are certain you have a dog that adores all children. A large dog can accidentally injure a child. Often, Akitas raised with children will tolerate their own children but may not accept the neighborhood kids. As a general rule it is wise not to leave an Akita or any large dog alone with children under 12 years of age.

Akitas do not like to be teased and can respond by biting. Some children are allowed to treat animals unkindly, a behavior that often leads to cruelty to animals. These children should be kept away from an Akita, whose large size and hunting instincts can endanger the child's life.

Akitas consider eye contact a challenge and can react aggressively. It is strongly advised NOT to get down on the Akitas level and close to the dog's face unless you are well acquainted with the Akita. These positions can and do trigger an aggressive response.

Akitas like to take charge--an inherited trait from their wolf ancestry and may at some time, challenge you for the dominant position. This behavior cannot be tolerated and a firm, consistent correction should be your immediate response.

Akitas with good temperament accept discipline well--not beating, but intelligent discipline. A good scruff shaking is an effective form of discipline for an Akita. Frequently, a firm verbal command or quick choke chain correction will get your point across.

Akitas should be obedience trained by their owner and not sent away to school. A good obedience class will guarantee you a firm bond with your dog and a well-behaved dog. Remember though, Akitas are extremely intelligent and tend to get bored easily. They learn quickly so short training periods are suggested. This keeps the dog from becoming bored. Akitas are also very stubborn and when the dog thinks it's a waste of time to "sit" or "stay" one more time, he will simply walk away! Obedience training requires patience!

Akitas may respond with aggression if treated harshly--do not hit or kick any dog, that sort of behavior means YOU have lost control of yourself and your dog.

Akitas are dogs and unlike human beings, dogs do not have the same short-term memory as humans. Do not discipline your dog hours after an incident--the dog will NOT associate the discipline with an incident, which occurred earlier in the day. If you can see and catch your dog getting into mischief, discipline should be firm and immediate for it to be effective. For example, if you return from work and find your Akita had been busily digging a hole, you should not discipline the dog when it greets you since the dog will not associate the discipline with a hole it may have worked on early that morning.

Do NOT call your Akita to you for discipline, that encourages the dog to fear your presence and it will find ways to avoid you. The "come" command is important and may someday be a life-saving command for the dog. Do not jeopardize that safety factor. Each time your Akita comes to your side, it should be rewarded.

Some Akitas are talkers! They may grunt, groan and mumble to entertain themselves and you. This conversational verbalizing IS NOT growling and should not be interpreted as a growl, which sounds quite different. Akita "talking" is an endearing trait and should not frighten you. After living with your dog, you will easily distinguish between talking and growling.

Most Akitas enjoy carrying things around in their mouth, including your wrist! They may take you by the wrist to lead you to the cookie cupboard or to their lead. It is

not an aggressive act; it is an endearing trait. If their "mouthing" is annoying to you, give them a job to do: allow your Akita to bring in the newspaper or the mail. They love to do these types of jobs.

For such a large breed, with a reputation for aloofness, you may be surprised to learn that Akitas are very sensitive and are adversely affected by stress and/or changes in their environment. Stress can be a trigger for autoimmune diseases in an Akita predisposed for these diseases.

Akitas are very family-oriented and are not happy when kept apart from the family. Akitas develop bizarre behavior patterns when raised as an outside "yard dog." When left alone in a yard without quality family interaction, the dog will regress in socialization and boredom will cause destructive behavior. If you do not plan on having your dog live inside your home, you should not seriously consider an Akita for a pet.

Akitas are not hyperactive and fit into a sedentary household, but optimum health requires that YOU and your Akita exercise regularly. A dog left outside while you're gone DOES NOT exercise it sleeps until your return. If your lifestyle includes outdoor activities like camping, hiking, swimming, or snow sports, Akitas adore being part of these pastimes.

Akitas will live from 10-12 years with good care and proper nutrition. Good nutrition for an Akita is an all-natural meat based food with high quality protein, especially fish. The origin of the Akita is Japan where rice, fish and sea plants are a diet staple and an ideal diet for the Akita. They should be fed two meals daily. Dry food should be soaked until it expands prior to feeding as obesity is dangerous for many health reasons but with Akitas, an overweight dog is prone to knee problems ultimately requiring surgery. Akitas suffer from gastric torsion, a life-threatening, sudden onset disorder that is fatal if untreated. Know the symptoms--discuss gastric torsion with your vet.

Hypothyroid disease affects 70% of the breed; however, it is treated by twice daily hormone replacement therapy. A blood test, including T3 and T4 thyroid levels will determine the existence of the condition. The symptoms include skin and coat problems, sudden onset aggressive behavior, itching, lethargy, musky odor, and many more. Before treating skin conditions as allergies, have your vet check for sarcoptic mange, sebaceous adenitis, and hypothyroid disease.

Sudden onset aggression is very often linked to hypothyroid disease which is a treatable condition. Discuss this with your vet or seek more information from some websites on the Internet.