



BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG PUPPY GROWTH

A common question new Berner owners ask: "Is my puppy the 'right' size for how old he/she is?"

The answer is: size of adult Berners varies; so naturally the size of Berner pups at any given point in their development will vary.

If your puppy looks smaller or larger, is taller or shorter, has heavier or lighter bones or a slighter or bulkier build, a longer or shorter coat than a Berner puppy of the same age you met somewhere - **DON'T WORRY**. Focus on keeping your puppy happy, healthy, work on training and on providing a nurturing, supportive environment. Your pup will grow up. Genes your pup inherited from his mother and father and ancestors control how your dog will look as an adult. Make the most of the genetic potential your pup inherited. Provide your pup with adequate nutrition and physical conditioning (exercise) during development.



This photo shows the same Berner as a young adult and a mature adult.

Bernese are **SLOW MATURING DOGS**. Most Berners do not reach their adult height and weight until they are 2 or 3 years old. Berners continue to 'flesh out' and add substance and bulk well into their middle years.

Often during the first year to 18 months of age puppies look gangly, leggy or unbalanced, and gawky. How puppies walk or run during the first year might look mildly uncoordinated - especially when a big growth spurt occurs. It is not uncommon for Berner puppy's skeletons to grow unevenly. A growing puppy's rear end (butt) may be an inch or 2 higher than the front end at certain times during development. **NOT TO WORRY! BE PATIENT!!!** If you think about it, people look very different at 30 or 40 years of age than they looked when they were 12, 16 or 20.

BERNESE PUPPY GROWTH GUIDE ~ 8 - 10 WEEKS

Typical Bernese pups weigh from 12 - 24 pounds at 8 - 10 weeks. Puppy weight at this young age is sometimes a reflection of litter size, with large litters tending to have smaller puppies and litters with fewer members having larger sized pups. Sometimes puppy weight is a reflection of the size pups a particular dam or sire is apt to produce. It is not uncommon to see a wide range of sizes and builds in pups produced by any dam, sire or breeding pair. Just because the sire of a litter is a **BIG** dog doesn't mean all his offspring will grow up to be big dogs. Same can be said for the size and shape of pups produced by any given dam. Relative size of a puppy or members in a litter may or may not carry through to adulthood. The smallest pup sometimes is the same size as an adult as his larger littermate. Typically puppies will gain somewhere between 2 - 4 pounds a week during the first few months.

FIRST STEPS FOR NEW OWNERS

Pups have to learn what is expected and they rely on you to provide direction. The first few weeks with your puppy will revolve around getting puppy used to your house's schedule, setting up planned feeding times, setting up a housebreaking routine, and crate training if you choose to use a crate. During the first couple of weeks, focus on creating bonds between puppy and everyone in the household.

Teach your baby puppy that human touches are good.

Just handling a pup, GENTLY, by examining or brushing teeth, feeling legs and paws, touching the ears, belly rubs, touching rear quarters and testicles teach a dog to be comfortable with human touches. Trimming nails, bathing and brushing are part of training that should be practiced. Do not over bath and dry out skin and coat - a tepid bath with a mild dog shampoo every 3 - 4 weeks, or as needed to keep the coat clean is correct care. Pups usually have to relieve themselves immediately following the excitement of a bath or brushing so plan on making a trip outside. If you have given a bath in a cold weather climate, please remember that pups can chill easily so make sure the pup is fully dried before allowing her to spend an extended time outside.

INTERACTION WITH OTHER DOGS

NO PUPPY SHOULD EVER BE PERMITTED TO ROUGHHOUSE WITH ADULT, larger or more

physically adept DOGS! Young dogs can and will overexert themselves in play. Slamming, racing around and wrestling can cause serious and even lasting injury to muscles and ligaments in growing pups. All play periods or exercise should be monitored by a responsible adult to avoid injuries to tender puppies.

BERNESE PUPPY GROWTH GUIDE ~ 10 - 16 WEEKS

From 10-16 weeks puppies continue to grow. Usually Bernese pups weight somewhere in the range of 24 - 45 pounds. Often puppies that appeared short and stocky at an earlier age start to put on length of leg. They look taller and have a less bulky body. Pups can begin to be housetrained, but will not be reliable about asking to go outside to eliminate. Early socialization is a must for Bernese. The first puppy socialization class can be started during this time frame.

Pups of this age are babies and will be looking to you for guidance. One of the most important aspects of puppy rearing is - remember to reward and praise your puppy each and every time she does the right thing. Give your puppy lots of opportunities to do the right things. For example give her toy to play with if you catch her chewing on an electric cord or the furniture, and remember to praise her for focusing her chewing on the toy. If your pup eats all her food, praise her. Or if she comes to you when you clap your hands give her



a treat as soon as she arrives as a reward. Young puppies have no ability to anticipate the results of their actions so owners must be constantly vigilant. Pay very close attention your puppy to see that she does not get into mischief or get into a dangerous situation. Take your pup outside regularly to relieve herself.

BERNESE PUPPY GROWTH GUIDE ~ 4 - 8 MONTHS

Pups at this age usually weigh around 45 - 85 pounds. Larger males may weigh more. Puppies begin to lose their milk teeth between 4 - 5 months. Chewing or mouthing may become more intense when puppies lose their teeth. Also, eruption of teeth may result in tender gums and a lack of interest in food. Soaking food in water to soften it may make eating a more comfortable experience for a pup with tender gums. Also many puppies are beginning to lose their puppy coats by four - five months. Don't be surprised to see lots of puppy fuzz in the brush when grooming. A Berner is changing over to an adult coat when a strip of very shiny coarser looking black coat runs down the center the dog's back. The adult coat will continue to come in over the course of several weeks. Fuzz often remains around the ears. Some owners like to trim ear fuzz with scissors or hand strip it out.

It is easier to start gaining your dog's confidence and attention when the pup is still young. Trying to instill good behaviors in a hundred pound dog that has not received direction or training during the formative months is a tough row to hoe.

Continue to socialize and train. Bernese are often very easy going and tractable as baby pups which can lull novice owners into a false sense that their pup does not need training and socialization. Nothing could be further from the truth. As the pup continues to grow from 45 pounds upwards to 100 pounds or more, spending time to teach your dog self control becomes an essential if you plan to own a canine good citizen.

Sometimes during these months a Berner puppy's growth becomes a bit uneven. The rear quarters may appear higher for a week or longer and then the front quarters grow to catch up. Uneven growing may extend to 12 months of age or beyond depending on how individuals or a given family of dogs develops. Uneven growth spurts are not in and of themselves a cause for alarm. Dogs can appear a bit uncoordinated during growth spurts.



BERNESE PUPPY GROWTH GUIDE ~ 8 MONTHS - 1 YEAR

They are still BIG puppies

8 - 12 month old Berners are not physically or mentally mature. The family of dogs a pup comes from will have a significant bearing on whether the dog appears filled out or is still a gangly teenager by a year of age. Typically dogs between 8 - 12 months of age weigh around 70 - 110 pounds. By this time a good idea of the finished size of your Berner can be predicted. Dogs that weigh 100 pounds at a year may gain another 10 - 30 pounds of bulk over the next 2 - 3 years. Females that weight 70 pounds are likely to gain another 10 - 25 pounds of weight. A female weighing 85 pounds at a year might finish at around 95 - 100 pounds.

Young Berners rarely carry as much coat as their mature counterparts. Coats on both males and females usually continue to lengthen as they age. Leg feathers are just beginning to grow on many yearling Bernese Mountain Dogs.

Bernese Mountain Dogs are young adults from 8 months to a year of age. Reproductive hormones can affect behavior during this time frame. Many owners choose to spay or neuter their companion dogs prior to their reaching reproductive maturity. Hormones associated with reproduction can cause a dog to act out in ways that are undesirable and unacceptable in the home or in social settings. The puppy that was so obedient and tractable at an earlier age may become more self involved - 'brain dead, forgot everything they learned, won't listen, girl crazed, boy possessed, dingy and oblivious' might be a better way to describe some dog's behavior. Males acting on hormonal instincts can become extremely difficult for novice owners to handle. It is especially important to offer males firm direction and guidance during these months. Reinforce everything that has been learned. Continue to build your dog's confidence through encouragement and praise when behavior is to your liking.

Reproductive hormones can be quite a disruptive force in a dog's life.



Females may become skittish and nervous prior to their first heat cycle, which typically occurs between 8 - 14 months. Some girls may begin to have heat cycles as early as 6 months or as late as 16 - 18 months. Every female will have her own way of expressing herself during heat cycles. Some girls will be very excitable while others become less active. Sensitivity to human touches on the rear end during heat cycles is common. Girls may tend to urinate more frequently or mark their territory as they get closer to ovulation and during the time they are ready to accept a male. Some intact bitches have developed pyometra (inflammation and infection in the uterus) during or after heat cycles which can be a life threatening condition. Vaginal discharges with a foul odor or of a pussy, or tomato soup consistency

should be checked out promptly by a vet. A bitch may miss a meal or two during the time she is in season or when ovulating. Any continued refusal to eat especially in combination with frequent urination over more than a few days may require further investigation by a vet. It is advisable to spay your female between 6 - 8 months of age if you do not plan to breed her.

Some males have a very strong reproductive drive while others do not. Berner males can start to lift their leg when urinating as early as 6 months; but it is normal for males to not begin to lift legs until they reach 18 months. It is advisable to neuter your male if you do not plan to use him for breeding at around a year to 18 months of age. Distract intact males with a game of catch or a walk if they become inappropriately amorous and attempt to mount and hump other dogs, pets or people. When reproductive hormones

kick in some male Bernese may start to show aggressive behaviors towards other dogs, other male dogs especially. Males can be territorial and some react unfavorably to another dog invading their space. Tight quarters where a group of intact overly excited males have the opportunity to bump into each other can pose a risk to other dogs and to people. Inappropriate behaviors or signs of aggression like jumping on the back of another dog, placing the head over the shoulders of another dog, pulling while on leash and straining to move towards another dog, growling or charging should be met with calm and a mind towards placing the aggressor under control. If the dog is not on a leash - he should be - and he should be under control. Dogs that are not behaving with good sense and proper manners should be directed to sit or lie down. The command must be enforced. Do not permit an out of control dog to continue or accelerate his inappropriate behavior. Remove the dog from the situation if he is unresponsive to basic commands like down or sit. A time out and separation can prevent a dog that displays no self control from starting a fight.

EXPECTATIONS

With the large, impressive size of a young adult Bernese, often owners expect their yearling to act like a fully matured dog. Pups of this age that have been offered consistent guidance, have been socialized and have been taught to go outside to eliminate should know how to follow commands with reasonable consistency. A yearling Bernese should be housebroken when provided with consistent opportunities at 4 - 8 hour intervals to visit the outdoors; but that does not mean accidents can't happen. Yearling Berners are still puppies and will behave as such. It is not realistic to expect more of your pup than the maturity at a year of age allows. Pups of this age have energy and curiosity. Some will still chew and find inappropriate ways to entertain themselves. A young bored Berner will get into mischief. Berners can be exceptionally creative in finding an outlet for pent up energy - counter surfing, hole digging, house or yard plant eating, feather pillow destruction, TV remote control ravaging, garden hose evisceration, newspaper shredding, and other devilish antics we humans are not amused by can tickle a young dog's fancy. "My Berner is up to no good" you say. - These antics are the dog's way of letting owners know they need to pay more attention and provide direction.

'OLD SWISS SAYING'

The Swiss saying, "Three years a puppy, three years a good dog, three years an old dog and the rest is a gift..." is an accurate description of the Bernese Mountain Dog. Bernese Mountain Dogs will continue to lay down bone, put on width and substance, and heads will continue to broaden well into the second and third year of life. Young dogs are rarely as together structurally, appearance or behavior wise as mature three or four year olds. By the time individual dogs in this breed reach 5 - 7 years of age, they should be in glorious in coat; their structure set; they should be calm and self assured; they are in full body and are, ideally, in the prime of their lives.