

# Chapter 1

## Is a Dachshund Right for You?

---

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Reviewing the pros and cons of Dachshund ownership
  - ▶ Exploring the unique traits that make Dachshunds different
  - ▶ Determining if you're up to being owned by a Dachshund
  - ▶ Considering the Dachsie back problem
  - ▶ Swallowing the patience and cost factors
  - ▶ Choosing between one breed, two sizes
- 

**E**verybody loves a Wiener dog! Those funny bodies, those short little legs, those floppy ears, those pleading eyes, and those antics. Dachshunds are clowns. They can keep a room in stitches, and they can coax even the most stolid disciplinarian into slipping them just one more dog cookie. Dachshunds aren't big dogs, so they don't take up much room. And they're so darned *cute*. Who can resist a pet like that?

Apparently, not many of us. As of 2006 (the most current statistics available at the time of this printing), Dachshunds were the sixth most popular dog breed in terms of registrations with the American Kennel Club (AKC). They've been a little higher on the list and a little lower at times, but for more than a decade, the diminutive Dachsie has sat comfortably in the top ten.

Many people own Dachshunds, so they can't be too much trouble, can they? Of course, a cute face and a good sense of humor aren't reasons in and of themselves to take on the 15-year-or-so responsibility of owning a dog. Too many people don't give pet ownership in general, and Dachshund ownership in particular, a lot of thought. But you're not like them, because you've already begun research by picking up this book. Good for you! Before you proceed further in your quest for the Dachshund of your dreams, read this chapter to look closely at the responsibilities of Dachshund servitude (because, as you'll soon see, Dachsies own you, not the other way around). But what if you already have a Dachsie pup curled in your lap? Better late than never: You're still at the right chapter!

## *Examining the Pros and Cons of Dachshund Ownership*

Dachshund ownership is easy to romanticize: You and your cute little wiener dog, together forever. You see yourself taking leisurely walks through the park with your Dachsie by your side; relaxing with a good book and his warm body on your lap; having a loyal companion and friend, and a playmate for the kids; and having friends comment on how well-behaved, well-trained, and intelligent your dog is.

Well, guess what? Life with a dog isn't always like that. From sleepless nights with a new puppy to expensive medication to treat health problems in your aging pet (see Chapter 18), having a dog as a family member is a lot like having a child. It takes a lot of work and a lot of time. It takes a physical, emotional, and financial commitment. And it often ends in heartbreak, even when your dog lives to a ripe old age, because humans usually outlive dogs, and no one wants to say goodbye to a best friend.

On the flip side, living with a Dachshund *will* fill your life with fun. You'll always be the object of your Dachshund's colossal affection. You just need to be realistic and decide whether you're ready to take on the responsibility. This section helps you put your feelings in perspective.

### *Dachshund pros*

Here are some major benefits to owning a Dachshund:

- ✔ Dachshunds love you unconditionally.
- ✔ Studies show that having a pet lowers blood pressure and helps to manage stress.
- ✔ Fulfilling your dog's exercise needs may keep you in shape (see Chapter 16).
- ✔ Dachshunds are great companions and listeners.
- ✔ Dachshunds can help teach children to respect and be kind to animals.
- ✔ Dachshunds are good at warning you if someone is outside the house — welcome or not.
- ✔ If you bring home a rescued Dachshund, you can feel good about saving a life. And your dog will show his gratitude every day (see Chapter 5).

## A word about the AKC

The American Kennel Club (AKC) is a nonprofit organization, established in 1884, that's devoted to the advancement of purebred dogs. The AKC maintains a record of all registered dogs; publishes ideal standards for each recognized breed; sponsors a variety of dog events, including conformation shows, obedience and field trials, agility competitions, and the Canine Good Citizen program; and produces educational information. (See Chapter 2 for more information on the AKC's Dachshund standards.)

### *Dachshund cons*

A hard fact of life is that the drawbacks to owning a Dachshund can outweigh the benefits for some people:

- ✔ Dachshunds need plenty of attention and affection. They want to be with you, not tied to a chain in the backyard.
- ✔ Dachshunds aren't people (even though they may think they are!) and must be taught how to live with people. Without proper and consistent teaching and socialization efforts, your dog may end up becoming an annoyance to you, your family, or your neighbors. He may even inflict damage on your possessions, other people, or himself.
- ✔ Dachshunds must be housebroken, and until they are, your carpet or other household surfaces may suffer. (And housetraining a Dachshund is no picnic; for more, see Part III.)
- ✔ Dachshunds cost money. Most people can expect to spend around \$1,000 in the first year to give their new puppies the proper care and supplies.
- ✔ Dachshunds need your time. They require walking, feeding, training, grooming, and attention *every single day* to stay healthy and happy.
- ✔ Dachshunds aren't a commitment to be taken lightly. Many live to be 15 years old or more.
- ✔ Your Dachshund will probably grow old and die before you do. You have to make decisions about your Dachsie's health care and quality of life, and eventually you must deal with your own grief.
- ✔ Your Dachshund requires regular preventive veterinary care. If he becomes ill or injured, you're also responsible for his care and treatment. Dachshunds are prone to several serious health conditions (see Chapters 16 and 17), and the medical costs to treat these problems can be high.

- ✓ Dachshunds tie you down. You can't just fly off on a spontaneous vacation for a long weekend, or decide not to come home after work without arranging for your dog's care.
- ✓ Dachshunds don't speak English. You have to learn to communicate with your dog in a way he understands.

How's that for a reality check? Think long and hard about the commitment you're about to make before you bring home a Dachshund.



Dachshunds are more stubborn than some breeds, so training efforts can be frustrating for the beginner. Don't give up. When in doubt, talk to your vet, hire a trainer, and practice, practice, practice — every day. Eventually, you'll be speaking the same language, and your Dachshund will understand what you want. He really does live to please you, even if it sometimes seems like you live to please him.

## *Dachshunds: Not Just Any Dog*

It's one thing to prepare for a dog; it's another thing to prepare for a Dachshund. Dachshunds have all the basic needs of a dog, but they come with a few of their own special quirks and considerations. If you have your heart set on owning a Dachsie — who can blame you after seeing a cutie like the pup shown in Figure 1-1? — you must be ready to handle a few extras. The following list presents the common characteristics of Dachshunds:

- ✓ **Dachshunds have fragile backs.** Because of their dwarfism (big dog, short legs), Dachshunds are genetically predisposed to have faulty spines, which can become injured when handled incorrectly, or sometimes for no apparent reason. Certain things can be hard on a Dachshund's back and can even result in a paralyzing disk rupture:
  - Going up and down stairs
  - Jumping off furniture
  - Even running quickly around a sharp corner.

Get ready to carry your Dachshund up and down the stairs!

- ✓ **Dachshunds love to jump.** But because jumping is so hard on a Dachshund's back, you need to keep an eye on your Dachsie to keep him from jumping off high places like beds, couches, porches, and so on. Some people install ramps in their homes so their dogs can ascend and descend from high places without jarring their spines. (For more on making your home Dachshund-friendly, see Chapter 6.)

## The Dachsie name game

The name *Dachshund* is German for “badger dog.” Although plenty of people pronounce it like *dash-hound*, the word is correctly pronounced *docks-hoont*. Yet, in Germany, the Dachshund isn’t called a Dachshund at all. The dog is a *Teckel* or *Dackel*. (Back in the 19th century, the Dachshund was even called the Royal Teutonic Dog by some.)

The name *Dachshund* is somewhat misunderstood. *Dachs* means “badger” in German; *hund* doesn’t, contrary to what you may think, mean “hound.” It simply means “dog.” Although Dachshunds are, to this day, classified in the Hound group according to the American Kennel Club, they could arguably fit just as well with the Terriers. *Terrier* means “earth dog,” and going underground is what Dachshunds do best (well, one of the many things they do best). Dachshunds hunt by scent and have keen noses like their Hound brothers and sisters, but if you’re on the other side of a door, that bark sounds an awful lot like a Terrier.

In any case, categories don’t really matter. What matters is knowing that your Dachshund will display characteristics of the Hound *and* the Terrier. You can call him anything you like! (How about “good dog”?)



✔ **Dachshunds live to eat.** Obesity puts further strain on a Dachshund’s back — not to mention his heart and entire body. Cute and pleading as he may be, you must be prepared to keep your Dachshund’s eating under control. No, your Dachshund shouldn’t eat that quarter-pound burger with cheese, let alone too many extra dog treats!

Dachshunds (like all dogs) have fewer taste buds than humans, so the taste of food isn’t as intense for them as it is for us. For this reason, dogs are more likely to eat just about anything, taste not withstanding.

✔ **Dachshunds bark.** Barking is part of their *modus operandi*. They were bred to hunt badgers or other small game underground (see Chapter 2). When the game was cornered, a Dachshund would bark to alert his human. Although you can train any dog not to bark excessively, Dachshunds bark pretty frequently. Get used to it, or don’t get a Dachshund.

✔ **Dachshunds are manipulative.** They’re cute, and they know it. They’re clever, too. They can get you to do just about anything, unless you have rules and you stick to your guns. Your dog has to know that rules are rules and that what you say goes. If you’re a big marshmallow when it comes to consistency and rule enforcement, you can’t get angry at your dog for making his own rules. Somebody has to do it!

So, what would your Dachsie's rules be? Here's a good guess:

- I can do whatever I want to do, whenever I want to do it.
- If I touch it, lick it, chew it, shred it, smell it, or see it, it's mine.
- Humans live to serve me.

Unless those rules sound reasonable to you (Hint: They shouldn't!), prepare to accept your role as pack leader.



Photo courtesy of Gail Painter.

**Figure 1-1:** Dachsies, although cute, love to bark, jump, and manipulate.

---

## *Understanding a Dachshund's Special Needs*

Dachshunds have special-care needs related to preserving the integrity of their spinal cords. Dachshunds are *chondrodys-trophic*, an inherited condition that results in dwarfism and makes the Dachshund's spine vulnerable to disc rupture. One hard jump off a high bed, a fall from a porch, or even a sudden twisting movement to catch a ball can rupture a disk. The result can range from severe pain to paralysis — temporary or permanent. (For a more detailed discussion of disk disease, see Chapter 17.)

## “How common is this flimsy disk problem?”

According to the Dachshund Club of America, Inc. — in its must-have publication *Canine Intervertebral Disk Disease* (available from the DCA for free — see Chapter 20 for contact information) — approximately one in four Dachshunds will experience a disk problem. Evidence suggests that Intervertebral Disk Disease (IVDD) is a genetic condition. The University of California, Davis, is currently investigating the genetic nature of this disease. If the link can be determined, scientists may be able to develop a test to predict which dogs are most likely to suffer from IVDD. Meanwhile, experts do know that most incidents occur between the ages of 3 and 7, with age 4 being the most common age of occurrence.

Of course, not every Dachshund is doomed to suffer this debilitating and painful condition, and I hope you won't be dissuaded from bringing a Dachshund into your life out of fear. But caution is warranted. Here are some steps you can take to care for your dog:

- ✔ Avoid long or steep flights of stairs and jumps off high places.
- ✔ Steer clear of any activities, like vigorous tug-of-war games, that can twist the spine.
- ✔ Keep your dog slim (for more on diet, see Chapter 8).
- ✔ Exercise for fun and for preventive measure. Daily walks and plenty of activity are important to keep a Dachshund's muscles strong and stable so they can support the spine.



Just be sure that the activities you choose are the kinds a Dachshund excels in — brisk walks and hikes, organized field-trial or earth-dog competitions (see Chapter 15), or just playing in the park.

In other words, just like a human with a weak back, Dachshunds need to exercise properly, eat a healthy diet, and avoid certain movements to minimize the possibility of injury. If you follow these responsible Dachsie-owner rules, chances are your Dachshund will never have a problem.

## What's Your PQ (Patience Quotient)?

Living with a Dachshund requires a degree of patience. Let me emphasize this one: *Patience*.

Do you have the patience required not to lose your cool when your Dachshund steals your pot roast right off your plate? Or eats the last half of your book before you get to the exciting conclusion? Or has an accident in the house *again*? I'm not saying you can't get irritated — or even downright angry — at your Dachshund. But yelling, screaming, flailing your arms around, and, dog-forbid, hitting your pup are activities that will do more harm than good every single time.

Every time your Dachshund makes a mistake — accidentally or on purpose — you have an opportunity to teach him something. This is especially true when you catch him in the act. But this teaching has to be performed calmly and rationally. Teaching a Dachshund is a lot like teaching a child: Losing your temper will only scare and confuse your charge. Keeping your cool will prove that you're the pack leader and the one with all the power. (For more on training your Dachshund, head to the chapters of Part III.)

Think long and hard about whether you have a short fuse or a long one before bringing home a Dachshund. And then, who knows? You may end up with a perfect little angel, and the whole discussion will be moot. Better to be prepared, however, because most Dachshunds are about half-angel, and half-, well . . . you know.

## ***Dachshund Dollars: The Financial Commitment***

Before you purchase any dog, whether Dachshund or Great Dane, be aware that you'll have to make a financial commitment as well as emotional and time commitments. Sure, you don't *have* to take your pet to the vet. You won't be breaking any law if you don't. But without regular veterinary visits, puppies have a much higher chance of becoming sick and dying from a serious disease, like parvovirus or distemper. And throughout their lives, adult and senior dogs need regular checkups, vaccinations (it is, in fact, against the law to skip the rabies vaccine), and tests to maintain their health and to catch health problems in the early stages. In addition, your vet can help you with wormings, flea control, and heartworm prevention, and can give you advice on general issues of care, behavior, and training. Worth every penny!



Puppies are immune to many diseases while nursing on mother's milk. As soon as a puppy is weaned and you take him home, however, his immunity quickly disappears and he's vulnerable to a number of serious diseases until he can build up his own immune system. Vaccinate your puppy according to your veterinarian's



recommendations to keep him safe during this gap of time. (For more on the first vet visit and which vaccinations your puppy really needs, see Chapter 16.)



*Canine parvovirus* is a quick-spreading, highly contagious viral disease that comes in two forms: enteric (diarrheal) and myocardial (affecting the heart). Young puppies are particularly vulnerable, and the disease often is fatal. *Distemper* is also a virus that spreads quickly and is highly contagious. In advanced stages, distemper affects the brain and can cause permanent neurological damage and often death. Distemper is the principal cause of disease and death in unvaccinated dogs.

In addition to a lifetime of regular veterinary care and vaccinations, you need to spend some of your hard-earned cash on supplies. Dogs need food — probably your most significant expense, all told — as well as feeding supplies, collars and leashes, dens (a crate or kennel), chew toys, and a number of other necessities and luxuries (see Chapter 8 for a major discussion on Dachshund necessities and accessories).

So how much money are we talking? Consider the theoretical breakdown of expenses shown in Table 1-1. Although expenses can vary dramatically from region to region, I list the approximate costs somewhere in the middle of the extremes. I also assume that you'll buy your puppy from a good breeder for an average price of \$600

**Table 1-1 First-Year Expenses for Dachsie Puppy Owners**

<i>Item</i>	<i>Cost</i>
<b>The dog</b>	<b>\$600.00</b>
<b><i>Veterinary</i></b>	
First office visit	\$50.00
Four vaccinations at \$35.00 each	\$140.00
Rabies shot	\$15.00
Bordatella vaccine	\$15.00
Leptospirosis vaccine (x2) and/or Lyme disease vaccine (x2), depending on where you live	\$15.00 each
Spay/neuter operation	\$150.00
Registration	\$20.00

(continued)

**Table 1-1 (continued)**

<i>Item</i>	<i>Cost</i>
<b>Total vet cost</b>	<b>\$420.00</b>
<b><i>Prevention</i></b>	
Heartworm prevention at \$3.50/month	\$42.00
Flea control spot-on at \$8.00/month	\$96.00
<b>Total prevention cost</b>	<b>\$138.00</b>
<b><i>Obedience classes</i></b>	
Puppy class (6–8 sessions)	\$50.00
Basic obedience (6–8 sessions)	\$50.00
<b>Total obedience classes cost</b>	<b>\$100.00</b>
<b><i>Services</i></b>	
Pet sitter/boarding for one-week vacation at \$20.00/day	\$140.00
Professional grooming (for longhairs and wirehairs), 6 times/year at \$25.00/session	\$150.00
<b>Total services cost</b>	<b>290.00</b>
<b><i>Pet supplies</i></b>	
Food	\$400.00
Leash	\$20.00
Retractable Leash	\$25.00
Collar or harness	\$12.00
Food and water bowls	\$10.00
Dog bed (although Dachsies will probably prefer to sleep with you)	\$50.00
Crate	\$75.00
Shampoo (two bottles)	\$20.00
Toothbrush/paste	\$5.00
Nail clippers	\$10.00
Brush	\$5.00

<i>Item</i>	<i>Cost</i>
Comb	\$6.00
ID tags	\$4.00
Pet gate	\$40.00
Toys (chew toy, squeaky toy, ball, and plush toy)	\$50.00
Treats, one box/month	\$30.00
Chewing/teething treats (rawhides, hooves, and so on), one purchase/month	\$50.00
Poop scoop	\$10.00
Breed book	\$15.00
Training book	\$15.00
Pet odor remover, 1 gallon	\$20.00
<b>Total pet supplies cost</b>	<b>\$872.00</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$2,420.00</b>

Not cheap — and this grand total assumes that your pup is healthy. If your puppy suffers from serious health problems, you can add quite a bit to the grand total. Are you ready for this?

Sure, you can cut corners here and there, but if you have to cut so many corners that you compromise the health and welfare of your dog — or if you aren't willing to spend money on your pet because he's "just a dog" — perhaps you should reconsider bringing a dog into your life right now. Dogs deserve proper care and a comfortable existence just like you do.

## *The Size of Love: Standards versus Minis*

A Dachshund decision you need to consider is what size will work best for you. Dachshunds come in two sizes — Standard and Miniature — according to the official breed standard published by the American Kennel Club and the Canadian Kennel

Club. Although the AKC doesn't officially consider the two sizes as separate classifications, the sizes are divided by weight for the purpose of competition:

Minatures are 11 pounds and under at 12 months of age and older; Standards are over 11 pounds, usually falling between 16 and 32 pounds.

Unofficially, many people call Dachshunds between 11 and 16 pounds *tweenies*, because they're between the two preferred Dachshund sizes. Tweenies may not be preferable in the show ring, but they're just as good as the larger Standards and the smaller Minatures as pets. Some pet owners even prefer the medium size.



In Europe, Dachshunds officially fall into three sizes: Standard, Miniature, and Rabbit. These sizes are determined not by weight, but by chest circumference. Rabbits are what Americans would consider the smallest Minatures.

What size suits your fancy? Maybe you've seen only Standard Dachshunds, or you like a sturdier dog. Maybe your heart melts at the sight of a Mini pup, and you can't wait to hold one in the palm of your hand. Maybe you aren't sure. No matter what, Dachshunds are a surprisingly sturdy dog and tend to believe they're much bigger than they are. Here are some general considerations:

- ✔ If you live in an apartment or a house without a fenced-in yard, a Miniature Dachshund may be best for you. Smaller dogs can fulfill much of their exercise needs inside the house.
- ✔ Minis may need more help with stairs and ledges because every jump is bigger for them than for a Standard, and they're just as prone to disk disease.
- ✔ If you like the idea of participating in outdoor activities with your Dachshund — things like hiking or long walks, for example — you may want to consider a Standard. I'm not saying Minis can't go on walks. On the contrary, they have a lot of energy and love to exercise. They may not be able to keep up with your fast strides, however. Remember how short their legs are!

The size matter is largely a personal one. Some people just like smaller or larger dogs — although Standards can hardly be considered large, even at their biggest and most roly-poly. Whatever size you choose, a Dachshund is a Dachshund — challenging and fun, full of mischief, and brimming with love for you (yes, even when he tips over that trash can). A Dachshund wants only your care, loving authority, and devoted attention in return.

## *Are You Ready to Be Owned by a Dachsie?*

I can almost hear you: “Yes, yes, I’m ready to own a Dachshund! Sure, Dachshunds have minds of their own, but I can handle one. How tough could it be with a dog that short?” Ah, but Napoleon was short, too. Take the following quiz to make sure you’re truly prepared and ready to be owned by a Dachshund; I’ll address the answers afterward:

**1. Dachshunds believe they should**

- A. Guard the house.
- B. Rule the house.

**2. A Dachshund loves to please you**

- A. No matter what.
- B. When you’re holding a doggy treat.

**3. Dachshund training sessions should be**

- A. Fastidiously structured.
- B. Cleverly disguised as playtime.

**4. When your Dachshund really, really wants that (third) oatmeal cookie, you should**

- A. Just give it to him.
- B. Close your eyes tightly, take a deep breath, try not to think about that cute little cocked head, and just say no.

**5. Dachshunds are obedient**

- A. After you’ve trained them.
- B. When the spirit moves them.

**6. When it comes to crowds, Dachshunds**

- A. Are a little shy and would rather blend.
- B. Love to be the center of attention and will do just about anything for applause (even if it’s naughty).

**7. When it comes to the power of destruction, a Dachshund**

- A. Doesn’t do much damage after the initial teething stages.
- B. Can rival a Labrador Retriever in his ability to dismantle a sofa.

- 8. Dachshunds often keep their noses to the ground because**
- A. They're surveying their environment through scent.
  - B. They're hoping beyond hope that they'll run across a piece of food.
- 9. If you don't allow your Dachshund on the furniture, he'll**
- A. Never get on the furniture.
  - B. Quickly learn to get off the furniture when he hears you coming.
- 10. To a Dachshund, a fence is**
- A. A safe enclosure.
  - B. Something to dig under.
- 11. To a Dachshund, the outside world is**
- A. An intimidating place.
  - B. His personal playground.
- 12. A Dachshund likes to perch in high places in the room because**
- A. He doesn't want to get stepped on.
  - B. He likes to survey his kingdom.
- 13. Dachshunds bark**
- A. Only when a true threat is approaching.
  - B. When anyone approaches — or just for fun.
- 14. To a Dachshund, any animal under 10 pounds is**
- A. Not worth noticing.
  - B. Absolutely worth chasing (hamsters beware!).
- 15. Dachshunds love**
- A. People.
  - B. Kids.
  - C. Other Dachshunds.
  - D. Other dogs.
  - E. The occasional cat.
  - F. All the above



## Body of a hot dog; eye of a tiger

Dachshunds are big fans of adults (although not necessarily strangers), well-behaved children, other Dachshunds, and often other dogs. A Dachshund may even befriend the family cat. Everything else, however, is quite literally “fair game.” Neighborhood cats, rabbits, squirrels, birds, field mice, hamsters, and other small animals look like prey to your Dachshund. And being bred to hunt, a Dachshund *will* pursue.

Count up all your responses. If you answered mostly As, you may not be ready for a Dachshund. Your ideas of what a dog should be and do may be better fulfilled with another breed. Of course, to grasp that special Dachshund mode of thinking, you may just need to give this book a once-through and then try the quiz again. Converts abound.

If you answered mostly Bs, you’re already talkin’ Dachsie. You already know, or can guess at, what life will be like with a Dachshund in the house. Challenging? Yes. Fun? Oh, yes. Easy? Oh, no! But as long as you know what you’re getting into and are ready to trade in the easy parts for some great fun, you may be just the kind of companion a Dachshund needs.

And as for Number 15: Although the answer is F (all the above), *you* will be tops on your Dachshund’s list.

