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### The Truth About Pit Bulls

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#### What is a Pit Bull?

There's a great deal of confusion associated with the label "pit bull." This isn't surprising because the term doesn't describe a single breed of dog. Depending on whom you ask, it can refer to just a couple of breeds or to as many as five—and all mixes of these breeds. The most narrow and perhaps most accurate definition of the term "pit bull" refers to just two breeds: the American Pit Bull Terrier (APBT) and the American Staffordshire Terrier (AmStaff). Some people include the Bull Terrier, the Staffordshire Bull Terrier and the American Bulldog in this group because these breeds share similar head shapes and body types. However, they are distinct from the APBT and the AmStaff.



Because of the vagueness of the "pit bull" label, many people may have trouble recognizing a pit bull when they see one. Multiple breeds are commonly mistaken for pit bulls, including the Boxer, the Presa Canario, the Cane Corso, the Dogo Argentino, the Tosa Inu, the Bullmastiff, the Dogue de Bordeaux, the Alapaha Blue Blood Bulldog and the Old English Bulldog. Think you can accurately identify a pit bull? Test yourself by following the link: [http://aspca.universityofcalifornia-a-bull.com/FindtheBulldogForPitBull\\_v3.html?010-2&w=0&h=0&rt=0&sl=0&st=0&td=0&v=0&w=0](http://aspca.universityofcalifornia-a-bull.com/FindtheBulldogForPitBull_v3.html?010-2&w=0&h=0&rt=0&sl=0&st=0&td=0&v=0&w=0)

#### The Pit Bull's History

##### Origins

The pit bull's ancestors hail from England and were brought to North America by English immigrants. These descendants were bred from the bulldog, which some breed historians believe originally served as a "gripping dog" for hunters of large game. (The term "bulldog" does not refer to the American Kennel Club's English Bulldog. This more recently developed breed serves as a loyal companion rather than a working dog.) Later, bulldogs were likely used as butcher's dogs and helped control large livestock. Eventually, these dogs were bred to participate in an inhumane blood sport called "baiting." Spectators found it highly entertaining to watch bulldogs pitted against bulls, bears and other large animals. During these violent events, one or more dogs were expected to attack another animal, biting it around the face and head. The dogs usually maintained their grip until the animal became exhausted from fighting and loss of blood. After animal baiting was banned in the early 1800s, people began pitting dogs against each other, and the cruel sport of dog fighting was born. As it grew in popularity, enthusiasts developed a lighter, more agile dog for the fighting ring. Some people bred their bulldogs with black and tan terriers, creating dogs who were only 25 to 30 pounds. Others may have simply selected smaller bulldogs for breeding purposes. These dogs were the forebears of the present-day pit bull.

##### The Pit Bull Today

Most experts agree that today's pit bull is a short-coated dog characterized by a wide skull, powerful jaws and a muscular, stocky body. But there is great variation in the pit bull's appearance. Typically 35 to 65 pounds, some weigh as little as 25 pounds, while others tip the scales at 80 pounds or more. Some have bulkier frames and colossal skulls; others have leaner, more muscular bodies. All are strong and athletic. With their impressive stamina and staunch work ethic, pit bulls enjoy a variety of activities, including agility, disc dog competitions, flyball, freestyle and competition obedience. They often excel in weight-pulling contests and schutzhund. Some pit bulls work cattle in herding trials, and some still function as hunting dogs.

#### The Pit Bull Temperament

Dog breeds are characterized by certain behavioral traits. Each breed was developed to perform a specific job, whether it is hunting rabbits or driving downed birds, herding livestock or sitting on people's laps. When developing a breed, breeders select only those dogs who perform their job best to produce the next generation.

Physical abilities and behavior are both important facets of any breed. A well-bred dog should have both the physical attributes necessary to perform his job and the behavioral tendencies needed to learn it. It's not surprising that individuals of a specific breed tend to look and behave somewhat similarly. However, it's important to realize that even though a breed may be characterized by certain behaviors, individuals of the same breed can vary tremendously. Some dogs are courageous, while others are timid. Some dogs are tenacious, while others are easygoing. Some dogs are sociable, while others are aloof. Like people, all dogs have unique personalities.

##### The Influence of a Fighting History

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When two dogs fight, the conflict is usually mutual. The objective is for one dog to win the engagement with little or no bloodshed. The participants try to intimidate each other by engaging in a series of elaborate behavior, which may include posturing, circling, growling, showing teeth and snarling. Bites delivered during a fight are typically inhibited because the pain is to cause pain but not necessarily to inflict serious injuries. Pit bulls have been bred to behave differently during a fight. They may not show warning before becoming aggressive, and they're less likely to back down when clashing with an opponent. When provoked, they may become aggressive more readily than another breed might. Sometimes they don't retreat their bites, so they may cause injury more often than other dogs.

Should You Keep a Pit Bull Away From Other Dogs?

Pit bulls were genetically selected for their fighting ability. What does this mean? It doesn't mean that they can't be around other dogs, that they're unpredictably aggressive or that they will always fight to the death. These are all common myths about pit bulls. It does mean that they may be easily encouraged to fight with other dogs.

The best way to prevent the development of aggressive behavior toward other dogs is to focus on early socialization. Learn how to interact, play and communicate with members of their own species. Dogs of all breeds need to be well socialized during puppyhood. If a puppy has many good experiences with other dogs, any future aggressive experiences will have less of an impact on him. Suppose a puppy is playing with another dog and the play escalates into a fight. This is relatively normal, and most well-socialized puppies will add events to play with other dogs afterward. If, on the other hand, the puppy has had only few experiences with other dogs, a fight may make a bigger impression on him. He may decide that the dog isn't like other dogs, and that feeling may contribute to fearful or aggressive responses to them when he returns.

Pit bull puppies may need even more socialization than other breeds. Numerous positive social experiences can teach a pit bull puppy to enjoy the company of other dogs. Frequent social interaction may also help pit bull owners modify their own play style, which is often more rough-and-tumble than that of other breeds. However, because of pit bulls' natural tendencies, a little squabble between friends can turn into a serious fight, even if a pit bull has been very well socialized. And, after experiencing a fight or two, a pit bull may become wary with unfamiliar dogs in general. Some pit bulls, the individuals of many breeds, only remain friendly with dogs they meet during puppyhood—which is another good reason to make sure your pit bull puppy makes plenty of friends.

Are Pit Bulls Dangerous to People?

Despite the fact that pit bulls were bred to fight with each other, nearly 100,000 are bred each year in production dogs that are friendly and friendly to people. However, because their opponent's dog before a match, most of the pit bulls were bred to fight with other dogs and often called them apart to and a fight. An dog who behaved aggressively toward a person was called, or killed, to avoid passing on such an undesirable trait. Pit bulls are bred to fight with other dogs, which is why they are called "fighting dogs." However, because of their natural tendencies, a little squabble between friends can turn into a serious fight, even if a pit bull has been very well socialized. And, after experiencing a fight or two, a pit bull may become wary with unfamiliar dogs in general. Some pit bulls, the individuals of many breeds, only remain friendly with dogs they meet during puppyhood—which is another good reason to make sure your pit bull puppy makes plenty of friends.

Why the Bad Rap?

Today, the pit bull has acquired a reputation as an unpredictable and dangerous menace. His intimidating appearance has made him attractive to people looking for a macho status symbol, and this popularity has encouraged unscrupulous breeders to produce puppies without maintaining the pit bull's typical good nature with people. To make matters worse, breeders often have a vested interest in presenting a false image of their dogs. Many breeders will tell you that their dogs are friendly and gentle, but they will often refuse to let you see the dogs in person. In fact, many dogs of other breeds are bred to fight with each other, but they're not bred enough today for television and print.

Despite the bad rap, a well-socialized and properly trained pit bull is one of the most delightful and gentle dogs in existence. It is only a myth that the breed is more prone to biting than other breeds. Some of the most beloved dogs in American history were pit bulls. A set bull named Steady, a dog owned by a man named George, was the first dog to be trained to fight with other dogs. Steady was a champion fighter and was often referred to as the "fighting dog of the world." During World War I, he was used to guard the front lines of the American Expeditionary Force in France. He was also used to guard the front lines of the American Expeditionary Force in France. He was also used to guard the front lines of the American Expeditionary Force in France. He was also used to guard the front lines of the American Expeditionary Force in France.

Modern pit bulls can still be protagonists for their breed. Some are registered therapy dogs and some are helping handicapped and learning disabled children. Some are registered as service dogs and some are helping handicapped and learning disabled children. Some are registered as service dogs and some are helping handicapped and learning disabled children. Some are registered as service dogs and some are helping handicapped and learning disabled children.

Pit Bull Myths

There are numerous myths circulating about pit bulls, some invented by people who are afraid of the breed and others disseminated by well-meaning pit bull advocates. A few of the most common myths follow.

"Pit bulls have locking jaws!" This is patently false. There is nothing unique about the anatomy of pit bulls that would allow them to lock their jaws together. In fact, many other breeds, including bulldogs, mastiffs, and boxers, have locking jaws. The myth is likely a result of the breed's reputation for being powerful and strong. However, because they're powerful dogs, pit bulls do have strong jaw muscles, like all dog breeds, and that means they can bite through people's legs. Please see our article on breaking up a dog fight to learn more about this important topic.

"If a pit bull bites another dog, it's going to start biting people next." Research confirms that aggressive dogs are no more likely to direct aggression toward people than dogs who aren't aggressive to other dogs. In fact, some of the best fighting dogs are the most trustworthy with people.

"All pit bulls are geriatric angels who can be left unsupervised with dogs of any size, cats and other animals." Pit bulls aren't vicious monsters—but they are dogs who have been bred to fight with other dogs. While some pit bulls are indeed very enjoyable, others should not be left alone with other dogs, cats or other pets. Pit bulls are strong, determined dogs. It might not be a pit bull who starts a fight, but he may be the one to finish it. This statement is somewhat true. Some pit bulls are indeed very friendly and social. However, because they're powerful dogs, pit bulls do have strong jaw muscles, like all dog breeds, and that means they can bite through people's legs. Please see our article on breaking up a dog fight to learn more about this important topic.



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