



Flooring Choice & Dogs

We want to manage a dog's environment to avoid risk of injuries caused by slips, trips, and falls. Young dogs whose growth plates have not closed can suffer injuries when they slip or fall on a hard floor, for example. Generally speaking, all hard floor surfaces are unforgiving to joints which add wear and tear over a dog's life and exacerbate arthritic conditions.

However, as a mobile practitioner, I see an increasing number of new build homes which incorporate hard and slippery floors; these are marketed as easy to clean and stain resistant. (Whether these surfaces are compatible with the long-term impacts of a dog's claws as they run and play remains debatable.)

A flooring choice is a trade-off between budget, aesthetics, and practicality. I am currently looking to replace carpet in my home and so a deep dive into flooring choices has been warranted.

If you are thinking exclusively about how easy a floor is to clean, then sources will tell you to ditch carpet and choose scratch resistant laminate, vinyl, tiles, or hardwood. I have ruled these out, however, because of the risks to joint health; there is also documented research about the benefits of carpet for people, which is transferrable to our dogs:

*"The higher frictional properties of carpets result in fewer falls, and the better resilience of carpets means that when a person does fall, there is less likely to be injury"*ⁱ

There are other considerations, too, when choosing carpet. Environmental exposure is a real issue and, since our dogs live on the floor and are inside more than we are over the course of a normal day, they have an increased risk of exposure.

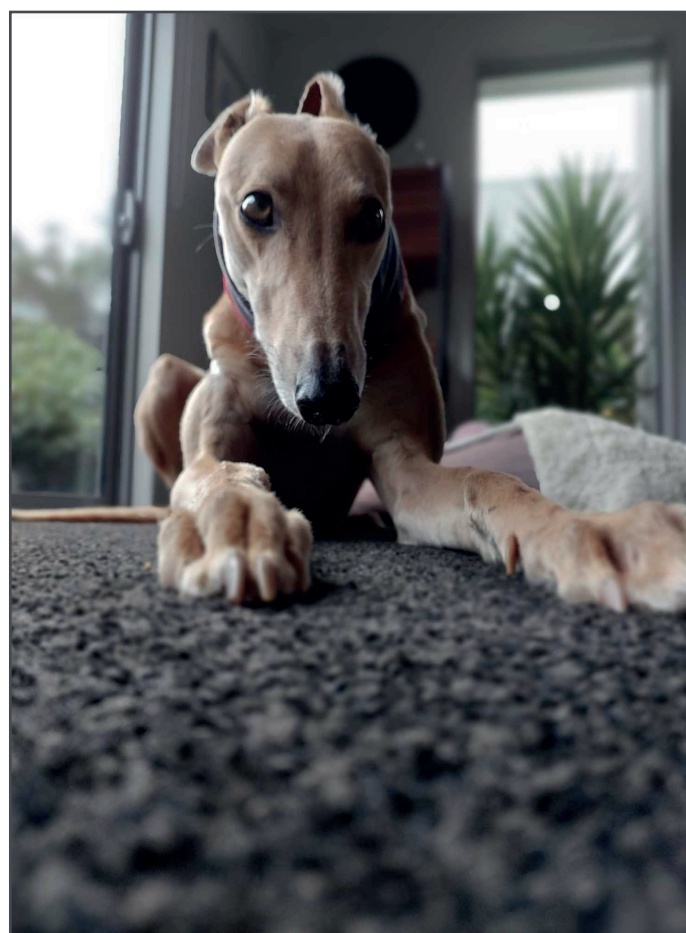
Any new carpet will 'off gas,' releasing volatile organic compounds that are used in the manufacture of the carpet, such as from the glues that bind the carpet fibres to its backing. Headaches, dizziness, and nausea are the primary symptoms. The US EPA has published guidelines which indicate that vacuuming daily with a vacuum equipped with a HEPA filter and cleaning with a hot water extraction system will reduce new carpet emissions. Ventilating the home thoroughly over the first 72 hours is also recommended.

Wool carpets have been found to be an effective thermal insulator, saving 8-13% of heating and cooling costs, with the greatest thermal insulation provided by thick carpets on underlaysⁱⁱ. For an older or arthritic dog, good insulation is important. In winter, get down on all fours in your home and feel the temperature variation.

In terms of safety, a wool carpet will be less flammable than a synthetic one, keeping both me and my dog safer should an ember from the wood fire escape. Research has found that wool will not ignite easily and will often self-extinguish.ⁱⁱⁱ

NZ-based research by institutions AgResearch and its predecessors, the Wool Research Organisation of New Zealand and Canesis, have studied the potential of wool carpets and fabrics to purify indoor air. In those studies, it was found that wool neutralises contaminants such as formaldehyde, sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides more quickly than synthetic carpet fibres and does not re-emit them. It was suggested that wool carpet may continue purifying the air for up to 30 years, (although I doubt my carpet will last that long).^{iv}

Finally, you must make a choice about how to clean carpet in a pet-friendly way. Hot water cleaning and rinsing is clearly preferable to the very toxic perchloroethylene dry cleaning powder I see on the shelf of my local carpet retailer. As a toxic chemical, exposure can cause adverse effects ranging from headaches and nausea to damage of the kidney, liver, immune, reproductive, and hematologic systems.



Wyatt approves of his owner's choice of carpet

ⁱ Wool Research Organisation of NZ, Technical Bulletin, Consumer Properties of Carpets, January 1998

ⁱⁱ AgResearch Limited, Technical Bulletin, The Thermal Properties of Wool Carpets, 2016

ⁱⁱⁱ International Wool Textile Organisation

^{iv} AgResearch, Technical Bulletin, The Removal of Air Contaminants by Wool Textiles, August 2015