

Exercising Your Dog/Puppy

Do you feel guilty that your pet does not get enough time with you? It is a situation that happens to most of us, but one that can be easily remedied. Giving your dog an opportunity to exercise with you every day can increase your bonding time and help to improve her quality of life.

Here are some reasons why you should exercise your dog daily, what can happen if you do not, and helpful tips for starting an exercise plan with your pup.

Benefits of Exercise for Dogs

Big or small, young or old, dogs need to exercise daily. While the age and breed of your dog may affect your dog's ability to exercise, all dogs still need to take part in some form of daily physical activity.



Exercise tones a dog's muscles, helps the body and metabolic system to function properly, and engages the mind.

Why Senior Dogs and Those With Disabilities Still Need to Exercise

Dogs that are less active and older—despite having physical conditions that can slow them down—still need to engage in some activity to keep the body working as it should.

Daily exercise is even more important for dogs with arthritis because it helps keep their joints moving. If you think your dog would experience too much pain to go on a casual 30-minute walk, talk to your veterinarian about pet pain medication and other pet health treatments.

Dogs that use specially equipped wheelchairs or carts can still enjoy a walk through the neighborhood, and some can even continue to take part in water activities.

What Can Happen When Dogs Don't Exercise

Without physical activity, your dog will become bored, frustrated and unhealthy.

Here are some issues that come up when dogs suffer from lack of physical activity and mental stimulation:

Destructive behaviors: These usually decrease once the dog is getting out every day.

Loss of muscle mass: This can be difficult on a dog's body.

Weight gain: Dogs will also become overweight if they are not allowed to burn off the calories they take in during the day. This is especially true if they are given a lot of dog treats in compensation for lack of attention.

Tips for Beginning a Dog Exercise Program

Before you begin a dog exercise program, be sure to visit your veterinarian for a health check. Your vet can recommend an exercise plan that is appropriate for your dog's age, breed and condition.

If you want to get your dog started on an exercise program, here are some guidelines.

Determine How Much Exercise Your Dog Needs

Exercise needs are based on a dog's age, breed, size and overall health. However, it is generally recommended that your dog spend between 30 minutes to two hours being active every day—and not just on the weekends.

Your veterinarian can help you decide exactly how much exercise your dog actually needs.

Breeds in the hunting, working or herding groups (e.g., Labrador Retrievers, hounds, Collies and shepherds) will need the most exercise. If your dog is in one of these groups and is in good health, she should be getting at least 30 minutes of rigorous exercise along with her one to two hours of daily activity.

If your dog is a short-nosed breed, like a Bulldog, he will not tolerate a lot of daily exercise once he is fully grown. A casual walk around the neighborhood will be sufficient.

As a general rule, you can tell your dog needs exercise if she is restless or pacing. If she isn't restless, a short walk should be enough to keep everything in order.

Start Your Dog Exercise Routine

Start out slowly and work your way up to longer walks or playtimes as they seem suitable. Additionally, don't forget to allow for a warm-up period and cooldown time at the end of your sessions.

A leisurely walk to the park or around the block before exercise should be enough to warm the muscles and prepare your dog for a serious game of catch or other strenuous activity.

And, don't forget that mental stimulation is just as important as physical exercise. Don't be afraid of taking new running paths with your dog, going to different dog parks in your area, or introducing new dog toys and games to your routine.

Activities for Exercising Your Dog

Depending on the level of exercise your dog is capable of, there are a variety of activities they can take part in.



Low-Impact Exercise:

Walking

Moderate Exercise:

Jogging

Hiking (flat trail)

Playing fetch

Strenuous Exercise:

Running

Hiking (with hills)

Swimming

Playing a more intense game of fetch

Agility training

Mentally Stimulating Exercise:

Trying a new walking route

Training exercises

Playing with puzzle games and feeders

Scent training

Agility training

Pay Attention to Your Dog's Signals

You don't want to pressure your dog into doing things that are too strenuous, or you could end up with bigger problems. Start slow if your dog is not accustomed to being physically active. Observe her responses, adding more activities or longer durations as she gets stronger.

Your dog should be happily tired, not exhausted, when you are done exercising her for the day. And remember that for most dogs, adding daily activities will NOT result in a need for more calories.

If you have any concerns about whether your dog can handle a long walk or whether you should implement a dog exercise plan for her, talk to your veterinarian.

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