



Exercising with Your Dog



Stay-Healthy Tips for You and Your Dog

Just like people, dogs need regular exercise and stimulation to keep them in tip-top shape, both physically and mentally. And since dogs crave human companionship, then who better to choose as your exercise partner than your pooch?

Frequent activity positively impacts your dog's health in many ways, benefiting his muscles, bones, digestion, sleep, circulation, and general attitude. The bond between canine and human also encourages humans to exercise more frequently and lose more weight than most nationally known diet plans. A key reason for the better results is that the dog walkers stayed with the program because of their emotional connection to their dogs.

Tips to get started

Exercise needs vary from dog to dog, depending on the dog's breed, age, weight, and other factors. Therefore, consult with your vet before starting an exercise program with your dog—and be sure to consult with your own physician about the right program for you.

- Take things slowly at first. Begin with short sessions at slow speeds; then, gradually increase the time, speed and distance.
- Your dog's paw pads will need time to toughen, so begin walking or running with him on soft surfaces such as dirt, sand or grass.
- Avoid exercising your dog immediately before or after he's eaten. A full stomach may cause digestive upsets. Provide only small amounts of water before and directly after exercise.

Keep things interesting

Just letting your dog out in the backyard is not enough—most dogs do not exercise themselves. Likewise, a brief daily walk may not be enough either. However, you can keep your dog both physically and mentally active on your daily walk by varying how you walk.

- Change the pace. Intermittently walk fast, slow, stop, etc. Your dog will come to see this as a game and will find the activity fun and stimulating.
- Change directions frequently. Go left, then right, turn in front of the dog, reverse direction, etc. Each time you make a change in direction, give a gentle flick of the leash to alert your dog you are about to change direction.
- Give obedience commands as you go. Stop and ask your dog to sit, lie down, etc.

Be sensible

No matter how fit your dog, his enthusiasm may overcome his common sense to know when to rest.

- Stop the games if your dog seems to be getting overly tired.
- Be sure he has access to fresh drinking water, but prevent stomach upset by limiting his intake if he is heavily panting.
- Take poop bags to clean up after your dog.

Watch the weather

In winter:

- Watch for signs of frostbite or hypothermia.
- Dress your short-coated dog in a doggie coat or sweater to keep him warm.
- After a romp in the snow, wipe your dog's paw pads and between the toes to remove any snow, ice or road salts that may have accumulated there.

In summer:

- Exercise in the cool hours of the morning or late evening.
- Watch for signs of heat stroke.
- Beware of hot asphalt, which can damage your dog's paw pads.

Exercise his mind

Exercise your dog's brain, too. Just 15 minutes once or twice a day of teaching basic obedience can tire your dog in a different way that is just as essential to his overall health and happiness. Review or teach the basics such as sit, stay, come, and walking on leash to energize the lethargic dog and tire out the hyper dog.

With some practice, you can establish the leadership required for a satisfying stroll with your dog so you can both reap the benefits of good health, fitness and a happy emotional bond. Remember, a tired dog is a happy dog!

