

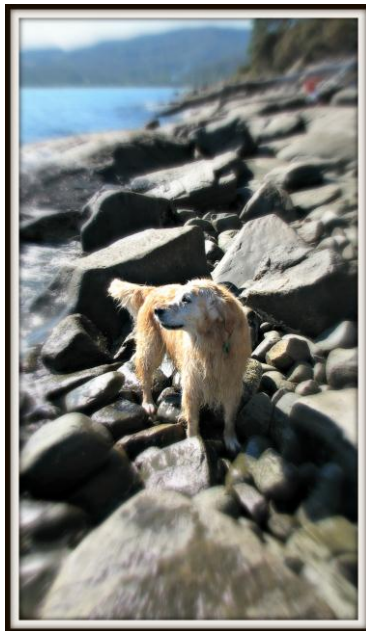


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Exercising Dogs



1. Advantages of exercise

- a) Exercise can improve bone and joint health, heart and lung function, makes show dogs look better, and helps sport or working dogs perform better.
- b) It can help train your dog. Whilst out exercising you can practice skills learnt in training classes, in a different environment.
- c) Friendly social interactions with other dogs and humans will improve your dog's sociability.
- d) It provides an opportunity to bond with your dog and teach new tricks (retrieval of balls or toys).
- e) The time you set aside to enjoy your dog makes it possible for the dog to do the important job of helping you stay emotionally and physically healthy.

2. Adequate exercise.

Regular, moderate and healthy exercise is what dogs need.

Healthy exercise engages both the brain and the body.

There is no simple answer to the question of how much exercise your dog needs, as this depends on many things such as age and breed (see below), but there are some guidelines on how to exercise safely.

According to your dog's condition, start with a tune-up of mental control as you give your dog a physical warm up. A fit dog may then go straight into strenuous exercise. A less fit dog will need a longer warm up, and a dog not up to high levels of activity may find the mental and physical warm up alone is enough.

Pulse the exercise in short segments, alternating between mental tasks and more strenuous physical ones. These periods can be altered according to your dog's fitness or activity levels.

After strenuous exercise, spend some pleasant, calm time with your dog before leaving him alone. It can be hard for dogs to calm down quickly, especially if you leave. Dogs can learn with time to "shift gears" more smoothly.

Considerations

- **Age:** Very young as well as old dogs should not exercise as hard as adults in their prime. Old dogs may have reduced hearing, sight and agility. Cater for their needs. Slowing activities may help him continue to participate safely and happily for a lot longer.
Young dogs are recommended to have no forced exercise until their growth plate closure (8 to 14 months, depending on breed and whether or not they've been desexed). That is, *they should not exercise more than they would voluntarily do on their own or with a pup of the same age*. They should not go running with an adult dog, nor should they be confined to a backyard where they may fence run all day. (see the handout: How much exercise does a puppy need)
- **Illness or injury:** lighter or restricted activities may be required to help the healing of an injury, and to prevent further harm. Exercises that stimulate the mind and fulfil the emotions, and exercise the body in healthy ways without adding stress are best. Scent tasks can fit these criteria, burning calories without having to run or jump. Respiratory illness and cardiac disease will limit a dog's ability to exercise safely.
- **Breed:** short-nosed dogs, long haired dogs and black dogs are more prone to overheating. Working-dog breeds are more prone to crazy, wild behaviour. Teaching some quiet pleasures is beneficial, such as scent and obstacle tasks, eating from a toy or searching for hidden food, being groomed, being massaged and settling at your side.
Hunting dogs can often be hard to call back when distracted by a scent. They may be unsafe for off-leash activities if roads are nearby.
- **Personality:** high energy, smart, bored and possibly stressed dogs are more prone to obsessive behaviours. Depending on his physical condition, they benefit from being taught a wide range of activities. These may include tracking, searching for food, eating food from a toy, working an obstacle course, retrieving games, doing chores around the house with you, carrying groceries from the car, going on errands with you, fetching the paper, and anything else you can think of.
A lethargic, or calm dog, (often described as "lazy"), will be content with a few interesting activities such as food searching games, going on walks, and maybe a little retrieving. Remember, they will need less food.
- **Lifestyle:** A mild life calls for mild exercise. Unless the dog is going to engage in a highly athletic sport, or needs strong musculature for the show ring, hard exercise is not really necessary. Many dogs will get enough exercise just by spending interesting days with people and other animals they enjoy the company of.
Busy owners are all too aware of how they need to "make more time". If the "me time" set aside can include your dog, then you both get advantages. If not, look for dog walkers, neighbours, young children (responsible enough), who would be willing to exercise your dog.
Too often we see dogs who try to cram too much into too short a space of time (the "weekend athlete"). Moderate exercise over a longer duration is kinder to the dog's body, and is mentally better for them.

3. Types of exercise.

The best exercise is that which increases mental and physical activity. It should be purposeful and increase the dog's ability to live happily in human society. It should be

balanced, helping the dog be calm and composed through regular practice of the skill. Remember the type of behaviour you want from your dog. Exercise adds zest to learning, while learning adds meaning and interest to the exercise. Combining the two will reduce the risk of injuries.

Some suggestions:

Interactive dog toys (e.g. Kongs®, everlasting treat ball®)

Aussie dog® balls and tug toys

Kong dispenser®/treat dispenser

Obedience/training classes

Agility classes

Backyard amusements (e.g. sand pits, tunnels)

Daily walking

Running/sniffing along beaches (dog friendly zones)

Finding local dog friendly parks

The RACT has a list of dog friendly accommodation whilst travelling

A great and often forgotten means of mental and physical activity is to encourage your dog to search for his dinner. This may include hiding all his food in a toy, or burying it, scattering it on the lawn, or making him actually work for it (i.e. do commands). Providing this is not creating any undue frustration or stress to his life, then it can be a great way to encourage mental stimulation, and also enhance your position to teach him new things. (see the handout "Entertaining your dog" for more suggestions)



4. Precautions

- a) Heavy objects should not be thrown for retrieval as they can harm your dog's teeth, neck, or other part of the body. Don't throw sticks for fetching or catching as they can jam into the back of his mouth or throat.
- b) Keep the throws low so your dog doesn't jump up and land on his hind legs. Jumping high in the air and landing awkwardly can cause stifle (knee) injuries. Frisbees should be used with caution as they may rise up higher in the wind than intended.
- c) Like humans, dogs should be warmed up and down after exercise (mentally and physically). This will reduce injuries and also help to encourage calm behaviour. If your dog has been crated or confined whilst you were at work, don't just let them "explode" out. Similarly, let them unwind after exciting exercise.
- d) Only exercise your dog at the level he is accustomed to. Like us, they will get stiff and sore if they do too much too soon.
- e) Heat exhaustion and heat stroke can occur. Young and old dogs have poorer temperature regulating abilities than dogs in their prime of life and peak of physical condition. Dogs with shortened muzzles (brachycephalics, such as pugs and bulldogs), black dogs, and long-haired dogs are also at an increased risk of overheating.
- f) Learning occurs when you are interacting with your dog, so make sure the exercise is teaching him positive things which make him a better companion, not encouraging disobedience or "guarding" behaviour. For example, if your dog is guarding the tennis ball with such fervour that he is growling at other approaching dogs, this is not an appropriate exercise for him, especially when other dogs are present.