



Exercising Your Dog

Sustained vigorous outdoor exercise is a necessity for dogs of every breed and size. In addition to helping to maintain your dog's good health, regular exercise can prevent many of the common behavior problems that plague owners such as chewing, digging, excessive barking and separation anxiety. A dog that is exercised regularly (in this case, regularly means every day, not just on weekends!) will not be as likely to be hyper, nervous and destructive in the house.

The amount of exercise your dog requires will vary according to breed, size, age and individual differences in dogs. In general, younger dogs will require more exercise, as will larger breeds such as Labs and Golden Retrievers. Sporting breeds (Labs, Golden Retrievers, Springers, Pointers, etc), working breeds (Dobes, Rotties, Huskies, etc) and herding breeds (Collies, Shepherds, Shelties, etc) require lots of exercise because they were all bred to do a job. Geriatric dogs still require regular exercise, but in more moderate amounts introduced gradually.

Ideally, a dog should be allowed to run flat out (in a safe place of course) until he tires on his own, twice a day. Since everyone cannot accomplish this with their dog, there are several other options:

1. Play retrieving or fetching games. Add variety by changing the retrieve object occasionally. Try plastic or canvas field training dummies, Frisbees, tennis balls and Kong toys. Remember: Do not throw the toy into the air so that the dog must jump for it. This could cause injury. If your dog will run away or does not want to come back with the toy, keep him on a fifty-foot length of line. Clothesline with a blot snap on the end is handy and inexpensive.
2. Swimming is a great exercise for both dog and owner. Either swim with your dog or throw training dummies or floating toys into the water for him to retrieve.
3. Jogging is beneficial for dogs and owners. If your dog has more stamina than you do, teach him to trot alongside your bike while you pedal.
4. Long walks are a good way to spend relaxation time with your dog. If walking is to have benefit as exercise, you must walk at least a mile, preferably two.
5. Obedience training exercises such as heeling and coming when called can be good exercise. The more reliably obedience trained your dog is, the more options you have to exercise with him safely. Consider enrolling in a basic obedience course.

Do not make the mistake of thinking that your dog will exercise himself simply because you put him in the backyard. He needs your attention and socialization and will probably simply stand there asking to come in the house if you do not interact with him.

Exercising your dog should be fun for both of you. Experiment with ways that all family members can participate in enjoying and exercising the dog. Be innovative.

Regular exercise will alleviate many behavior problems, keep your dog mentally and physically healthy and fit, help keep his weight down and give you a beneficial way to spend quality time with your pet.