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Paws in Motion

Exercise Your Pet Properly

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Just as with humans, it's very important to keep our pets moving. Exercise promotes better overall health, can prevent injuries and illness, helps with aging issues, and generally makes for a happier pet.

There are a few things to keep in mind, however, as you aim to keep your four-legged friend fit.



EXERCISE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE WORK ~ Exercise can be a FUN part of your pet's and your life together. Incorporate exercise into your daily routine by taking morning walks and workouts together, stretching your pet on an exercise mat after finishing your own stretches, or massaging your pet while relaxing together on the couch.

WARM-UP ~ Would you set out to run a couple of miles without warming-up? Of course not! Pet owners that drop their dogs into the dog park without taking a few minutes to warm them up are basically doing just that. Your dog is less likely to injure itself if you take a few minutes to warm-up and stretch their muscles and joints. Consider a 10 minute brisk walk before letting them run, jump and play intensely. Afterwards, make sure to cool them down with a 5-10 minute leisurely walk.



PET YOGA – Well, not exactly, but taking a few minutes to stretch and massage your pet will not only keep them limber and prevent injuries, but give you some great bonding time. If you're going to pet your dog or cat to show them affection, why not also make it valuable to their health? Believe it or not, they love it – stretching and massage is often the most relaxing time for our four-legged patients.

Ideally you want to remember to stretch your pet once they're warmed-up, before *and* after exercise. Try these simple at-home stretches:

Shoulder Extension: With your pet lying all the way on its side, keep the front leg straight and progress the entire limb towards your pet's face. Stop and hold at the point your pet seems uncomfortable or tight. If your pet pulls away, you may have pushed too far. Try again, but don't stretch quite as far, so they learn to relax their muscles. Hold for 15 seconds and repeat 3 times.



Hip Extension: With your pet lying all the way on its side, keep the hind leg straight and progress the entire limb backwards, keeping the leg parallel to the ground. Again, stop and hold at the point your pet seems uncomfortable or tight. Hold for 15 seconds and repeat 3 times.



Hamstring Stretch: With your pet lying all the way on its side, keep the hind leg straight and progress it forward so the paw heads to the nose. Always stop and hold at the point your pet seems uncomfortable or tight. Remember, if your pet pulls away, you may have pushed too far and you can try again, not stretching quite as far, so they learn to relax their muscles. Hold for 15 seconds and repeat 3 times.

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🐾 KEEP EXERCISE AGE AND BREED APPROPRIATE ~ We would probably never ask our 70-year-old grandmother to take a 2-mile jog down the beach with us. Dog owners taking their 7, 8, 9, 10 year-old dog running with them may be doing just that. Age-appropriate exercise is the key to fitness and longevity in pets. Walking, stretching, core muscle strengthening, diet and exercise can keep pets pain-free and living longer.



By the same token, we probably wouldn't expect a Basset Hound or Bulldog to play catch or fetch all afternoon in the park. Border Collies and Weimaraners are two breeds that require considerable exercise. German Shepherds can be prone to hip problems, Poodles to knee issues. Know your pet's breed (or breed mix) health profile and exercise needs, as well as personal exercise tolerance.

🐾 LIMIT EXPLOSIVE EXERCISE ~ Any strenuous activity, such as rough play, should be limited to intervals of 10-15 minutes, 2 to 3 times a day, in order to prevent common injuries such as knee problems like cruciate ligament or ACL tears, back problems like bulging intervertebral discs, and muscle strains. Urge your dog to rest about 10 minutes at a time between intervals (unlike humans, they won't think to take a break) and make sure to encourage them to drink water and lie in the shade while resting.



🐾 BUILD CONTROLLED ENDURANCE ~ To ensure that your pet remains healthy and injury-free, the majority of exercise should be controlled (on a leash, no running, jumping or rough play). This way, your pet is better physically prepared for strenuous activity, similar to sports training for humans.



🐾 KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS OF OVER-EXERCISE ~ If your dog sits down or lags behind on a walk, then you are walking them too far. Your pet should end the walk at the same pace that it begins the walk. It's a fallacy to think a pet should collapse and sleep for hours after exercising. This is a sign of over-exercising and possibly even pain. Consider seeking rehabilitation for pets that exhibit exercise intolerance.

🐾 SENIOR PETS ~ As your pet ages, it will simply not be able to do the same activities as when it was younger. Your pet may slow down on walks, have difficulty getting up, limp, or not want to navigate stairs or jump. Consider ramps for your aging pet, to assist them with difficult obstacles (such as getting up and down onto the sofa or in and out of the car). Also consider whether your expectations are realistic for your pet at their age (think of a 9 year-old Labrador Retriever as a human senior citizen). With an age-appropriate exercise program, older pets CAN regain a little more pep in their stride and even seem younger again. The key is to identify problem areas *as they age*, and develop an appropriate home care and pet rehabilitation program that fits both your lifestyles.

