

Let's Go for a Walk!

Getting your dog to behave on walks is easier than you think.

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If your dog usually walks nicely but occasionally gets excited and pulls, you can use a few tricks. First of all, if your dog gets excited in predictable situations, be ready. If your dog starts barking and leaping when he sees other dogs, look ahead for other dogs while walking. When you see one, tell your dog, "Leave him!" and turn around so you walk back the way you came. Top your dog facing away from the other dog, and have him sit and be still. When your dog has calmed down (and only when he has calmed down), turn around again and start walking toward the other dog. In the beginning, you may turn around again and again and again. That's ok! Eventually your dog will learn to approach other dogs calmly.

If your dog gets excited but is not controllable, simply have him sit. Make your dog concentrate on sitting. For example, if your dog loves children and gets excited when he sees kids, tell him to sit and stay as children approach. This way he is concentrating on being good and not jumping on the kids. Keep your hands on your pet to help him, and praise when him does sit still.

If you want to walk your dog but haven't done so recently, start slowly. Keep your walks short and at a relaxed pace. Sore muscles are no fun for dogs or people. In addition, your dog's pads will need to toughen. As your dog becomes conditioned to exercise, gradually increase the time you walk, the distance and pace. You may want to clock off a distance using your car's odometer, perhaps a quarter mile out and a quarter mile back to start. Or you might like using a pedometer. I find he helps me set goals to walk a little bit farther each time we go out.

Walking is a recreational activity you can totally control. You can walk fast and vigorously, at a steady pace, or you can stroll. You can walk alone with your dog, or you can invite a spouse, kids or a dog-owning neighbor. Walk first thing in the morning, at lunchtime or in the evening. You can exercise and train your dog and enjoy spending time with him. You can look at the world through your dog's eyes as you watch him react to his environment. Best of all, walking is free.