

Jog Your Way to a Healthier Dog

Many dogs need more exercise than a walk can provide.

Liz Palika

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Many dogs especially herding, sporting and working breeds designed to be active need more exercise than a walk can provide.

Some owners take their dogs jogging with them, which offers great exercise when done safely. Before you start running with your dog, take it to the veterinarian for a complete checkup. Even dogs that appear healthy may have a physical problem, such as elbow or hip dysplasia, that could worsen with strenuous exercise. If you have a very young or older dog, make sure running won't hurt it.

You will also want to refresh your dog's obedience training. Make sure it will walk and jog at your side. Don't let it run ahead, pulling on the leash. This can cause sore neck and shoulder muscles and make the outing difficult for you. If your dog pulls at the leash while you run, you'll wind up with strained muscles and have little control of your dog. Make sure it will run by your side in a nice heel position, with its neck and shoulders by your leg. If you have trouble teaching your dog this position, seek the help of an obedience instructor.

Start jogging gradually, especially if your dog has been a couch potato. Too much exercise too soon will result in sore muscles. In the beginning, you may want to alternate walking and jogging. Jog one block, walk a block and then jog another. Keep the speed and distances short until you and your dog are comfortable with both; then gradually increase the distance.

To avoid causing injuries, jog on softer surfaces. Concrete is unforgiving and repeated jarring on it can damage bones and joints. Asphalt is softer, but hot asphalt baked under summer sun can burn your dog's paws. Grass or sand is better for both of you but harder to run on watch for ruts or holes.

Keep an eye on your dog's pads as you jog. Its paws can become cut, scraped, burned and bruised. Injuries often heal on their own, but you need to keep the pads clean and dry and stop the exercise until they heal. If walking is painful or the pads are visibly cut or burned, call your veterinarian.

Watch your dog for stiffness, soreness and limping. If it starts to limp soon after starting to exercise, you probably pushed it too hard too soon. A massage may help relieve some of the stiffness. Sit on the floor, and have your dog lie between your legs. Begin with an easy, gentle massage.