

Down Dog Digest



No. 6



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Are your walks miserable?

How to make your daily walks fun instead of a chore



Do you dread taking your dog for a walk? Perhaps you're fed up living with painful shoulders, aching arms, or a bad back. Or annoyed by your dog pulling you off balance. Or tired by constantly needing to look out for distractions because you never know what your dog is going to do.

Your dog is out of control and that causes you immense frustration - you feel unimportant in your dog's life, to the extent you sometimes feel you don't even exist on his radar when you're out and about.

Do you worry about how long your walks should be or feel guilty if you only have time for

a quick trip round the block?

There are quite a few myths out there about walking your dog. One is: "You must walk your dog for at least an hour every day because your dog needs the exercise."

Partly true. In the sense that yes, your dog does need some physical exercise. But often much less than you think.

Just like us, dogs need to stay fit to be healthy, which means they need to have some physical exercise each day. But how much they need varies with their breed, age, condition and overall health.

Younger dogs need more exercise than older dogs. Some breeds need more exercise than others.

Dogs from the hunting, working and herding groups need the most. Border collies will take whatever you can give them - 10 hours every day would probably suit them down to the ground.

Husky types will grab the opportunity to power forward with you for several hours if offered.

Some small terriers have the stamina of an Olympic marathon runner and they too can walk with you all day.

Other breeds vary hugely in their exercise needs.

Most companion dogs are happy with a short half hour dander.

Many large and giant breeds may also be happy with shorter walks.

How to make dog walks fun instead of a chore

The best guide to whether you are giving your dog enough walks or not is how they behave in your home.

If your dog spends most of his time lying down snoozing or just pottering around, then you've probably got things about right.

But if your dog is destructive, or never settles, or pesters you to play with her all the time, or runs to and fro at the window, barking at anything and everything, then they may need more exercise than you currently give them.

Or perhaps you're giving them too much exercise. Or perhaps it's the TYPE of exercise they are getting.

Here's another myth: "If your dog is too full of energy you need to walk him more."

There are two reasons for dogs being hyper around the house and not settling. It's either overstimulation, or, surprisingly, boredom.

There's not much difference to see behaviourally between a dog who is bored and a dog who is overstimulated.

Both find it difficult to settle in the house, both can exhibit unwanted behaviours such as chewing, or nipping, or barking at everything, or jumping all over visitors.

Boredom is usually linked to a lack of stimulation, so the remedy is simple - do more with your dog.

Walks perhaps, but training definitely.

You need to allow lots (and lots) of sniffing and work that mind.



Overstimulated dogs show compulsive behaviours, such as chasing a ball again and again and again, never wanting to stop, even when they are physically tired. It's essential that these dogs are taught to calm down, so their stress hormone baseline can be reset back to normal.

The easiest way to do that is to give them mental tasks to do - things like practise some basic training exercises intermittently during the walk, such as asking for a sit, down, or stay for various lengths of time before throwing the ball. Allow plenty of sniff time on your walk, especially on the way home to allow them to wind down, and provide their food in imaginative ways so they have to work for it.



On walks, allow your dog to sniff. Lots. Your dog needs to check his daily pee-mail. Stop at each lamppost, gatepost, bush and tree. Walks should be more about letting your dog sniff than about the physical exercise.

You could try some wild agility - walking on walls, jumping over logs, getting on and off benches or tables, for example, for more active dogs.

Be more fun. Throw toys or food into longish grass for him to sniff out, or teach him to track back to find things you've dropped. That could save you a lot of bother one day, if you lose your keys.

Engaging in these ways with your dog will mean he's happy to pay attention to you, rather than the environment, which in turn will mean he stops pulling and saves your aching arms from more damage.

Come to our Perfect Pet course or book 1-2-1 training if you need more help teaching your dog to walk nicely. Walks CAN be fun!

Quiz: What sort of dog walker are you?

Answer the following questions - and be honest!

Circle the answer that applies to you:

1. Daily walks with my dog:

- A) Are a joy and I look forward to them
- B) Are a chore but I do them fairly regularly, even though my dog pulls badly
- C) Are a nightmare - my dog won't walk

2. When I get out my dog's lead or harness:

- A) My dog gets excited at first but calms quickly and it's easy
- B) My dog becomes a whirling dervish and it takes me a while
- C) My dog runs and hides

3. When we get to the door:

- A) My dog generally sits and waits while I open the door
- B) My dog tries to push through the door in front of me and it's a bit of a battle
- C) My dog tries to hang back, nearly choking himself

4. Once outside:

- A) My dog waits patiently for me to close up then we walk on together
- B) My dog is desperate to get going and it's difficult to lock up
- C) Outside? I struggle to get outside and if I do, my dog just sits and refuses to move

5. On the walk:

- A) We enjoy our walk. I stop to let my dog sniff regularly
- B) My dog drags me from tree to gatepost. All he wants to do is sniff. I'm irrelevant
- C) If I'm lucky, we manage a few steps but I get frustrated and have to drag him to get anywhere

6. During the walk:

- A) My dog and I do some training together and play with toys
- B) My dog gets distracted. He barks at other dogs and tries to chase cats or birds
- C) My dog seems to just want to sit and watch the world go by

7. When meeting other people on your walk:

- A) My dog ignores them but is happy to say hello if I stop to chat
- B) My dog pulls me towards them then jumps all over them. It's embarrassing
- C) My dog tries to hide behind my legs sometimes

8. In general I'd say:

- A) My dog and I have a great time
- B) We get lots of exercise, but I'm concerned my dog will hurt himself with the way he pulls so much
- C) My dog seems to hate walking and he just wants to get back home all the time

Now add up the total number of As, Bs, and Cs you get. Check your results below.

Mostly As:

Well done. You've obviously been through our Perfect Pet training, have worked hard and have done the homework. Congratulations and enjoy your walk with your perfect pet.

Mostly Bs:

You need some help to make the walk pleasurable for both of you. If your dog gets over excited, pulls like a train, jumps up at everyone, tries to chase things and drags you around, it isn't fun - for either of you. Book our Perfect Pet course or our online Simply Stop Pulling course today. You need it!

Mostly Cs:

You've either got a new puppy or rescue dog, or a tiny companion breed. Puppies need loads of time just watching the world happen. But they will walk eventually. Rescue dogs need time to settle into their new environment. Some tiny companion breeds just don't want to walk very far (though many do). Our Perfect Pet course (or Simply Stop Pulling course) can help you with any and all of these issues.

Visit www.downdog.co.uk to book a course.

Carol's Challenge

Each issue I'm going to set you a challenge.

This time your challenge, should you wish to accept it, is: teach your dog to walk nicely on a loose lead.



Our Perfect Pet course teaches you how. If you've been to one of our Perfect Pet courses, revise the lessons from your workbook. If not, go to the website to book on a course soon.

Here are some tips to try today:

- Be patient when putting the lead on and going out of the door. Wait for your dog to be calm for as long as it takes
- Praise and reward your dog whenever she is near your side, wherever you are and whenever she's walking with the lead loose
- Teach her to walk on a loose lead at home and in the garden first. If she can't do it there, she won't be able to do it out on walks

- Avoid busy, exciting places while you're teaching her to walk nicely

I really dislike planning what to eat every day. Like many people, I suspect, we eat similar things each week. Some routine is good, but it's easy to get in a bit of a rut. Give yourselves a break from everyday drudgery. Try something different occasionally.

Do you tend to do the same walk at the same time each day?

Why not try a different walk on one day each week? Your dog will thank you - he'll get to sniff new scents and smells which will be like a mini-holiday for him.

Or incorporate some training into your walks by asking your pooch to do something he knows every 30 paces or so - sit, down, stand, wait/stay, mini recall, or some of the many games we teach in class. Or play scent games.

Doing something different will help your dog to enjoy his walks more and will tire him out more mentally so he'll be calmer at home.



We hope you've enjoyed this Down Dog Digest. Please feel free to share it with any friends, neighbours or family members you think might find it interesting,

If you'd like more information, tips, and advice about owning, training, caring for and enjoying your dog more, we've got a range of options to suit your needs. We've given you free advice and downloadable helpsheets on a wide range of topics. Get it right from the start with your new pup, book group or one to one training to suit you, and check out our Down Dog Devotee membership programme.

If you've got a Problem Pooch, why not visit the Doggy Doctor's Surgery for help, in person or online.

Details of all our services can be found on our website: www.downdog.co.uk