



PLAY AND EXERCISE

Why are play and exercise important?

Dogs need both physical and mental exercise – just like us.

Insufficient exercise can contribute to problem behaviours including destructiveness (chewing and digging), investigative behaviour (raiding bins, counter surfing), unruliness, excitability, attention-getting behaviours, and some forms of barking. It's especially important to make sure your dog is physically and mentally tired before leaving them alone at home.

What are good ways to exercise my puppy?

Taking your puppy for a walk is good exercise and can be enjoyable and healthy for you as well. Get your puppy used to a collar and lead from the start. A flat nylon or leather collar is fine. Practice your walking skills in your own house and garden first.

For young puppies a good rule of thumb for walks is 5 minutes per month of life twice a day. So at four months, two 20 minute walks is fine. Plus lots of play at home of course. This is a guide not an absolute! Three hour hikes are out early on, but don't get too worried about counting the minutes.

For smaller breeds, limit daily exercise for the first 9-12 months. For larger breeds, and for those prone to joint problems, stick to the limits for at least 12-15 months. For giant breeds, be careful about exercise for the first two years.

Ask for help early if your puppy is starting to pull. Our Perfect Pet training classes (or our online Simply Stop Pulling course) teach you how to teach your puppy to walk nicely on lead.

Use your walks for training too. Practice control exercises, play recall games on your walks, play "find it" games, and nose work games. Our Perfect Pet course will give you lots of ideas.

Playing with your pet is enjoyable for both of you. Play with your dog as often as you can during the day but keep the sessions short. Five to ten minute sessions 3-4 times a day is ideal. Any training that you want to do can be incorporated into these sessions as play sessions are a great opportunity to do some training.

Know your dog's breed(s)

The appropriate amount and type of play and exercise, will depend on your dog's breed. Dogs from working breeds have higher exercise requirements. Think about what your dog was bred to do - the retrieving breeds will enjoy lengthy games of fetch or "Frisbee", while the sledging breeds might prefer pulling carts, or running or jogging with an active owner.

What games can I play with my puppy?

Tug-of-war games are enjoyable for most puppies and help to direct chewing and biting toward an acceptable play object, rather than your hands or clothing. Games like chase and fetch can be good exercise, but they can sometimes result in wild exuberant play that gets out of control.

Teaching your dog to "give" on cue can help in play sessions such as fetch and tug-of-war. Every so often during a game you can ask your dog for a calm behaviour such as sit or down.

There are plenty of other good games. Many dogs can be taught to play "hide and seek". Other dogs like to "search" for their toys and bring them to you. Use your imagination along with your knowledge of your dog.