



PLAY AND EXERCISE

Why are play and exercise important?

Play with owners and with (carefully chosen) other dogs, not only provides the dog with some of its exercise requirements, but also helps to meet social needs. Insufficient exercise can contribute to problem behaviours including destructiveness (chewing and digging), investigative behaviour (raiding bins), unruliness, excitability, attention-getting behaviours, and some forms of barking. It is especially important to ensure that a dog's need for exercise has been met prior to leaving the dog alone at home and prior to lengthy sessions of confinement.

What are good ways to play with and exercise my puppy?

Taking your dog for a walk is a good way to accomplish exercise and can be enjoyable and healthy for you as well. From an early age you should accustom your puppy to a collar and lead. A flat nylon or leather collar is fine. Keep your puppy away from stray dogs and busy public areas until all vaccinations are completed. Practice your walking skills in your own garden first. Put your puppy on a lead, and using a food or toy reward as a prompt, encourage it to follow you. Reward the good behaviour with praise. Keep initial walks short to encourage compliance.

Ask for help early if your puppy is starting to pull. Good puppy training classes will teach you how to teach your puppy to walk nicely on lead.

Playing with your pet is an enjoyable activity for both of you. Not only does the puppy get exercise, but positive interactions take place. Training sessions are also an excellent way to build your relationship with your puppy, while providing interaction between you and your pet.

How much exercise and play is appropriate?

Selecting an appropriate amount and type of play and exercise, will depend firstly on the type of dog. Puppies and even adult dogs from breeds that have been bred for their stamina or to do "work" often have higher exercise requirements. For purebred dogs, consider their traditional work when deciding the type and amount of play to provide. For example, the retrieving breeds do best with lengthy games of fetch or "Frisbee", while the sledging breeds might prefer pulling carts, or running or jogging with an active owner.

The length and type of play and exercise for your dog will depend on its behavioural requirements and health limitations. While some dogs may still be ready for more after a 5 mile jog and a game of fetch, others may be tired and satisfied after a short walk around the block.

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! Basically three hour hikes are out early on but don't get too worried about counting the minutes.

It is good to try to 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 is a great opportunity to do some training!

How can I keep my dog occupied when I am away?

When you are out, or you are busy at home with other activities and responsibilities, it would be ideal for your dog to be relaxed and sleeping, but this will not always be the case.



Exploring the environment, stealing food items, raiding the bin, chewing or digging, are just a few of the ways that dogs will find to keep themselves occupied. Therefore when you are certain that you have provided your dog with sufficient play and interactive exercise, and you must leave your dog alone, provide sufficient toys and distractions to keep your dog occupied and confine your pet to a safe, dog-proofed area. Provide safe objects to chew and self feeding toys (Kongs, Buster cube, Kong wobbler etc. etc.) to keep your puppy occupied and "busy" while you are unavailable. Remember dogs should not be left more than a maximum of 3-4 hours at a time and even less for puppies.

What games can I play with my puppy?

Tug-of-war games are enjoyable for many puppies and they do help to direct chewing and biting toward an acceptable play object, rather than an owner's hands or clothing. On the other hand, some puppies can get very excited, overly stimulated and become far too aggressive during tug-of-war games. Games like chase and fetch are good exercise, but they too can sometimes result in wild exuberant play that gets out of control.

As a general guide, you should be the one to initiate the games. Teaching the dog to "drop" on command can help to ensure that you remain in control of object play sessions such as fetch and tug-of-war. Every so often during a game you can ask the dog for a calm behaviour such as sit or down. Stop the game quickly if you see your puppy getting over excited. Short sessions are best!

There are plenty of other good games. Many dogs can be taught to play "hide and seek" without becoming too excited. Other dogs like to "search" for their toys and bring them to you.

How can I teach my puppy to play fetch?

Most young puppies, even those that do not have an inherent instinct to retrieve, can be taught how to play fetch from an early age. You will need to train your puppy to do three things; go to get the toy, bring it back, and give it to you so that you can throw it again. First, make the toy enticing. Try a squeaky toy or a ball. Toss the toy a short distance, 1-2 feet, and encourage your puppy to go to it. When she gets there, praise her. If she picks it up in her mouth, tell her "good dog". Then, move backwards a short way, clap your hands and entice your puppy to come towards you. All the while you should be encouraging your puppy with a happy tone of voice and lots of praise.

When your puppy returns to you, say "give" or "release" and show another toy or even a small food treat. Most puppies will gladly give the toy to get the new toy or treat and at the same time will quickly learn the "give" or "release" command. Then, by repeating the entire sequence of events again, the game of fetch itself should soon be enough of a reward that food and toys will no longer be necessary to entice the puppy to give the toy. At the end of each fetch play session, the puppy should return the toy and you should then give a toy or chew treat for the puppy to play with as a final reward for releasing the fetch toy.