

## Unleash the Power of Play

Transform your dog walks into dynamic play sessions that keep both your spirits high. Discover the dual benefits of staying active and engaging your dog in playful and purposeful ways every day.

**Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker**

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- If you're like most super busy pet parents these days, chances are when life gets hectic, two things fall by the wayside: exercise, and spending time with your canine BFF
- The good news is you can actually combine those activities, ensuring both you and your dog stay physically active as a team, and increasing the bond between you
- All dogs need the physical and mental stimulation of exercise, including those who are older or have mobility limitations; in these situations, it's a wise idea to consult your veterinarian before starting a workout program
- Many dogs love to take walks, so make an effort to integrate different types of walks into your routine; some dogs make great hiking, running, and biking partners
- There are dozens of activities you can do with your dog that provide lots of aerobic exertion and wonderful opportunities for bonding

Because we live in a crazy busy world these days, I'm guessing many of you often find yourselves short on time and feeling guilty about the To-Do's that don't get done. For many dog parents, items that most often don't get checked off the list include daily exercise, and spending quality time with our canine BFFs.

That's the bad news; the good news is you can actually combine those two activities in ways that benefit both you and your dog.

The reality is that most dogs don't get nearly the amount of daily exercise they need, and if you aren't getting your heart rate up as often as you'd like either, a daily workout routine that includes your dog could be the ultimate solution. The added benefit is that exercising with your dog means you're also spending quality time together.

And believe it or not, your dog can be a great workout partner. Unlike a human companion, your dog will always be ready to get up and go. And since dogs love having a daily routine they can count on, yours will be happy to remind you when it's time to exercise each day.

### Why Exercise Is So Important for Your Dog (and You)

Working out together can provide important health benefits for both you and your dog. These include lowering your risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and joint disease. Not only will you get in better shape, but your canine companion will also benefit both physically and mentally. Bored, under-exercised dogs often develop behavior problems that can be prevented or resolved simply by adding more physical activity into their daily routine.

No matter your furry family member's size, age, or physical condition, he still needs to move his body every day. Exercise tones muscles, assists organ function, and is mentally stimulating for dogs.

If your canine companion is older or has a medical condition such as arthritis that slows her down, it's still important to get her moving. Dogs with specially equipped wheelchairs or carts can enjoy a walk through the neighborhood, and some can even continue to take part in water activities.

If your dog isn't used to daily exercise, it's wise to make an appointment with your veterinarian for a health check. Build your doggy-and-me exercise program with your pet's age, breed, size, and overall health in mind. Set a minimum goal of 30 minutes of activity, seven days a week.

Depending on your dog's physical conditioning, start slow and work your way up to longer walks or other activities.

## Outside-the-Box Dog Walks

Many pet parents tend to look at dog walks as chores to be quickly finished, and I think part of the reason is they're simply in a rut. They're not using their imaginations. There are actually lots of ways to change up your dog walking routine that can make it fun for both you and your canine BFF, and something you look forward to. Different types of dog walks:

1. **Purposeful walks** — These are typically short and have a specific goal, for example, walking your dog to her potty spot.
2. **Training walks** — These walks can be about improving leash manners, learning basic or advanced **obedience commands**, ongoing socialization, or anything else you can think of that can be done on a leashed walk. Be sure to bring some healthy training treats on these outings. Ongoing training throughout your dog's life is a great way to keep his faculties sharp and boredom at bay. It's also a wonderful way to strengthen the bond between you and your pet.
3. **Power walks** — Power walks keep your dog's frame strong, his weight in check, and help alleviate arthritis and other degenerative joint diseases. These walks can also be an essential method for ensuring your dog gets the exercise he needs, as long as you're consistent with them.

Remember: A healthy dog needs to exercise an absolute minimum of every three days (every other day is better; every day is ideal) at an intensity that elevates his heart rate for 20 minutes to maintain cardiovascular conditioning and muscle tone. If your dog is out of shape, you'll need to start slow and build gradually to 20 minutes per power walk.

4. **Mentally stimulating walks** — Most leashed dogs don't get to spend nearly as much time sniffing and investigating as they would like, so allowing your pet some time to explore is good mental stimulation for her. These walks allow her to stop, **sniff**, investigate, and pick up and send pee-mail. Dogs accumulate knowledge about the world through their noses.
5. **Sniffaris** — Sniffaris are walks during which your dog takes the lead, you follow, and he gets to sniff whatever he pleases. Sniffaris are upgraded mentally stimulating walks, more or less, with your dog making all the navigational and investigational decisions!
6. **Change-of-scenery walks** — Instead of heading outside in the same old direction, instead, buckle your dog in and drive a few blocks away or to a neighborhood park or nearby hiking trail for your walk. Both you and she will find new things to see, smell, and experience.

7. **Walks with friends** — If your dog is comfortable around other dogs, consider meeting up with neighbors or friends with dogs for group walks. Everyone on two legs and four gets to socialize and exercise simultaneously, and dog parents can also be valuable resources for one another.
8. **Different dog-walker walks** — Everyone walks a dog a little differently, so the more members of your household who walk your dog, the more variety she'll enjoy. And since walks done right are bonding experiences, everyone in the family gets to spend one-on-one time with the dog. A variation on this if you work outside the home is to hire a professional dog walker a few times a week or ask a willing friend or neighbor to take your dog out for a walk in your absence.

## Hiking With Your Dog

Hiking can be a fun activity and great exercise for both you and your dog. There's nothing like a few hours on the trail in the great outdoors to clear your mind, challenge your lungs and leg muscles, and explore the natural world right along with your canine BFF.

Of course, both human and canine hikers need to be reasonably fit before setting out on this type of adventure. If you're not sure your dog is in good enough physical condition for a hike, consult with your veterinarian. If she doesn't typically get much exercise, is overweight, a senior, a **flat-faced breed**, or has arthritis or another condition that limits mobility, you'll want to consider those things before setting off on even a mildly challenging hike.

The last thing you want is for your dog to get injured, and you also need to think about whether you'll be able to carry her the distance if something happens or she tires out earlier than expected.

## Running With Your Dog

Running with your dog can be a great form of exercise for you both, not to mention an excellent activity for bonding. However, don't simply assume that your dog is ready to be your running partner just because she's a dog.

Not all dogs are suited for running long distances, and even those who are, may need to work up to your pace and distance. In addition, while some dogs love to run with their owners, others prefer brisk walks or vigorous play sessions, so it's important to keep your dog's preferences in mind, too.

Assuming your dog enjoys it, however, you and your pet can grow as runners together.

## Biking With Your Dog

Another option might be to take your dog along on bike rides. Obviously, this won't be the answer for every dog parent or every dog, but if your canine BFF has the energy and physical stamina to jog alongside you as you bike, this could be an ideal way for both of you to be more physically active. And this goes double if you have a **hyperactive dog** or a large breed with energy to burn.

If your dog is very young, older, overweight, out of shape or has a health condition that might make jogging risky, you should make an appointment with your veterinarian first to ensure she's up to the challenge. You may need to start with a milder form of exercise and gradually work up to bike rides.

## More Ideas for Exercising With Your Dog

There are a number of dog-centric activities that can also get your heart pumping as your pup's partner, trainer and coach. Some of these include flying disc, dock jumping, flyball, flygility, herding, hunt and field trials, musical freestyle, and heel work, to name just a few.

Dogplay.com is a great resource for exploring all kinds of organized exercise and socialization possibilities for you and your dog.

### Sources and References

[PetMD, May 28, 2019](#)

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