

This Simple Technique Can Boost Health for You and Your Pet

This unique practice offers your pet many health benefits, including socialization with other people and dogs. If you can't find a local resource, you can easily try this at home. Try these simple stretches as well.

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Doga (dog yoga) comes in two forms — one where dogs simply accompany owners to yoga class for socialization, and another where dogs actively participate in poses and stretches
- While traditional yoga offers whole-body benefits, dog yoga primarily helps with socialization, making pets more comfortable with unfamiliar environments, new people, and handling during veterinary visits
- Before starting doga, ensure your studio allows dogs, familiarize your pet with the space, watch for signs of discomfort, and bring treats for positive reinforcement
- Regular stretching exercises can benefit dogs' shoulders, hips, and back, especially for senior dogs or those with joint pain and musculoskeletal problems
- Key stretches for dogs include shoulder flexors (front leg movements), hip flexors (back leg extensions), chest stretches, and back stretches using treat-guided movements

One of the most popular fitness trends today is yoga — this mind and body practice uses a combination of stretching, poses, breathing techniques and meditation to help build flexibility and strength, ease pain and manage stress.

You've probably heard or even tried different types of yoga, like Bikram, Hatha and Ashtanga, but have you ever heard of doga or "dog yoga"? Animal lovers will surely find this an interesting experience!

Doga Offers a Unique Bonding and Health-Boosting Experience for You and Your Pup

Doga is exactly what it sounds like — doing yoga with your canine companion. However, there are two types of dog yoga today.

The first one is where you simply bring your pet dog to a yoga class. During the class, your dog can stay by your side or move around and socialize with other dogs. Even so, they are not required to practice any poses or moves with you. This type of doga is geared more toward socialization, allowing your pup to be acquainted with other pets and people while being immersed in the calming yoga atmosphere.

The second type of doga involves your pup into the activity and is more hands on. When doing yoga, you will gently guide your dog into doing various stretches, such as the chair pose — lifting their two front legs in the air while they sit on their back legs.

Is Doga for You and Your Pet?

Traditional yoga provides plenty of whole-body benefits, but for dog yoga, the benefits are more related to socialization. Doga allows your pet to acclimate to new places, people, stimuli and pets. According to Daily Paws:

“Adequate socialization for dogs — especially during the puppy stage — can help them grow into healthy, well-adjusted, confident hounds who will have positive associations with new people and situations.”

Another advantage of dog yoga is it allows your dog to be more tolerant when they are being touched or handled, which can be an advantage during vet checkups and grooming sessions.

In terms of physical benefits, there’s still some speculation as to what dog yoga brings to the table, although some experts believe that canines are already reaping the benefits of yoga during their usual movements. Case in point — some yoga poses are actually named after canine movements, like downward dog or puppy pose.

Excited to Try Doga? Keep These Reminders in Mind Before Your First Class

If you think that your dog can benefit from dog yoga, and has the right temperament and personality for it, check with your local yoga studio if they have dog-involved classes, and if they have limits on dog size and rules about behavior in class. Here are some more tips:

- Allow your dog to be acquainted with the studio, and to sniff around the place to help them become comfortable.
- Pay attention to your pet during class, and check for signs that they are experiencing discomfort or anxiety.
- Be careful when moving them into yoga positions to avoid injury.
- Bring treats to help them loosen up and get acclimated to the studio and environment.

However, you don’t need to bring your pup to a local studio to do dog yoga. If you have space in your home, you can check out dog yoga videos on YouTube that you can follow. This is a good alternative if your local studio doesn’t have dog classes.

Benefits of Stretching

Aside from dog yoga, good old-fashioned stretching exercises, which you can do easily at home, can provide plenty of benefits for your pup. Whether your dog is a senior, an athlete or is struggling with a health condition, like joint pain, muscle loss or musculoskeletal problems, gentle stretches can offer some form of relief and help them remain flexible and agile.

In particular, stretching can benefit three areas of your dog’s physique — their shoulders, hips and back. The key is to be consistent; make sure you do these stretches every day, and set aside a time to do them (For example, after your daily walk). It only takes a few minutes a day, but the results can stretch for a lifetime. Before you start, make sure that you:

- Are in a safe, quiet environment that’s familiar to your dog, so they’ll feel at ease
- Stay gentle and patient, and are present in the moment

- Observe for signs of discomfort or anxiety; adjust the activity as needed
- Follow your dog's lead
- Keep an eye out for skin conditions, lump and bumps, changes in skin or fur, which may trigger pain during the activity

Stretches You Can Try on Your Dog

These four types of stretches are a good starting point when incorporating this technique in your dog's routine. These can be done while your dog is standing up, but some exercises can also be done while they're lying down on their side. Be observant and see which position is more comfortable for them.

- **Stretching the shoulder flexors** (The muscles that allow your dog's front legs to move fluidly and properly)
 1. With one hand, grasp one front leg above their elbow. Put your other hand under the elbow to stabilize it.
 2. Gently move the leg forward, as if you're teaching your pet to do a high-five.
 3. Hold the position at the point of resistance, for at least 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat two to three times for each front leg.
- **Stretching the hip flexors** (The muscles that allow your dog's hind legs and hips to move properly while walking, running or trotting)
 1. Ask your dog to stand up. Grasp a back leg above the knee.
 2. Slowly and gently move the leg back straight out behind your dog's body.
 3. When you reach the point of resistance, hold the leg in position for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat two to three times for each hind leg.
- **Stretching the chest area** (Your dog can either stand or lie on their back during this exercise)
 1. Grasp both front legs, near the wrist. Open them to the side gently.
 2. Hold for a few seconds and repeat.
 3. Optional but recommended — give your pet a gentle chest massage using light pressure and circular strokes to make them more relaxed.
- **Stretching the back** (You'll need training treats for this)
 1. With your dog standing up, position yourself on one side of their body.
 2. Hold the treat in one hand, and move it in the direction of their tail, encouraging them to follow it with their eyes, so they're only turning their head. Their body will bend into a C-shape.
 3. Hold them in this position for 15 to 30 seconds.
 4. Stand on their other side and repeat the exercise. Do two to three stretches per side.

Sources and References

^{1,2} [Daily Paws, September 15, 2020](#)