

Exercise: A Strategy for the Dog with Arthritis

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Get Moving!

The pain and loss of muscle mass and fitness resulting from osteoarthritis may make it hard for your dog to move around. Resting or limiting exercise may seem appropriate but in reality, it is the lack of exercise that can be most damaging, making your dog less flexible, with loss of muscle strength and increased joint pain and stiffness. Here are a few exercise tips that, together with veterinary approved medical therapy, can help your arthritic dog live a happier, healthier life.



- **Reap the Benefits!** Exercise has many unseen advantages, each of which can benefit your dog by increasing strength in the arthritic limb and decreasing stress placed on all joints. Exercise can also improve joint mobility and aid in weight management, resulting in increased stamina, which will afford you and your dog the ability to enjoy more quality time together.
- **Remember the Three “R’s”!** Make it easy on yourself and plan your dog’s exercise regimen using the three R’s: reasonable, rate-conscious, and regular!
 - Be reasonable – Start by taking your dog on a short leash walk, instead of a 10 mile hike
 - Be rate-conscious – Start your dog off slowly and increase exercise time gradually
 - Be regular – Make exercise a routine, like your dog’s meals
- **Do No Harm!** Start your exercise program on a level, soft surface such as grass or dirt. To prevent further injury avoid exercise that requires jumping, like catching a toy thrown high into the air, jumping into the back of a car, or onto the bed. Avoid strenuous exercises on hard surfaces (concrete) or very soft surfaces (sand).
- **Don’t Be a “Weekend Warrior”!** Starting your dog off on a new routine too quickly or engaging in infrequent intense exercise will place undue stress on the dog’s other joints or spine, resulting in unnecessary pain and slowing improvement. It is especially important for the arthritic dog to receive moderate, daily exercise.
- **Exercise Can Go “Swimmingly”!** Swimming is an excellent way to improve muscle strength and joint flexibility while limiting weight-bearing stress on all joints.
- **You Don’t Have to Go it Alone!** If exercising at home is not working, your veterinarian can recommend one of an increasing number of physical rehabilitation centers, specifically for animals, that incorporates swimming with other therapeutic techniques.
- **Stress the Positive!** Instead of reflecting on the activities you can no longer do with your dog, concentrate on those that you can still take part in as a team.
- **Your Dog is Unique!** Every dog’s needs are different. Please consult your veterinarian before beginning a new exercise program. Together you can develop a complete and personalized plan to meet the specific needs of your dog.

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