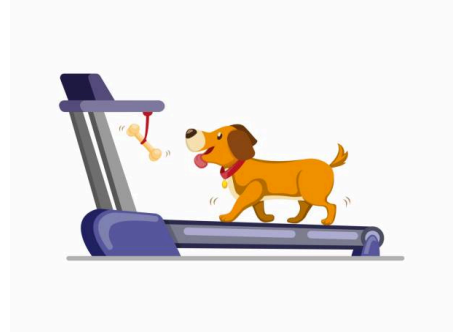




Senior Dog Exercises

Although your four legged friend may be slowing down, it is still important that they get daily exercise to keep them moving comfortably for as long as they can. They may need to retire as your jogging partner, but you can still find ways to keep you both moving together.



Walks!

Walks are a fundamental exercise routine for dogs because they:

- Help with weight control and body conditioning by burning calories
- Promote joint health by keeping the joints in motion to improve function
- Encourage digestive and urinary health by providing a regular bathroom schedule
- Contribute to emotional well-being by catering to a dog's love for spending one-on-one time with their person(s)
- Provide mental stimulation as they use their senses and experience new things

Daily walks with your dog (not just potty breaks) are best if possible. Keeping a predictable schedule is important. If they start lagging behind or panting, try shorter walks and gradually increase the distance over time.

Balance Exercises

Balance is important to maintain strength. In any movement, stabilizer muscles act to steady one joint so the desired movement can be performed in another joint. Dogs have stabilizing muscles in their trunk and legs that need to be exercised regularly to help with balance.

One type of balance exercise you can do with your dog is the "leg lift and hold".

1. Have your dog stand on a nonslip surface. Tap on the leg you want to be lifted and hold out your hand. You might have to help bring the paw up, but do not force this.
2. When lifting a front paw with one hand, use your other hand to support the elbow joint of that lifted leg. When lifting a hind paw, support the knee joint of the lifted leg. The goal is for the dog to shift all their weight onto the three legs that remain on the ground while lifting the fourth leg.

3. Start by lifting and holding each leg separately for 5-10 seconds. Do a set of 2-3 holds per leg every day or two. This can be increased gradually over time to 20 seconds per leg.
4. Reward with praise and/or a food treat.

Mobility Exercises

Mobility exercises help with flexibility by keeping your dog's spine mobile, and they improve balance by giving the stabilizer muscles a workout.

1. One mobility exercise to try is a "cookie stretch". These simple stretches aid with flexibility by utilizing a cookie (not an actual cookie, but a dog-safe food treat) to lure your dog into a position that stretches through their spine.
2. Using a treat to guide your dog's nose to different parts of the body stretches parts of the neck and spine.
3. Have your dog stand comfortably with all four paws on the floor. The front and rear legs should be parallel and stable.
4. Lure your dog's nose:
 - Straight up
 - Up and to the side
 - Toward the chest
 - Toward the shoulder
 - Toward the elbow
 - Toward the front foot
 - Toward the hip
 - Toward the knee
 - Toward the back foot
5. Repeat on both sides.

Your dog should keep a balanced stance with still feet while performing the stretches. If they don't, shorten the stretch, so they don't have to reach as far. The stretch should last 5-10 seconds in each position and be repeated three times. Depending on your dog's mobility, you may need to start with fewer positions held for a shorter time and gradually work your way up. These stretches can be done every day.

Figure-8 walking:

1. Set up two cones (or whatever you have on hand that can stand in for cones) and have your dog walk around and across them in a figure-8 pattern.
2. Start with the markers fairly wide apart and move them closer if your dog can easily navigate them. This simple exercise lets them get in some steps and helps with flexibility

Swimming!

Swimming is a great, low-impact exercise for dogs that is easy on the joints, while still working all parts of the body. Because of its effectiveness, swimming is often used as physical therapy for dogs that have undergone major surgery for injuries. If your dog doesn't know how to swim, speak with your veterinarian about finding a local rehabilitation center that offers safe instruction for getting your dog in the water. Also, it's always a good idea to have your dog wear a life vest, especially in deep water and if your dog isn't the most advanced swimmer.

Low impact fetch

For dogs that love fetch, try rolling the ball instead of throwing it. Rolling the ball instead of throwing it makes it much easier for them to chase and catch it, as it's less likely to travel far and bounce wildly. They can still get the thrill of the chase and the feeling of victory that comes with retrieving the ball — without the added strain on their joints. The great thing about fetch is that you can play it anywhere, indoors or out. Just gently roll a ball and have your dog grab it and bring it back to you. You can even kick the game up a notch by rolling the ball, asking your dog to sit and stay, then having them fetch it.

Hide and Seek

You can try hiding your pet's favorite toys, treats, or even yourself! Giving your dog something to seek out provides a great amount of mental stimulation, with minimal physical impact. Start with hiding a few treats or a toy in an area that is easy for your dog to find, then once they get the hang of the game you can challenge them a little bit. Give them a simple obstacle, such as having to push open a door; this helps keep their confidence up.

You could also try "scatter feeding" in your yard if it is fenced in and has not been treated with pesticides. You can take some of your dog's food or some low calorie treats and scatter them in a small grassy area. This encourages their natural foraging instincts, keeping their mind and body engaged. Once your dog has the hang of sniffing out the treats, you can expand the area in which you're scattering treats.