

Exercising your dog for physical and mental well-being

By Michelle Lonergan

Being owned by a dog has many perks, but the best one is that we commit ourselves to an active lifestyle. Daily walks with your dog not only enhance the physical and mental health of your canine BFF, but also of yours! Exercise is as important for your dog as it is for you!

As with people, obesity is becoming a major health problem in today's dogs. Many diseases seen in dogs are linked to obesity and lack of exercise. 40% of all dogs seen by veterinarians in the United States are considered overweight, with many clinically obese.



If the physical threats associated with obesity aren't enough, there are the behavioral aspects of lack of exercise. Dogs are active by nature. Their ancestors, wolves, covered many miles every day in search of food. Many domestic dogs were selectively bred to be even more active, hunting, herding or patrolling, hour after hour. Preventing them from their genetically programmed activity level only builds frustration, which usually exhibits itself in the form of hyperactivity, barking, digging, tail chasing and home destruction. Lack of exercise is one of the major reasons behind many causes of problem behavior. Remember, it's difficult for a tired dog to get into trouble.

Don't think you can just stick your dog in the yard and he'll exercise himself. Unless he has a friend, or lots of stimulation on the other side of the fence (in which case he's probably barking too much to be a good neighbor) he may chase his tail a few times, sniff around and then just sit there. You'll need to play coach to get him in shape.

“T” FOR TWO

... Training, that is! Whether you have just brought home an 8-week-old puppy or you have adopted an adult dog, there is no better way to break the ice than by attending training classes. Even if you have attended dog training classes in the past, each relationship you develop with your canine companion is unique. Because dogs have a pack mentality, being in a group setting helps your dog create confidence in you as a pack leader.



Not only does training work the physical aspect of your dog, but it will provide your dog with a strong trust in you, which creates a well-balanced and well-behaved companion.

“P” FOR PLAY



Set time aside everyday to play with your dog. There isn't anything that would make him happier! Go for a walk or run. Play fetch or take him swimming. Enroll “Fido” in structured play groups where he not only gets exercised, but develops good socialization skills. Play groups are also a great place to practice your dogs' training skills in a group setting with you there to be his “pack leader.”

For those that have busy schedules, enroll your dog in doggie daycare. Ensure the facility has holistic practices. A doggie day care that is poorly supervised by untrained or inexperienced staff could have a negative impact on your dog.

Questions to ask your doggie daycare facility:

1. May I take a tour? (If denied, move on.)
2. How many dogs in a group? (Should be >20.)
3. What is your emergency plan?
4. What is the procedure if your dog gets sick or injured?
4. Is the staff trained in first aid and CPR?
5. Are the dogs supervised?
6. Is the staff knowledgeable in obedience training and pack behaviors?
7. What techniques are used to correct and reward behaviors?
8. What games/activities do they plan?

Holistic doggie daycare is one that treats each guest as an individual, with a focus on developing a well-rounded pooch. The group sizes should never be larger than 20, and breaks should be allowed so over-stimulus doesn't develop into an unbalanced dog. The daycare workers should have knowledge of basic obedience training and will work with your dog one-on-one to ensure

his individual training and play needs are met. A day at a holistic doggie daycare will result in a fun day that will create a tired and well-mannered pooch!

Michelle Lonergan owns Tabby & Jack's Pet Supplies & Grooming and recently added a holistic daycare and training facility in Fitchburg. She has studied pet nutrition her whole life and is well known in the Madison area for her expertise in healing dogs and cats with a tailored diet, supplements and natural topicals. She works with many holistic vets in the Madison area to manage a health plan through proper nutrition. If you have questions or comments about this article or need advise on tailoring a diet for your pet, please contact Michelle Lonergan at michelle@tabbyandjacks.com.