



For Active Dogs!

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Coaching dog enthusiasts to embrace the unique needs of active dogs through teaching, mentoring and educational media

Be Strong!

Many people think that the best way to exercise their dogs is to take them for a walk. However, while **going for a walk is an excellent** (and I might add necessary) **“Good for the Soul” exercise**, providing abundant sensory stimulation – sights, smells, sounds, new surfaces to walk on, and even some tasty treats (either served by you or discovered in the environment), walks generally **do not provide your dog with a balanced exercise program**. Even if you also train your dog for one or more sports and play some fun games like retrieving, your dog still does not experience all of the components of a balanced exercise program.



A **balanced exercise program** should contain the following five types of exercises:

- Strength
- Cardiopulmonary
- Proprioception (body awareness)
- Balance
- Flexibility

In the next several For Active Dogs newsletters, each of the above components will be discussed. We will provide many examples of how **you can easily incorporate balanced exercises into your dog’s life** with tons of **fun and stimulation**, while **not requiring more than 10 to 20 minutes three times a week**.

Where to Start - Strength Exercises

The **typical strength exercise for humans is weight-lifting**. Since dogs don’t have opposable thumbs, they tend to drop barbells 😊, so for canine strength exercises we use the dog’s body as the weight. **Strength exercises require that the dog move its body over short distances**, accelerating, decelerating, turning, etc.

There are **three principles for designing appropriate strength exercises**.

1. **Exercises should be targeted** to work specific muscles or muscle groups (e.g., front legs, core, rear legs, gluts, hamstrings).
2. Exercises should be as **low impact** as possible.
3. Exercises should be performed in a way that ensures that the dog **works to overload**, so that the muscle cells break down and rebuild themselves with stronger capacity.

The table below provides **examples of the types of strength activities that our dogs require** to safely and effectively play various sports, perform specific jobs, and just play fun dog games. It demonstrates just how important strength is for active dogs.

Canine Strength Activities and Related Sports

Strength Activities	Sports
Acceleration	Most sports, working dog jobs, and dog games
Deceleration	Most sports, working dog jobs, and dog games
Turning	Most sports, working dog jobs, and dog games
Stopping	Most sports, working dog jobs, and dog games
Jumping	Agility, flyball, obedience, rally, IPO, police/military work, SAR
Driving through vegetation, muddy water and/or other environmental obstacles	Hunt tests, field trials, tracking, police/military work, SAR
Carrying an object	Hunt tests, field trials, obedience, IPO, retrieving games
Pulling against a harness	Tracking, mushing, police/military work, SAR, assistance dog work
Lying down & getting up repeatedly	Herding
Heads-up heeling	Obedience, rally, IPO
Bitework	IPO, police/military work, tugging games

Strength Means Speed

Note that **strength is directly related to speed** (1-3). So, **if you want your dog to be fast** at any sport or working job (agility, flyball, obedience, rally, hunt tests, field trials, lure coursing, herding, fast CAT, barn hunts, nosework/scentwork, IPO, police/military work and search and rescue all reward speed), **then your dog needs to be strong**.

Strength Means Longevity

Regardless of your dog's age or stage of life, **strength is the most important component** of your dog's exercise program. Puppies can begin targeted, safe strength exercises at 6 months of age. Active adult dogs that are strong can **reduce their risk of injuries by 66%** (see For Active Dogs Newsletter [Volume 1, Issue 12](#)), and strength training can even **increase the longevity of senior and geriatric dogs**. Sadly, many dogs are euthanized every year because they can no longer climb stairs, retain their balance on slippery floors or even stand up from a down position. For the vast majority of these dogs, **strong core and rear legs would allow them to retain their quality of life for months or even years longer**.

Make a Plan

Knowing that strength is so important to your dog, it is important to incorporate exercises that **target your individual dog's needs**. For example, **many dogs have weak core muscles**; a strength-training program for these dogs should include exercises to specifically work the paraspinal and lateral and medial abdominal musculature. However, to know what to target, you **need to regularly and objectively assess your dog's fitness** so that the program you design will incorporate exercises that safely and effectively **strengthen your individual dog's weakest muscles**.

Consider signing up for [Fit for Life](#), **the only science-based program with regular fitness assessments that provides individualized, targeted, low impact exercises for dogs**. We would be honored to be a part of your dog's health care team to help you improve your dog's strength and longevity!

References (Full articles available [here](#)):

1. Behm DG, Young JD, Whitten JHD, Reid JC, Quigley PJ, Low J, Li Y, Lima CD, Hodgson DD, Chaouachi A, Prieske O, Granacher U. Effectiveness of Traditional Strength vs. Power Training on Muscle Strength, Power and Speed with Youth: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Front Physiol.* 2017 Jun 30;8:423.
2. Cronin JB, Hansen KT. Strength and power predictors of sports speed. *J Strength Cond Res.* 2005 May;19(2):349-57.
3. Felser S, Behrens M, Fischer S, Heise S, Bäuml M, Salomon R, Bruhn S. Relationship between strength qualities and short track speed skating performance in young athletes. *Scand J Med Sci Sports.* 2016 Feb;26(2):165-71.

