

Fetch, Stretch, Dance

Make Your Dog an Exercise Buddy

by Sandra Murphy



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Man and woman's best four-legged friend can activate and energize even the most reluctant couch potato or exhausted owner, making the family dog an excellent exercise buddy. Regardless of how lax we may be, everyone feels better after some kind of workout. A study published in the journal *Environmental Science & Technology* confirms that working up a sweat outdoors affords an appealing boost of energy, enjoyment and improved state of mind.

Dogs love routine, so they'll be waiting by the door for their daily walks. Make each outing mindful by letting the pet choose the route and pace. While they stop to sniff, do hamstring stretches by leaning against a wall, fence

or tree. Once the warm-up portion is completed, add sprints to burn more calories. Ask for a sit, pick a goal a short distance away and then give the cue to run together fast. After arriving at the goal, ask for another sit.

"Our favorite time to go is before 7 a.m. to avoid cars and when the asphalt isn't too hot for his paws," says Monica Weintraub, a food and travel blogger currently working from Beijing, China. "Carl loves the burst of energy, and we both build muscle."

A backyard agility course can complement or even substitute for walks. It's easy to make with weave poles, jumps and tunnels. Vary the order of the obstacles and run alongside the dog to call out each one. When it's excessively wet, cold and icy

or hot outside, create an indoor agility course. Use blankets and upturned chairs for tunnels, cardboard boxes to designate a weaving trot and a hula hoop for jumps. Set it up on top of rugs that foster firm footing. Balance can also be improved with exercise balls. While some dogs only see a soccer game, others try to balance on the ball, strengthening core muscles like their humans.

Learning doga, or yoga for dogs, incorporates a canine's natural trainability, flexibility, mimicry of human moves and desire to please. Kristen Corral, who's also certified in animal massage, teaches Anima yoga fusion classes for people and pets of all ages in Las Vegas. "Anima means an expression of one's true inner self,"

she explains. “We work on balance and never force the dogs into poses. They’re excited during the first sessions, but as you move and breathe together, it becomes a calming and relaxing activity.”

Floor exercises with the help of a dog also helps strengthen core muscles. Do leg lifts and teach the pet to walk under a raised leg to ensure it stays raised for the proper amount of time. Incorporate fetch games with sit-ups; throw the toy when sitting up and accept it back while reclining. Alternate arms—the dominant one has better aim, while the other one adds steps for the dog as it runs to fetch an errant toss.

For chair exercises, use a toy to lure the dog under the chair, moving it from side-to-side, simultaneously working the waistline. Fetch lets the dog chase the toy before dropping it in front of the chair, giving the owner’s core muscles a workout when bending to pick it up each time.

Dogs love to play hide-and-seek. It’s easy with two people; one holds the dog while the other hides. If solo, teach the pet to sit until a timer goes off before starting the hunt.

“I ask Felix, my mixed-breed dog, to hold a sit-stay while I go hide,” says Chantelle Wallace, a professional writer who volunteers to exercise animals at Skyline Pet Care and Fitness, in Austin, Texas. “Hide and seek activates both mental focus and physical exercise.”

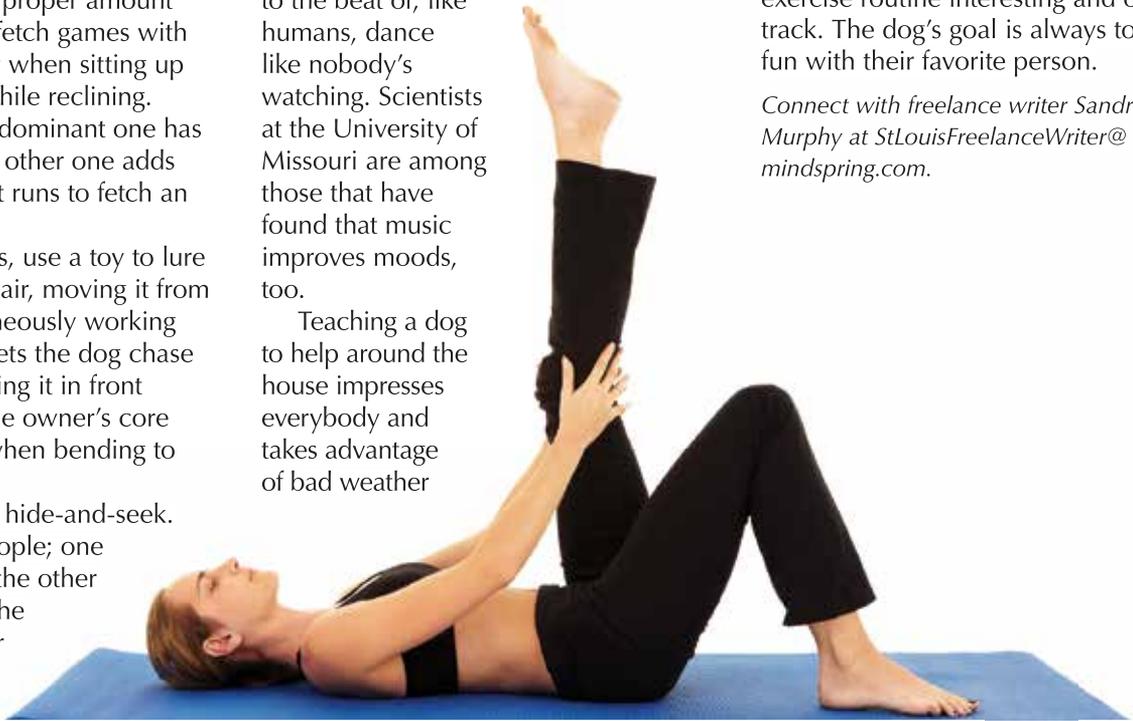
Dancing to favorite tunes expends lots of energy. Dogs may perform obedience moves to the beat or, like humans, dance like nobody’s watching. Scientists at the University of Missouri are among those that have found that music improves moods, too.

Teaching a dog to help around the house impresses everybody and takes advantage of bad weather

to catch up on chores. They can tour a laundry basket to bedrooms, pick up trash or place items for recycling in a bin. Select individual items to be carried up or down stairs for a muscular workout. Take some tips from Jesse, a most helpful dog, at Tinyurl.com/HouseholdHelpPooch.

When our will to exercise is wavering, an eager dog will help keep an exercise routine interesting and on track. The dog’s goal is always to have fun with their favorite person.

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