



DOGa EXERCISE combines elements of flexibility, balance and stability to ensure that dogs can develop and remain physically strong for as long as possible. DOGa exercises can be used at all stages of a dog's life. These exercises help puppies with physical development, assist in strengthening the canine athlete, and help the senior dog that has lost strength and stability from age related weakness. Additionally, DOGa can play a role in injury rehabilitation but that is not the focus of this badge. A veterinary rehabilitation specialist should evaluate any dog that has been injured prior to beginning any type of DOGa exercise program.

DOGa should not be approached in a haphazard manner but rather, a training plan must be developed for each dog. The dog's experience and progress with DOGa exercises should be tracked in a training journal. Prior to developing a training plan, we first have to understand our dogs' bodies and their individual needs.

KNOW YOUR DOG:

There are two aspects of a dog's body that are important to understand in order to choose the most appropriate exercises for his training plan. These are **body type** and **height/weight ratio**.

There are five main **body types** for dogs and two additional type characteristics that may be present in most any body type. Breed can help in determining body type, but each dog must be individually evaluated since two dogs of the same breed, and even from the same litter may be different in body type.



The **ectomorphic** dog is light boned, tall and has long limbs. Many sighthounds, including Whippets, Greyhounds, Afghan Hounds, and Salukis are ectomorphs.



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Mesomorphic dogs are of medium build and are moderately boned and well-muscled. Mesomorphs include many herding breeds (Australian Shepard, Bouvier, Belgian Malinois, English Shepard, German Shepard, Old English Sheepdog) and some retrievers (Chesapeake Bay Retriever, Field Spaniel, Cocker Spaniel, Labrador Retrievers).



Average to large sized, heavily boned dogs are **endomorphs**. Bernese Mt. Dogs, Mastiffs, Bull Terriers, St. Bernards, Bull Dogs, American Staffordshire Terriers and Newfoundlands are all breeds considered ectomorphs. It is important to note that large sized does not equate to tall as height varies quite a bit among this type of dog.





Corgis, dachshunds and other dogs with short limbs and slightly elongated bodies have **achondroplasia**.

In contrast, **pituitary dwarf** breeds, such as Chihuahuas, Maltese and Papillions are small in size but have a body/limb ratio that is generally proportionate.



There are additional type characteristics should be identified when present since they may affect physical activity.



Giant dogs are generally those above 110 pounds though there is no universal height classification. These dogs may be ectomorphs such as the Irish Wolfhounds, mesomorphs like the Great Dane, or endomorphs such as the St. Bernard. Because of the dog's heavy weight, and the inability of most people to safely lift that amount of weight, special caution must be used when exercising giant dogs.

Brachycephalic dogs have shortened skull bones and come in many different sizes. Brachycephalic breeds include the Boston Terrier, Boxer, Bulldog, Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, English Mastiff, Pekingese, Pug, Shih Tzu and others. Use special caution when exercising brachycephalic dogs and pay close attention to potential breathing issues.





Height/weight ratio is a simple calculation where a dog's weight is divided by its height. This calculation is important in choosing the most appropriate activities and sports for the dog. Dogs with a height/weight ratio of around 2.5 or less are generally more agile and quicker in their movements. Sports like agility, lure coursing or disc dog are good choices for these dogs. Dogs with a ratio of 2.5 or greater are slower in their movements but often have greater strength and may excel at sports like barn hunt, freestyle, drafting or weight pull.

The height/weight ratio can vary quite a bit from one dog to the next. Consider the following examples.

- A Papillion weighing 7 pounds and standing 11 inches at the shoulders has a height/weight ratio of .6
- A Belgian Malinois that weighs 60 pounds and is 24 inches tall has a ratio of 2.5
- A Newfoundland topping out at 135 pounds and 30 inches tall has a ratio equaling 4.5

Of course, this ratio is just a guide since most everyone has seen a St. Bernard that truly excels at agility and a Corgi that does well pulling a cart.

When you look at two dogs that are at opposite ends of the height and weight spectrums it's easy to see why body type and height/weight ratio must be considered before choosing sports activities and developing an exercise training plan.





STRETCHING:

When a muscle contracts repetitively over time and is not stretched to counter the contraction, the muscle tends to remain in a shortened position. A muscle creates more power when it starts from a lengthened position and less power from a shortened position. Over time, shortening of a muscle can create a cascade of weakness in surrounding muscles and can also cause problems in the surrounding joints. In contrast, muscles that are lengthened through both passive and active stretching strengthen joints and help the dog throughout his lifetime.

Dogs who are getting older are prone to joint problems, muscle loss, decreased flexibility, and the aches and pains of an aging body. Stretching can help alleviate these issues.

Athletic dogs, especially those active in strenuous sports like flyball or agility, put stress on their bodies whenever they practice or compete. Stretching is essential in helping these dogs to avoid injury.

Large and giant breeds typically have more musculoskeletal problems than smaller dogs. Keeping these dogs lean, strong and supple with stretching serves them well throughout their lives.

Before stretching a dog, always ensure that his muscles are warmed properly. This can be accomplished with a short walk, a gentle massage or a warm moist towel on the area to be stretched. A warm muscle stretches better than a cold muscle and warming the muscle before stretching reduces the risk of injury from over stretching.

Passive stretching occurs when muscles are lengthened through manipulation. There are some very important things that need to be front of mind when stretching a dog's muscles in order to avoid injury.

The dog must remain **relaxed** while being stretched. Be aware of anything in the environment that would keep him from being completely relaxed. Be aware of the dog's reaction to stretching and recognize the signs that he is not relaxed and may be fighting the stretch. Most prominently, a dog that is not relaxed will fight the stretch by attempting to pull back on the limb and shorten the muscle that is being worked. This may also be a sign that the dog is uncomfortable in the stretch.

When stretching, the joint nearest to the muscle being worked must be **stabilized** by keeping it firmly held in your hand. Failing to stabilize the joint can cause serious damage to the joint and surrounding muscle tissue.

Stretch the joint using only **straight plane movement**, avoiding any manipulation that causes the joint to move from side to side. Any attempt to move the joint out of the natural plane can cause very serious damage to both joints and muscles.

Avoid pumping the limb. Strive to **stretch and hold** instead.



Stretching should never be rushed and the dog's reaction to the stretch must be carefully observed. Begin with small ranges of motion, then progress to a good stretch. Stop the stretch when you start to feel some moderate tension in the tissue and then hold. If your dog pulls away, the stretch may be too aggressive, or the area may be sore. Back off intensity until you can stretch the muscle for up to 30 seconds and then repeat 2-3 times. Always hold the limb you are stretching with both hands. Open palms and a gentle grip are best to avoid squeezing your hands or stressing the joint. Never force a muscle or joint. Think low and slow.

There are many bones, joints, and muscles in the dog's body and they all can allow for various degrees of movement. To simplify explanation, basic stretching routines should include movements that include flexion, extension and abduction. It's important to understand these terms as you begin any exercise plan.

Flexion is the motion that bends the joint towards the rib and spine. It decreases the angle between two parts. To perform a flexion stretch in the shoulder you will bring the elbow up towards the rib and spine. Hip flexion is accomplished by bringing the knee towards the ribs, and knee flexion is bending the knee joint.



Extension is the opposite motion. It lengthens the angle between two parts. To stretch the front limb using extension you will stretch the front limb towards the front past the head and gently straighten. For the hind leg, protect the hip from rolling by using your knee on the lower lumbar area and cup the knee joint and extend backwards as straight as your dog can manage without rolling the hip.





Abduction brings the limbs out and away from the body. For front limb abduction, simply lift up and away from the body. For the hind limbs you will perform the same action. During a hip abduction stretch the knee can be slightly bent and then the leg is lifted like your dog is standing at a fire hydrant.



Forelimb stretches include stretches to shoulders (stabilize scapula - extension, flexion and abduction) and elbows (extension and flexion). Use caution with dogs that may have elbow dysplasia.

In a seated position, bring one forelimb into flexion. Place one hand on the wrist and one hand on the elbow. Gently guide the limb into extension.



Hind limb stretches include stretches to hips (extension, flexion and abduction), Stifle with hip maintained at 90 degrees (extension and flexion) and hocks (often tight in dogs that run – flexion only).

In a standing position, bring one hindlimb into flexion. Place one hand on the ankle and one hand on the knee. Gently guide the limb into extension





Passive **back and neck stretches** require a dog that is EXTREMELY relaxed. This level of relaxation cannot normally be achieved with anyone other than the dog and handler present. For this reason, passive back and neck stretches are not a requirement for the DOGa Exercise badge beyond basic movements. Avoid back and neck stretches with any dog that has spinal arthritis, degenerative disc disease or spinal instability. Consult a veterinarian with specialized training in canine body conditioning or injury rehabilitation for more information on back and neck stretches.

Active stretching occurs when the dog participates in the process by following as the handler guides him into various positions. Always have the dog walk or trot around a bit before stretching. Hold stretches for about 10 second each unless the dog shows signs of stress or discomfort. Each stretch should be repeated 3-5 times. Simple stretches serve as the groundwork for more challenging exercises completed using appropriate equipment.

To perform a simple back or neck stretch use one hand to keep the dog in a standing position. Use the opposite hand to target the dog's nose to each shoulder, each hip, each rear foot and down between the front legs.



With the dog in either a seated or standing position, use one hand to lure the head straight up. Place your other hand gently on the shoulders to make sure you feel a good stretch. Next, lure the head straight down between the front legs. All movements should be purposeful.





The bow stretch resembles a play bow. It stretches the front limbs and lengthens neck and shoulder muscles. When the stretch rebounds as it does very naturally when a dog stands, rear limbs are stretched as well. With the dog standing, slowly lure the dog down and forward while supporting underneath the keep the rear elevated. This stretch is different than the bouncing movement often used when teaching the trick 'bow'.



Another good active stretch begins with the dog standing in front of you facing in the same direction. Lift the front legs and put the dog's back against your body. Gently lift the dog's front legs vertically. This is a challenging maneuver with large dogs but can be easily modified by using exercise equipment.

DOGa EQUIPMENT:

There are many different types of equipment that can be used for DOGa exercise. When considering what types of inflatable platforms to use with your dog remember that **safety is paramount**. That means both the dog's safety and your own. Make sure that you are able to remain comfortable throughout the exercise routine. Consider your own body mechanics and use good posture at all times. A good quality, **non-restrictive harness** is necessary to provide support, especially on larger equipment. The harness helps you to provide control and but is not intended for you to lift the dog's weight.

Selecting **inflatable platforms** can be overwhelming as the canine fitness industry has exploded in recent years. Equipment can be expensive so consider how much money you are willing to invest and also how much time you will invest in using the equipment once purchased.

Fit is important when selecting equipment. The dog should be able to stand normally with all four feet on the largest piece of equipment you have. This is most often a peanut, egg or round inflatable. While a smaller dog can use equipment that is sized larger, the opposite is not true. Also, special care should be taken when using equipment that is sized too large for your dog as it can be a safety concern.

Inflate peanuts, eggs, donuts and balls until they are firm to the touch. As the dog gains confidence, the difficulty level of exercises can be increased simply by deflating the equipment a bit. This requires the dog to expend more energy to accomplish exercises and forces greater use of core muscles.



Fully inflated platforms are easier for beginning dogs, but they have little roll resistance. For this reason, they should be supported by using a base, a wall or your own body. Smaller equipment pieces like discs and bones should not be overinflated to the point that they clearly bow up and are unable to remain flat on the floor.



Lastly, never leave equipment unattended when a dog is present. Many dogs eagerly take to DOGa equipment but should never be allowed to jump on it unsupported. If your dog is on the equipment you must be fully attentive and providing support.



Peanuts and balls are available in sizes to fit every dog.



Balance Discs



Bones



Bosu Ball



Egg



Here, a Corgi demonstrates how to use Stones.





Targets can be used to help a dog understand the desired behavior



Equipment is used by itself or in various combinations to increase the difficulty of the exercise or achieve a desired result.



PERFORMING EXERCISES:

The goals of balance and stability activities are to enhance the proprioceptive feedback (body awareness), encourage weight shifts and muscle contractions, and facilitate balance and function.

Balance work works the whole body with the contraction and co-contraction of many muscle groups, from the shoulders and forelimbs, all the way down the spine and core, to the hips and hind legs. Instead of repetitions, in balance work think about duration, or how long it can be sustained. Start with a few minutes at a time and observe the dog's tolerance. Each dog is different, and you must be able to tell when your dog is close to fatigue. Some signs of fatigue may be panting with tongue out, muscles twitching, leaning into you, or trying to sit or lay down on the equipment.

Begin with standing and holding activities, then progress to functional movements like sit to stands, and turns with slow purposeful movements. These activities can be done every day for a few minutes at a time. Mix it up. Try doing some balance work before or after a walk. Vary the activities and types of balance platforms to make it fun and different each time.

There are three basic ways to create a stability challenge for your dog on any platform. Each of these methods makes any exercise more difficult and results in the dog engaging larger muscle groups.

1. Ask your dog to stand on the platform and physically manipulate him with small motions.
2. Manually manipulate the platform under your dog, rocking it back and forth to make the exercise.
3. Reduce the amount of support you provide (reduce air, less harness support) to make the dog feel less stable.

Exercises should take a 3-step approach, providing three levels of difficulty using the same or similar movements. Asking the dog to make voluntary movements, such as raising a paw or lowering the chin to the equipment can make the exercise more difficult. Asking for bigger and bigger movements further engages the core and increases difficulty. Additionally, the exact same movement completed on increasingly challenging platforms makes exercise more difficult.



SAMPLE EXERCISES:

3. Guided Stand



1. Sit



6. Double Disc Down



4. Rear Balance Stand



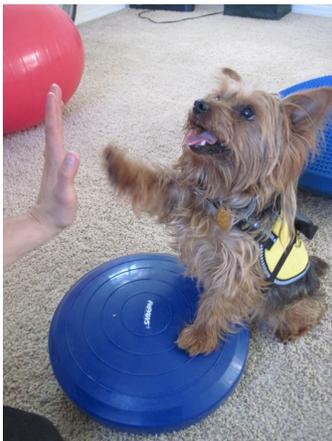
2. Double Disc Stand
(2 versions)



7. Squats



5. Front High 5





DEVELOPING A TRAINING PLAN:

DOGa Exercise should never be haphazard and therefore requires a training plan. You would never go to a gym and jump from one exercise to another with little thought to what you are doing. This would not help you to achieve the desired results that drove you to the gym in the first place and would almost surely lead to injury. The same principles apply to your dog. For those reasons you must always make sure that you are working from a solid training plan.

The first step in designing a training plan is to clearly define your dog's level of activity to start.

- Does the dog hang around the house most of the time sleeping and resting and going for the occasional walk?
- Is the dog fairly active with at least a couple of walks per day and longer hikes on weekends?
- Does the dog have a job that keeps him active like search and rescue, tracking or service dog work?
- Is the dog a performance dog that regularly competes in sports like agility, flyball or dock diving?

As you might imagine dogs in each of the above scenarios require different levels of conditioning and the training plan will need to reflect the current activity level. For example, a performance dog may be able to move through levels of difficulty quickly. Or a dog that works regularly at a specific job might have muscle stiffness that needs to be accounted for in the plan.

There are many ways to put together a training plan. No matter the method used to develop it, there are certain things that must be included in every plan.

1. Goals - It's important to identify the reason for exercise in the first place. The goal will likely relate to the dog's current level of exercise previously identified.
2. Individual Concerns or Considerations - These things would include health conditions, old injuries, injury prevention, etc.
3. Exercises – Identify specifically what the dog will do.
4. Equipment – Clearly identifying platforms used for different exercises on the plan will help you to make sure that everything is organized and will help keep the plan on track.
5. Repetitions – Identifying the number of reps ensures that the dog is not over or under exercised.
6. Timeframes – Days of the week and times of the day that exercise will take place.
7. Variety – The plan needs to include variety so that the dog doesn't get bored.
8. Fluidity – Every exercise plan needs to have room for growth. The plan must have a way to reflect progress. As the dog gains confidence and is able to perform more difficult exercises the plan is adapted.

Some thoughts and ideas for creating training plans are included below. Please note that these are NOT training plans but might help you in creating one. Information is provided for different levels and some sample exercises are included for reference.



Puppy Programs -

Puppies can begin a DOGa program as early as 4 weeks of age with 1- to 2-minute sessions on the ball, several times a day.

Gradually build up to longer sessions, but never more than 10 minutes in length.

Most puppies can start with a beginner program at 6 to 9 months of age, but larger dogs and slower-developing dogs may take longer to advance to more challenging ball work.

Remember that you want ball work to be FUN for your puppy. Don't overdo it and don't rush your puppy's progress. Some dogs take a long time just to become comfortable sitting or lying on the ball. Going slowly will help your young dog build confidence and keep sessions stress free.





Beginner Programs –

A goal of any beginner program should be to improve balance and get the dog to work in a standing position. It is appropriate for some dogs, such as older dogs or those with previous injuries to never to advance from this level.

Getting your dog comfortable and confident with getting up on the inflatable platform and being bounced on the ball should be your first priority. You may need to work on just these skills for several weeks, and that should be considered when developing the plan

Platform work might begin with 5- to 10-minute sessions each day for 10-14 consecutive days, unless the dog is actively competing in a sport or is sore after ball work. If your dog is sore, only work him every other day. If your dog is actively competing in a performance sport, don't do ball work the day of an event or the day after. Gradually build up to 10-15 minutes per session.

After the initially doing platform work for consecutive days you should make platform work a part of any cross-training program and your sessions to 3-4 times per week.

Sample Exercises

Head movements up, down, right, and left. 3 repetitions in each direction.

Weight shifting from side to side. 3 shifts or go to fatigue.

Weight shifting from front to back. 3 shifts or go to fatigue.

Simple $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ turns. 3 turns in each direction or go to fatigue

Each time you increase repetitions or the length of your sessions, look for signs that your dog has had enough, including panting, muscle trembling and loss of control (rear end starting to slide, for example), disinterest in the treats, or trying to jump off the platform.





Intermediate/Advanced Programs –

More advanced programs are designed for younger, healthy, athletic dogs. The goal is to achieve 15-20 minutes of active work with the dog in varying positions.

Sample Exercises

Warm up your dog with gentle bouncing, weight shifting from side to side (3 shifts), and weight shifting from front to back (3 shifts).

Head movements up, down, right, and left: 3 sets of 10 in each direction. When moving his head to the left or right, the dog should be able to reach a treat placed on his hip. When moving his head down, he should be able to reach a treat placed between his front legs. When moving his head up, ask the dog to reach as far as possible without shifting into a sit.

Full turns to the left and right. Begin with 3 sets of 3 and build up to as much as 3 sets of 10. With large dogs it can be preferable to continue doing $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ turns, pausing in between to ensure that the dog is able to maintain footing.

Stand to sit to down. Start with 3 sets of 5 doing stand to sit. Work up to 3 sets of 10 doing stand to sit to down and reverse.

Limb lifts. Lift one front limb and then the other a few inches off the ball for one set. Start with 3 sets and build up to as much as 10 sets. Eventually add rear limb lifts into each set.

Alternative limb lifts. Lift the opposite forelimb and hind limb a few inches off the ball and then lift the other two opposing limbs for one set. Start with 3 sets and work up to as many as 10 sets.

Waving. With the dog in a sitting position, have him lift one paw and wave. This is increasing the difficulty of the single limb lift. Start with 2 sets and work up to as many as 10.

More difficult exercises can be added to the plan once the dog can accomplish exercises like those above. These can include side-lying sit-ups and sit ups from front to back. Be aware that adding these exercises can take quite a while and should not be attempted with long-backed breeds or any dog with known or potential back problems. Repetitions should always be kept to a small number on these exercises.





KEEPING A TRAINING JOURNAL:

In addition to developing and maintaining a training plan, a training journal allows you to make note of challenges, issues, concerns and the dog's readiness to increase difficulty. It may also be a place to note overarching goals or even plans to purchase additional equipment that may benefit your dog. Keeping all of this information in the same place along with your plan will help you to stay organized and keep the commitment you have made to your dog's fitness.

With practice, your dog will become a DOGa pro and will look forward to his exercise program each week!

