

Puppies and Exercise – Not So Much

When I see an enthusiastic new dog owner walking a puppy, I mean a *little* puppy not an almost-year-old-dog, I want to applaud the owner's commitment but tell hi-scale it back just a notch for a minute. How much exercise and what kind to puppies really need?

All dogs need some movement, but for a puppy, just some playtime with you in the living room will suffice. (Not only is this enough exercise, this is crucial bonding activity to create a connection with the dog, make him feel secure, and establish your dominance.) Good puppy play can be anything unstructured and not too strenuous: chasing, running, playing with dog toys. For training purposes, you *don't* want to encourage biting or gnawing and maybe even start using a command for when playtime is over so he will start to know the difference. Playing with other dogs that are in the house is good for him too, but just watch if you have older dogs. A puppy playing with an adult dog can tend to play hard to keep up, and will be more prone to injuries.

Overdoing it with your puppy can lead to problems later. Things like rough play and jumping is a *bad idea* for a young pup. A puppy's bones are soft and spongy. They don't completely harden until the puppy is 18 months to 2 year depending on your dog's breed. High jumps, jumping over large objects and jumping out of things like porches or trucks should be discouraged. The stress soft bones, underdeveloped muscles and immature ligaments can create damage-maybe life-long issues.

More than a casual walk is *not* good for a young puppy either. Besides the issue of her still-developing bones, a puppy's body is not good at controlling its body temperature, making her more prone to heat stroke. Running, jogging, rollerblading, and biking with you dog should be saved for later (when growth plates have closed).

As your puppy grows, more intensive or longer workouts are fine. Here are some guidelines on appropriate physical activity for your pup:

Exercise Guidelines for Puppies

6 Weeks to 4 Months

Short walks (15 mins) on soft terrain
Playing with soft toys in a contained area, such as a fenced yard
Swimming in warmer water for short periods

4 to 8 Months

Longer walks (30 mins) on soft terrain
Playing with soft toys
Swimming and playing with toys in the water

8 to 12 Months

Faster and/or longer walks on soft terrain
Playing with soft toys
Swimming and playing with toys in the water for longer periods

12 Months and Up

Walks on terrain that has been checked for hazards such as unseen glass, holes, ditches, wires, stakes, and metal fragments
Jogging with you (begin with short distances on softer terrain until endurance is built up)
Playing with appropriate toys
Swimming and playing with toys in the water

Remember, generally, you know any exercise is enough for your dog when he or she is laid out at the end of the day. A tired dog is a happy dog. You just got a new puppy. You know the basics of dog ownership: someplace to sleep, food, training, and exercise and play. But a puppy is not an adult dog, he is still growing physically and still learning mentally. You need to approach each of these areas differently than you would an older dog.