

RUNNING WITH YOUR DOG

It has been well established that working out with a partner not only increases your motivation, but also helps to ensure the likelihood that you will stick with your chosen workout program. Your dog may be the ultimate workout partner you've been looking for! Who else has endless amounts of energy, is always happy to spend time with you, and never complains that it's 'too early', or they just want to stay home and watch TV? It's pretty hard to skip a workout when your best friend is standing at the door, tail wagging, leash in mouth, ready to pound the pavement with you! With a bit of training, and by following a few tips, you and your pooch can soon be on your way.

Check with your vet!

Similar to humans, dogs should check in with their doctor before starting any vigorous training or exercise program. Visit with your dog's veterinarian to see if running is something that would be safe for her. Obesity, joint problems and heart conditions are a few issues that may make your vet deem your pup unfit to run. A physical exam can alert your veterinarian to any red flags, and will help her provide advice about what is safe and healthy your dog. Even if you think your pet is perfectly fine, giving your vet a heads up never hurts, and may save you and your dog unnecessary injury.

Build your distance gradually

Just as you likely won't start your training program with a grueling, long distance run, neither should your dog! Dogs need time to gradually build their distance, not only to increase their cardiac and

respiratory stamina, but also to allow their sensitive pads time to toughen up with the increasing mileage. Building up your mileage slowly will decrease the risk of injury to the joints and soft tissue.

Use the proper equipment

Keep your dog on leash, especially when running on sidewalks and roadways. Avoid retractable leashes, as they provide too much distance between you and your dog, and can easily become tangled. Excessive pulling can put a strain on your own joints, and will make the experience much less enjoyable. Aim to train your pup to run with his nose at the level of your knee. Adjustable leashes that can loop around your waist are handy, or use a basic 4-6' leash. Front loading harnesses allow for great control and may be more comfortable for your dog than a collar, but avoid those that rub excessively under the limbs. Most importantly....don't forget the poop bags! Dogs will almost always defecate when out for a run, and you don't want to be caught unprepared!

Keep the weather in mind

Avoid weather that is too hot - dogs don't have sweat glands like we do, and it's very easy for them to overheat. Hot pavement can easily burn sensitive pads, and since dogs don't typically alert us when they're thirsty, it's easy for them to become dehydrated. Winter running is not without it's risks as well, however. Heavily salted roads can irritate the feet, and licking the salt off after a run can cause gastric upset. Boots or protective latex balloon booties can provide protection in harsh winter weather.

Know when to pre-fuel and re-fuel!

Filling up before, or eating too soon after a run can cause your furry pal some major GI upset, and potentially even contribute to a life threatening condition called bloat. Bloat (also known by it's medical name, Gastric Dilatation and Volvulus) occurs when the stomach twists, or flips on its axis, blocking off the inflow and outflow of the stomach, causing an extreme buildup of gas. This not only makes breathing more difficult, as the pressure builds on the diaphragm,

but can also cut off the blood supply to the stomach and lead to rupture. The condition is very serious, and can quickly lead to death. Waiting a couple of hours after eating before hitting the trails can significantly lower the risk, as well as waiting to feed your dog until he has calmed down and stopped panting after your run.

Pay attention to your dog's cues

During your run, monitor your dog for signs of overexertion or overheating. Lethargy, excessive drooling, dark or "brick red" gums, vomiting or diarrhea (especially with blood), or extreme panting are all signs that you should stop, seek shade, and provide your dog with (small amounts of) water. Although dogs will often exercise past their comfort level, identifying and responding to these simple cues can prevent complications. In the several hours or days following your run, watch your pup for signs of limping or stiffness. Dogs can acquire running injuries just like their humans, and may require rest, or in some cases anti-inflammatory medications before they're ready to hit the road again.

Running can be a great way to bond with your best furry friend, and helps to not only keep unwanted pounds off, but also improve your health and extend your life! Following the tips above will help you to ensure you have an always willing, always excited workout companion!



By Dr. Kristin Baird.

Dr. Baird is a veterinary at the Oakville Animal Clinic located at 218 Kerr Street in Oakville, Ontario and is a friend of L.R.A.S. She enjoys spending time with her lab Kayley.