

Warm Up Your Dog!

We can take a racing Greyhound as an example. When the race starts and the dog is released from the starting box it reaches a speed of 60 kilometres an hour in a few seconds. If the dog has not warmed up and the tissues are not prepared for exertion there is considerable risk of strain and other injuries. Working dogs, agility dogs and regular family dogs are also often exposed to sudden, extensive pressure, in their work or during lively play in the exercise yard. Another example is putting the dog into a cold car in the winter and then letting it out to run around and play.

By warming up we mean getting warm through activity and increasing the temperature in the musculature. The increase in blood flow allows the muscles to absorb nutrients more easily. The speed of nerve impulses causing muscles to contract increases and the dog is able to run faster. A sound warm up does not tire the dog but rather increases blood circulation and warms up the muscles ensuring that the joints are lubricated and more supple. The dog is then ready to perform more demanding physical exertion without running the risk of injury.

How to do it!

Warming up (regular family dogs) can involve walking with the dog on the lead for 15 - 20 minutes before allowing it to run freely. In this way the muscles soften up and are ready for physical activity. Competitive and working dogs could warm up in a more goal-oriented way.

Here is a check list that could be used before the exercise:

- Let the dog walk slowly for a while and then increase the tempo for 2-3 minutes.
- Let the dog trot for 2-3 minutes.
- Let the dog gallop for one minute.
- Then let the dog make some short explosive moves.
- Let the dog wind down a little by going back to trotting and then walking.

(I also strongly recommend that you allow your dog to wind down after the exercise before any stretching activities.)

As a dog owner there is nothing we can do to prevent all accidents. However we can prevent muscle related problems and strain injuries by warming up our dogs regularly.

Under these conditions the dog can access optimal gait and stretch to its full length. This keeps the dog well-balanced physically and psychologically, allowing it to retain the agility of the young dog to an advanced age. Warming up should be an automatic element in the health care, a complement to your dog's daily exercise, obedience training and diet and are suitable for all dogs regardless of breed, age or size.

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