



Canine Fitness

In evaluating your dog's fitness today, he/she feels like the workload needs to be increased. The fastest way to build muscle tone will involve trading off a cardio-focused day and a strength-focused day. Fatigue is deemed as one of the most common ways that performance dogs incur injuries. Because these magnificent animals are often willing and somewhat able to do what we ask, they work without often telling us that they can't. We often only find out the hard way that they really should have had more conditioning than they currently had when they come up sore.

Let's look a little deeper at your program and build in a bit more tissue building and toning to ensure they are safe to do the job we are asking these dogs to do.

On the cardio day our goal is to get our dog's heart rate and respiration up. In a one-hour workout we would want to give 2-3 long breaks; time frame here will very dependent on the current respiratory condition of your dog, 3-5 minutes (very fit dog), 5-8 minutes (dog in fair condition), 8-12 min (dog just beginning a fitness program) of walking on leash at a normal or slow pace, so that our dog can fully catch its breath. We should spend more time in each gait, working exercises that our dog knows well and can accomplish easily. The focus isn't training something new but to increase muscle tone, muscle nutrient and waste exchange enhancement, and to have respiratory function bolstered. The dogs posture during these exercises is one they can hold easily.

Contrarily, the strength day is a different story. On these days we can work on the next level of our dog's training. Strength work is more intense and because of this there will be more frequent breaks. In a one-hour workout we should still take two longer breaks so that our dog can fully catch its breath, but we should also have 6-8 short breaks to allow the dog's tissue to drain. These breaks can be as short as 20-25 seconds, perhaps ask for a down or a wait, or for the dog that won't relax during a down, a relaxed walk. It is imperative that we allow the dog to break before he/she becomes fatigued so that we can allow the tissue to drain before the dog has to go

to other tissue to compensate for the muscle that just can't fire any longer. Even a short break, like the one mentioned above, will allow the dog to regain the ability to use the tissue for a short time in a correct fashion.

A favourite method for increasing fitness level with canine athletes is the '3-1 program': three days on and one day off. This program allows for enough tissue-building time to be balanced with a repair and recovery day. As we get ready for show season we must ensure that our dogs are conditioned and fit enough for the job we want them to do. Each workout should be seen as a building block in your program. Every athlete needs the mental relief of an easy day (i.e. Out playing with the family day), however that day will not add much to our dog's fitness level. A dog needs to be comfortable with twice the workload at home that we expect from it at a show. If you are planning to show two days in a row at a competition, we must practice this schedule or greater at home.

One of the hardest things on muscle tissue is being the 'weekend warrior'; this can create; muscle fatigue, muscle micro tears, fibrosis, stiffness, and ultimately pain. The unfortunate part of the weekend warrior program is that it takes a while for the negative effects of this to really show up in the dog's performance level. A lot of handlers think that their dog does well with this program, until performance starts to falter at which point this decrease is often wrongly associated with the dog's temperament or poor behaviour. The truth of the matter is that the tissue has been under stress for a long time, it is just at the point it can't compensate any longer.

Check your program today and consult your veterinarian, therapist or trainer to decide how to safely increase your program to a level that will allow your dog to work safe and sound!

****NOTE: Therapy is not a replacement for Veterinary Care.****

