



Exercising your puppy

How much should I exercise a puppy?

There's no one answer fits all for this question, and it depends on several factors. Your puppy's age and breed have the most impact. It won't be a surprise to learn that younger puppies require less exercise.

Puppies grow really quickly. Within a puppy's bones they have areas known as growth plates which allow the bone to grow. Once a dog reaches maturity these growth plates will fuse and become stable and strong, but while a dog's body is developing, they can be easily damaged, and what may seem like minor issues while they're small can add up to lifelong issues once mature. Growing bones and joints also contain much more cartilage compared those in an adult dog and are more prone to stress injuries and trauma. Damage as a puppy can result in deformation or joint disease that can be permanent, painful and debilitating. Your puppy is unlikely to show any signs of being overexercised until the damage has already been done, so it's important for you to regulate their activity for them from the start.

As a general guide, we recommend the '5-minute rule'; one to two sessions of five minutes walking for each month of age. For example, a 5-month-old puppy can be exercised for up to 25 minutes once or twice a day. This should be continued until they are fully grown and skeletally mature; around 6-8 months for small breeds such as terriers but can be up to 2 years of age for some larger breeds such as Dobermans, Great Danes or St Bernards.

The 5-minute rule should be low impact exercise and not be filled with racing around. Fast paced activities such as zoomies, stairs, hill work or jumping can put masses of strain on young joints and should be carefully avoided until your pup is grown up. This is easier said than done but is really important to give your pup their best start in life. Is it sensible to take your puppy jogging? Not really. That is too much strain for those soft immature joints. Ideally you need to wait until at least a year old before that sort of activity; dog ownership is a marathon not a sprint. It is also worth noting that chasing toys is very strenuous for joints so try not to play too much fetch with your pup (or adult dog too for that matter); it is all about moderation...and no more ball flingers please!

Things to avoid

- High impact activities such as jumping and sharp/sudden turns (eg. chasing a ball repeatedly)
- Going up and down stairs for puppies under 12 weeks
- Excess bodyweight.

Breed differences

- The larger the breed, the longer it will take for the bones to mature and become fully developed. For any large breed dog, err on the side of caution with the amount of activity.
- Highly active breeds such as collies and spaniels may overdo it if you try to tire them with exercise alone, and probably need mental stimulation to bridge the gap between a safe walking amount and a satisfied pup.
- Brachycephalic breeds (with short noses) will need close monitoring to assess their breathing as the exercise amount increases.
- Sighthounds will do 'zoomies' and whiz around and around. This can put a lot of strain on their long developing legs so limit fast running in sighthounds until 10-12 months.