

# Exercise: Moving Toward a Healthy Outlook

by Sean W. Aiken, DVM, MS,

## Rule #1: Make It Fun!

Like most pet owners you probably have a backyard or a place you let your dog out to run – and this is his/her daily exercise. Unfortunately most dogs won't exercise when they are left outside by themselves. As an owner, you want what is best for your dog – freedom to play – but you don't want to turn that play into work.



Most people don't equate exercise with fun. In reality, exercise is healthy for your dog's body and mind. Exercise can be used a reward for your dog – giving you the added benefit of time to bond with your faithful friend – a friend that is counting on you to do what is best for them. Here are some tips that, with your veterinarian's permission, could turn work into reward:

- **Make a Friend!** Taking your dog to a local dog park can be a treat for both of you. Your dog can run with some friends while you have a chance to share tips and relax with their companions. If the park does not provide water, be sure to bring some along – making friends can build up quite a thirst.
- **Go Fetch!** Your dog can “fetch” a lot of entertainment out of something that may not seem all that exciting to you. A favorite toy and a safe area to run can lead to a very happy dog. Just a few safety tips:
  - Don't use a stick for your game of fetch; many dogs are injured this way.
  - Keep your throws low to the ground to avoid injury to your dog's legs when jumping to catch objects.
- **Hidden Rewards!** Put aside some of your dog's normal diet, or choose another low calorie snack, and hide it inside a toy. You can also wrap a favorite toy or small treat inside a towel and let your dog try to unwrap it. These games provide a workout for both body and the mind – and a reward for persistence!
- **Routine Play!** An everyday walk can become an amusement park for your dog. Set up a small obstacle course, let your dog jump across a fallen tree, or hide a favorite toy along the way for them to find. You can also add a little resistance (and burned calories) by taking your walk in snow, along a sandy area, or in shallow water.
- **Exercise Can Go “Swimmingly”!** If your dog likes the water, swimming can be a great exercise. Water provides a soothing space for your dog to make full use of his/her joints. A short swim can provide the same amount of exercise as a hard run, without unnecessary stress to the body and joints.
- **Indoor Fun!** In cold or inclement weather, fun can also be found indoors. Sign your dog up for an agility or obedience class. You can usually find information on classes in your area from your veterinarian or at a local pet store or grooming shop. Dogs (and their owners) can play and learn at the same time!

---

## Northside Animal Hospital

2317 North M-52, Owosso, MI  
48867 TEL: 989.723.1681

<http://northsidevet.net/>