

How Much Exercise Do Puppies Need?

by Gayle Watkins, PhD



A Lot According to Our New Puppy Exercise Guidelines!

There seem to be two approaches to exercising puppies by well-meaning owners. There are those who do too much too soon with their pups, starting repetitive, concussive exercises like weave poles much too soon. Then there are those who minimize their pups' activity, almost wrapping them in cotton until their growth plates have closed. So **what is the right balance of physical activity for your puppy?** What kind of exercises should you do? Can you walk, jog or hike with your puppy? These are all good questions! To help you find answers, leading sports medicine specialist Dr Chris Zink and I created our new *Fit For Life™ Puppy Exercise Guidelines*. These guidelines lay out activities puppies should and shouldn't do from 3 weeks of age until after their growth plates have closed.

WHY DO PUPPIES NEED A LOT OF EXERCISE?

The foundation of our puppy exercise guidelines assumes that puppies need **a lot of safe physical activity to properly develop their brains and bodies**, just like other young mammals, including children. The World Health Organization and many national governments recommend **intense** exercise for young children. Toddlers and pre-schoolers should get at least **three hours** a day. By 6 years of age, children should be getting at least **an hour of vigorous-intensity, aerobic exercise** each day. **Our puppies are no different.** The right amount and balance of early exercise offers **lifetime benefits** to puppies, foals, children, and the young of many other animals. For our pups, these include:

- healthier, stronger bones, muscles, cartilage, tendons, and joints
- lower canine hip dysplasia rates
- healthier heart and lungs
- better balance, proprioception, coordination and muscle control
- healthier body weight
- improved self-confidence
- better learning
- better overall lifetime health

We also know that puppies learn best what they learn first so we chose physical activities that won't develop bad habits, like pulling on leash, running away, or obsessively sniffing the ground and eating things they find there. Instead, **each of our exercises contribute to future manners, good behavior, and better relationships with owners**, as well as a stronger mind and body.

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WHAT SHOULD YOU DO WITH YOUR PUPPY?

Our puppy exercise guidelines tell you what activities to do at each of the five stages your puppy will go through before it becomes an adult. Exercises are broken down into six categories:

- flexibility (or stretching)
- balance and proprioception
- core, front and rear strength
- skill training for sports and lifetime activities
- endurance
- and what we call, Good for the Soul exercises

Creating the right balance among these activities is essential. Doing too little exercise with our pups has long-lasting effects on critical body parts, like cartilage (think future cruciate injuries). At the same time, doing too much exercise has long-term detrimental effects on cartilage, bones, and tendons. So our guidelines give you the perfect balance for optimal development of your puppy's body and nervous system. [Download your free copy of the Fit for Life Puppy Exercise Guidelines](#). Then, grab some treats and your pup and go have some fun! Skip weave poles and contacts early on. Don't do intense jump training. Avoid jogging, biking, road-working, disc games like Frisbee, and flyball with your puppy. Recognize that walks on short leashes fall into training not exercise so do them along with other life-skill and sport training but don't depend upon them to exercise your pup. Instead, teach your pup active stretches, work on its balance and proprioception, and go for long off-leash (loose-leash, if you must) walks in nature. These things alone will gain your pup the most benefit in its early months. At 6 months, start including strength exercises in your pup's routine and by the time your pup is a young adult, you will have given it a great foundation for a long, healthy life!

For blog references and photos, please go to www.AvidogZink.com/blog.

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