

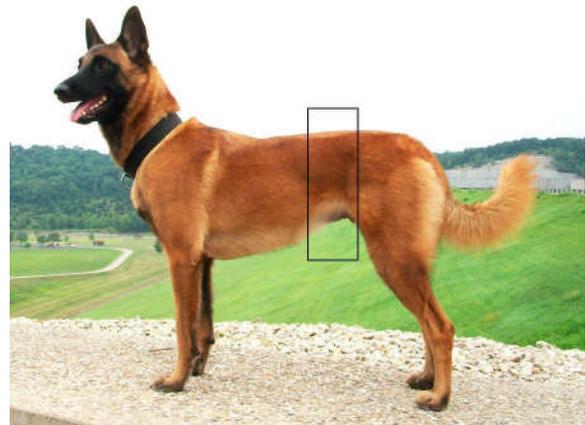
K9 Fitness Badge

Information and Training Instructions

Keeping our dogs fit is an important part of maintaining their health and improving their quality of life. An overweight dog is at an increased risk for a number of health conditions, has a greater risk of injury and heat exhaustion, may experience more problems related to osteoarthritis, and has an overall shorter life expectancy. An estimated 25-40% of pet dogs in the United States are clinically overweight. As responsible dog parents, we can make efforts to keep our dogs active and exercised, so they not only are healthier but are also able to participate in and enjoy the numerous activities that many Dog Scouts love.

Assessing Weight:

A dog's ribs should all be easily palpable, but not visible, on a healthy weight dog. When viewed from above, the waist should be observable behind the ribs. When viewed from the side, the abdominal tuck should be evident, meaning the area between the last rib and the start of the hind legs should be smaller/higher than the rib portion of the dog's chest. Some dog's tuck up is not as prominent, but this area should not be lower than the ribs. You should not feel a covering of fat on top of the ribs. If your dog has a fluffy coat, you'll need to hold the hair down to show the dog's true rib area for video certification (or get the dog wet). For in person evaluations, the evaluator can feel the dog's rib area. If the dog has long flowing hair that makes it hard to tell where the tuck up starts, the hair can be held out of the way or a soft tape measure can be used to show the tuck up is smaller than the rib area.



If your dog is overweight when beginning this program, be mindful to build up exercise gradually (as discussed below), and do not perform high-impact activities until excess weight has been taken off.

Starting an Exercise Program:

Before starting an exercise program for your dog, it is important to evaluate the dog's current fitness level and recognize if your dog has any particular needs or risks. If you are concerned, you may want to discuss with a veterinarian how to start increasing your dog's activity.

Start keeping track of how much exercise your dog currently gets and notice the dog's muscle tone and physical condition. You will use this as a starting point. Make a goal to gradually

increase the dog's activity weekly by about 10% each week. When you reach a desired level of fitness, plan to stay at that level of activity to maintain that fitness. It is important not to rush in too soon, as you will risk overexertion and injury. It is also important to build in rest days once or twice a week – so perhaps instead of a run; you take the dog on a more casual walk in the neighborhood. This will not only help with muscle recovery, but can prevent boredom by adding some variety to the exercise program.

To keep yourself motivated, start keeping a log so you can measure your progress. Note the type of exercise, the time spent performing it, and if applicable (and desired) the miles covered. Set goals and work towards them – perhaps you want the dog to reach a specific weight, or to be able to run in a dog-friendly 5K in a couple months, or to log 50 miles hiking over the summer.

For the badge requirements, you will need to log at least 2.5 hours of aerobic exercise for your dog, for at least 6 out of 8 consecutive weeks. (This can be done with even a half hour of exercise five days a week.) At a minimum, for the badge you must log exercise at least three days out of every week with at least one rest day each week – we do not want a dog being sedentary for six days then exercising for 2.5 hours on one day or even trying to get all the exercise in on the weekend only. That won't build stamina and could cause injury.

For an exercise to be logged, it must involve at least 15 minutes of continuous aerobic activity. This does not include warm up and cool down time. It is acceptable to pause briefly to allow the dog to cool off in a wading pool or take a drink of water, for example, but the rest period should not be long enough that the dog's heart and respiration rates return to normal resting levels. Sprint-type exercises that are performed in intervals with regular extended breaks do not meet the criteria (for example, a dog running an agility sequence a few times during a group class, with lots of down time to rest in between, would not be logged as aerobic exercise).

Types of Exercise:

Any exercise that involves you interacting with your dog, and the dog (and perhaps you) getting an aerobic workout can count toward the badge. Possible examples include:

- Walking/hiking (if this gets the dog's heart/respiration rate up)
- Running/trotting (with you or next to a golf cart or bike)
- Cycling
- Skijoring
- Swimming
- Fetch or Frisbee
- Treadmill
- Restrained recalls
- Pulling a sulky type cart or utility cart (if that is aerobic for the dog)

It is great if you can get a workout along with your dog, but if this is not possible, there are plenty of other ways you can help your dog get fit. Throwing a ball for your dog to fetch, accompanying the dog on a hike while in a motorized cart, encouraging the dog to walk on a treadmill, and playing various recall games can all get your dog moving even if you aren't able to.

For the badge requirements, activities such as letting the dog run with his dog pals at the dog park, or going out in the back yard to run around are not considered applicable. This exercise should involve the two of you interacting as a team in some manner. Playing with canine housemates or at the dog park focuses the dog's attention away from you.

Safety

Be careful not to overdo exercise with your dog. Dogs are capable of great endurance, speed, agility and strength, but it is important to build up those skills over time. Increase exercise gradually, keep an eye on your dog for any signs of lameness, soreness, or over-exertion, and do not force the dog to continue if he or she seems hot, tired, or injured. For those with very high-drive dogs, remember that they are not always the best self-limiters – you may need to know when to stop the Frisbee session even if they still want to continue!

If an activity or dog sport that you ultimately want to participate in involves a lot of high impact forces on the dog's joints, it is best to get the dog in good physical condition prior to beginning that training. For example, a dog that is doing a lot of jumping in agility or flyball is putting a lot of stress on their joints, and it is important that the dog is a healthy weight so that the risk of injury is not increased. Likewise, puppies should not be encouraged to perform too much high impact or long duration exercise until their growth plates are closed to prevent long-term joint damage. This usually occurs around 12 months for smaller breeds, to about 1.5 years for larger breeds. You may want to discuss with your veterinarian when your breed is likely to stop growing, and may want to perform x-rays to insure that the plates have closed.

Assess whether your dog has any physical or health issues that you should consider. Older dogs and brachycephalic breeds (those with short muzzles) are more prone to heat exhaustion, so should be monitored especially carefully. If your dog has any structural limitations, consider what types of exercise might be safest. All these dogs can certainly find a safe exercise program and improve their fitness, but you may need to tailor it to their individual needs. For example, you may not be comfortable asking a dog with hip dysplasia to accompany you on long-distance runs, but he or she may be able to safely and comfortably perform other activities like swimming or hiking.

Make sure that the equipment you use is safe and appropriate for the type of exercise you are performing. Padded, non-restrictive harnesses and waist belts are great for running or hiking. Likewise, some gear, such as head halters and front clip harnesses, may not be the safest choice for activities such as biking – use your judgment and keep in mind that the equipment should not restrict movement or put too much force on one part of the dog's body. If pulling is

part of the exercise, the leash or attachment should be on a properly fitted V-front harness, not the dog's collar. Devices that employ pain or discomfort, such as prong collars and choke collars, should not be used for any exercises.

Other gear that may improve your safety includes identification tags for yourself and the dog, reflective gear (vests, harnesses, leashes), headlamps, pad conditioners or booties to protect paws, or cooling coats when exercising in hot weather. The type of exercise and conditions you encounter will help you determine what equipment is appropriate.

Exercising: Warm Up and Cool Down

Warm-up your dog for about 5 to 10 minutes prior to exercising by walking or trotting. This may be followed with some stretching routines to stretch the muscles in the toes, limbs, neck, and spine – it is important not to stretch cold muscles though, so be sure you do your warm up first. Static stretching may not be the best choice for pre-workout. Instead, active stretching, where the dog is performing the stretch through his or her own movements, is ideal for a pre-exercise routine.

For the badge, you must train at least two behaviors that involve the dog actively stretching. These can include things like:

- Weaving between your legs to stretch the spine
- Waving each paw up high to stretch forelimbs
- Putting feet up on your arms and “dancing” back and forth for a few steps or to encourage the dog to drop his chest and stretch
- Bowing
- Curling head to touch hip on each side to stretch neck
- Or put their natural stretching behavior on cue!

Many of the fun tricks we teach also encourage the dog to move and stretch their body, so be creative. These behaviors can all be trained with shaping, targeting, or luring, but must be done using only positive methods. For the badge check-off, your dog should be willing to perform at least two of these behaviors on cue, without food reward, and without luring. Using a target is acceptable as long as the target is not the reward.

After exercising, cool the dog down for another five to ten minutes by trotting or walking. Afterwards, repeat your stretching exercises, and when the dog's heart rate and breathing return to normal, incorporate some passive stretching, where you are gently manipulating the dog's body, causing the dog to gently flex and extend their joints. Use caution with passive stretching – do not force a stretch, and if your dog resists a particular stretch, do not continue. Use gentle, steady pressure, and do not use bouncy or jerky motions when stretching. If you feel the muscle start to tense and tighten, stop the stretch. Ideally, hold each stretch for 15 to 30 seconds.

Some helpful articles written for CleanRun agility magazine about stretching and strengthening your dog (and preventing injuries) are found with the K9 fitness badge information. Original articles found here: http://www.cleanrun.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=category.display&category_id=459

For the badge, you must demonstrate that you can handle your dog's body, and that the dog will allow you to passively stretch and massage his or her muscles. The dog must not be distressed or struggling.

On the log sheet, columns are provided for the warm-up and cool down as a reminder to do those activities. How (or if) you use these columns is up to you. You can choose to note the amount of time spent on these activities, simply put a check mark in the box or leave them blank. Only the time actually spent doing the aerobic activity counts toward the 2.5 hours needed each week.

While Exercising:

While participating in exercise, continually monitor your dog for any signs of pain or overheating. Pay attention to any changes in the dog's gait. Inspect the pads of your dog's feet regularly for cracking or chafing. Make sure that you and the dog stay hydrated. Be sure to follow any rules of the road, trail, or the area that you are using, and be courteous of other users. Dogs that are on leash do not need to be heeling during exercise, but should not be lunging or dragging you excessively (of course, some pulling is OK for certain activities such as skijoring, dog-sledding, or even biking – but it should be under control and not presenting a danger to either of you).

Over-Heating:

One of the most serious risks for a dog when performing exercise is overheating. It is important to recognize the signs of over-heating and know how to respond. A good resource, we highly recommend you read is available here:

http://www.dogscouts.org/uploads/Beating_the_heat-heat_stroke_prevention.pdf

For the badge, you must be able to handle each of your dog's feet to inspect the pads, and must be able to inspect the dog's mouth and gums. Gum color can be an indication of heat stroke. In the early onset of heat stroke, the lips and gums may appear bright red. In severe heat stroke, the gums may feel tacky and dry, and be pale and grey in color. It is also a good idea to familiarize yourself with the dog's normal gum color when he or she is at rest, so you can more easily distinguish if there has been a change in appearance.

Maintaining the Canine Athlete

Other important aspects to overall canine fitness are strengthening and body awareness (proprioception). It is important to include exercises that develop these skills so that the dog is able to safely and efficiently use his or her body and to prevent injury. For the badge, you must

demonstrate that the dog can participate in at least one exercise that helps improve each of these skills.

Examples of strength-building exercises include:

- Balancing on an exercise ball or egg. This improves balance and coordination and strengthens core muscles. (This type of equipment should be sized properly for your dog and can cause injury if used improperly. The training information for this could be a long article in itself, so getting at least one of the training books or DVD's found in the resources section is highly recommended before you buy or use an exercise egg or ball)
- Balancing on an exercise disc or wobble board – train dog to put all four paws on one disc, or use two discs and have him/her place two paws on each
- Weight pull activities (training info found here: http://www.dogscouts.org/Dog_Activ-WeightPull.html)
- Balancing on two legs (hand stands, lifting two legs on the same side or standing on hind legs.) These are only recommended for dogs that have excellent balance and core strength. Some dogs are not physically able to do this; others shouldn't be encouraged to do this. Training info can be found in videos on this YouTube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/kikopup>
- Sitting up to "beg" (see note above)
- Retrieving or performing recalls uphill (Avoid having the dog run down a hill. It puts too much impact force on their shoulders) Walking down is good if the hill is not so steep that slipping or sliding is a possibility

Examples of body awareness exercises include:

- Walking through a ladder or cavaletti
- "Perch" exercise- Pivoting rear feet with front feet on a perch
- Backing up to target an object with rear feet on cue

As with active stretching, these exercises should be taught using positive methods. You may shape the behaviors, or use a target or lure at first. For the badge check-off, rewards may be used for these types of activities, but the dog must not be bribed or lured into performing the activity. For example, you may intermittently give the dog a food reward while he is balancing on the exercise ball, but he should not have to be lured and fed continuously.

Massage

Massage can be very therapeutic for the canine athlete. Before exercise, quickly and lightly running your hands over the dog's body can help get the muscles warmed up and helps get the dog thinking about using his or her body (dogs often seem to forget they have a rear end and can be clumsy if we don't remind them through touch and the body awareness exercises mentioned above). At the end of a workout or active day, spending some time lightly massaging your dog is a great way to bond and help loosen tight muscles and drive out toxins that may

build up in the body during exertion. Be careful not to use too much pressure, especially if you have not received formal training on massage. Pay attention to your dog's feedback about what feels good, how much pressure he or she likes, and what areas might be sore. Do not force massage on an area if the dog shows resistance or discomfort. Do not massage directly on the spine or the abdomen, as these can be very sensitive areas. There are many good books and DVDs that can help you learn more formal techniques. A few have been listed in "Resources" below.

Hydration and Nutrition

Hydration and nutrition are also important in maintaining your dog's overall health. There are many high-quality dog foods and diets available on the market today. Resources such as The Whole Dog Journal (www.whole-dog-journal.com) and www.dogfoodanalysis.com can provide good independent reviews of a variety of diets, and can help you understand how to read ingredient labels and make a healthy choice for your dog. Certainly, many premium foods can be quite expensive, so make the best decision you are able to afford. It is best to stay away from the cheapest, "grocery store"-type generic dog foods, but most medium- to premium-level foods that you would find in a decent pet supply store should provide the basic nutritional requirements. There is more comprehensive information about diet and dog food starting on page 62 of the "Understanding the Dog Scout Laws" manual. It is a 107 page manual, so it might take some time to download, but it is packed with educational information!

http://www.dogscouts.org/uploads/Understanding_the_Dog_Scout_Laws.pdf

All manufacturers include their recommended feeding amounts based on the size of your dog. You might use this as a starting point, but these amounts do tend to run high (a good way to sell more food!). Monitor your dog's weight regularly, measure out your dog's proportions, and make adjustments as necessary. Individual dogs of the same size and breed can vary greatly in their calorie requirements.

If despite your best efforts, your dog's weight does not change in the direction you desire, consult your veterinarian. He or she may recommend blood work to check for an underlying medical condition.

There is a growing body of evidence that dogs have improved muscle recovery if fed a glycogen replacement supplement within 30 minutes of completing strenuous exercise. There are now a variety of dog "power bars" and energy drinks available on the market intended towards replacing glycogen for canine athletes. Many options are often available at agility equipment suppliers such as Clean Run (www.cleanrun.com). If nothing else, your dog might appreciate a tasty treat as a reward at the end of a tough workout!

Congratulations on deciding to start your dog on a path towards increased fitness! Have fun!

Resources for Further Reading/Viewing

Structure, Conditioning, Strength and Stretching:

- Chris Zink:
 - Book: Peak Performance: Coaching the Canine Athlete
 - Book: The Agility Advantage
 - DVD: Building the Canine Athlete

- Debbie Gross-Saunders:
 - DVD: Getting on the Ball (1 and 2)
 - DVD: Strengthening the Performance Dog
 - DVD: Stretching the Performance Dog
 - Numerous articles in Clean Run magazine (www.cleanrun.com)

Massage:

- Book: Canine Massage in Plain English by Natalie Winter
- DVD: How to Massage Your Dog (Maria Duthie)

Nutrition:

- Book: Performance Dog Nutrition by Jocelynn Jacobs
- Book: K9 Kitchen: The Truth Behind the Hype by Monica Segal
- Publication: The Whole Dog Journal (www.whole-dog-journal.com)