



## HEALTHY PUPPY ACTIVITY AND EXERCISE

The biggest cause of growth plate and soft tissue injury in young puppies is continuous or repetitive exercise. Until about 18 months of age, avoid long hikes, long walks, and definitely long runs. Consider investing in a puppy stroller if you are an avid hiker, walker, or runner! This way puppies can still be socialized and exposed to life! Puppies can play as much as they want but the repetitive nature of simply walking, running, and hiking is what can cause problems in their joints, bones, and ligaments.

Soft landings are imperative! A major cause of spiral fractures is when puppies jump off of beds and couches. We must be on guard to either keep them off of furniture or help them off! We also must use carpet and bedding all around furniture to cushion the impact should the pup decide to explore on his own.

Puppies run after toys and don't stop until they are right on top of the toy causing twisting and heavy impact in bones and joints. You should drag toys and roll balls on the ground to minimize this movement. Also, tug toys should be held low and still. You should let the pup pull against the toy. Don't tug on the toy when your pup has it in his mouth as his bones, muscles, and ligaments aren't sufficiently developed and this may cause problems later in his growth and development.

Puppies can swim for short periods of time but must wear a life jacket until they are 18 months old and must always be supervised. Swimming is a wonderful low impact activity for their bones and joints. They should not jump in the pool but can be helped in or can use the steps with supervision. They should never be forced to swim if they don't want to.

Puppies should only get approximately 5 minutes of repetitive exercise for every month of age up to 6 months. Repetitive exercise would include walking with no breaks. This typically means when the puppy is on a leash being compelled to walk. When a puppy runs and plays in the yard or house this isn't considered repetitive exercise because the puppy breaks the repetition with sniffing, pouncing, changing directions, etc. It is too hard on a puppy's bones, joints, and growth plates to do repetitive movement over certain periods of time. This is especially important when puppies are playing on hard surfaces such as concrete, rocky trails, and hard flooring. It is better if the puppy is on soft carpeting, exercise mats, grass, or soft dirt trails with leafy padding! Stop if the puppy is tired or reluctant.

Here are some guidelines for appropriate exercise and activity:

## 8 to 16 weeks

**Continuous walking** – Puppies in this age range should have repetitive exercise limited to a 10 to 20 minutes. Remember that puppies need to be fully vaccinated before being exposed to the world so any repetitive exercise should be limited to safe places such as your yard.

**Jumping** - Puppies should jump no more than up to wrist height (i.e., approximately 6 to 10 inches). Puppies should not climb more than one or two stairs at a time and should be carried up and down more stairs than that. Stairs should be carpeted to buffer impact and prevent slipping. Puppies must be lifted off of furniture.

**Play with other dogs** - Puppies can have free access to resident dogs but only 10 to 15 minutes with new dogs or puppies. Be sure to enforce rest periods and interrupt rough or overly fast play. You can do this by physically separating the puppy or puppies into crates, X-pens, different rooms, or leash/tether time with a human for a rest period. It is very important to limit a puppy's play at this age in order to ensure they don't overstimulate; that their play doesn't become too rough; and that they learn to stop and calm down when they are limited. It is also a great impulse control exercise and frustration training exercise.

## 4 to 6 months

**Continuous walking** – For this age range, repetitive exercise should be limited to 20 to 30 minutes. Stop if the puppy is tired or reluctant. Formal leash training should be limited to 5 minutes per session.

**Jumping** - Puppies can go up and down stairs on their own but must be supervised. Encourage your pup to walk instead of run or leap by putting a leash and harness on him and compel him to take one step at a time - especially when going downstairs. Put gates up at the top and bottom of stairs when the pup is not supervised. Puppies must be supported when jumping off furniture. You can do this by gently supporting his chest as he jumps down to buffer the impact to his front legs. Do not allow unsupervised access to furniture or he will play jungle gym on the furniture and jump more than his body can handle. At this age, he still should only be jumping no more than your wrist height (i.e., approximately 6 to 10 inches) from an agility standpoint!

**Play with other dogs** - Puppies can play with other dogs but must still have mandatory rest periods and play must still be stopped for rough or overly fast play.

## 6 to 12 months

**Continuous walking** – Remember, walks on pavement should be kept shorter than walks on dirt hiking trails or grass due to the softer surface that acts as a shock absorber for a puppy's joints. They should be limited to 20 to 30 minutes on hard surfaces and 30 to 45 minutes on soft surfaces unless they tire or are reluctant.

**Jumping** - At this age from an agility standpoint, their joints can withstand jumping up to elbow height (i.e., approximately up 15 to 18 inches) the closer they are to a year. While they are able to jump off furniture, they may still need to be supported off of high beds and out of high-profile vehicles.

**Play with other dogs** - Their increased body mass can make them more susceptible to injuries (since growth plates are still not fused) if they engage in rough play like body slamming other dogs or fast turns. If play is too rough or too fast, play should still be stopped for a mandatory cool down or rest period.

## 12 to 18 months

**Continuous walking** - Walks on pavement should be kept shorter than walks on dirt hiking trails or grass due to the softer surface that acts as a shock absorber for a puppy's joints and bones. They can walk for up to 45 minutes unless they tire or are reluctant.

**Jumping** - Be sure that dogs have appropriate traction for all jumps down from lower furniture and platforms and continue to support the dog for getting off high furniture and out of high-profile vehicles.

**Play with other dogs** - Their increased body mass can make them more susceptible to injuries (since growth plates are in the final stages of fusing) if they engage in rough play like body slamming other dogs or fast turns. If play is too rough or too fast, play should still be stopped for a mandatory cool down or rest period.