Stage 1: Choosing the right dog: **Exercising Dogs**

**Introduction**
Every dog needs regular, consistent, purposeful and supervised physical and mental stimulation in order to stay fit and healthy. This is not simply a matter of burning off energy, although the effect of exercise on fitness is important for dogs as it is for humans. But for all dogs, exercise is also about mental stimulation, socialisation and interacting with different environments. So it is important that exercise is varied and includes off-lead as well as on-lead sessions and play (and training). Actual amounts of exercise required by dogs do vary considerably, both between breeds and between individuals within a breed, as well as with age and state of health.

**Play and exercise.**
As you get to know your dog, experiment to find the games and activities that it most enjoys. The type or breed of dog (and its origins as, for example, a scent hound, a gaze hound, a retriever or a herder) is likely to have a bearing on its behaviour, and so on the choice of games to try:

Dogs enjoy joining in many forms of recreation and play from games with toys and balls, to simple open air exercise (swimming, running, jogging, hiking) to skills based sports/work (Obedience, Agility, Flyball, Heelwork to Music, Tracking, Trialling, Hunting). The added bonus is that they are all equally pleasurable and beneficial to both the dog and its owner.

But be aware that some activities that may seem fun to you (e.g. bicycling with your dog on a lead or in a front basket), could be unsafe for your dog. Any play that could have an element of risk should only be carried out under the right instruction and supervision, and with the appropriate knowledge and equipment. Your dog may also be physically unable to perform some types of play. If in doubt about your dog’s engagement in a particular challenging activity, you may wish to consult a Veterinary Surgeon, or a specialist in the field of activity that interests you, to ascertain his suitability and training for it. In some sports, the dog may enjoy the use of training aids (e.g. treadmill) in conjunction with, rather than separate from, any specific activity, in order to improve, maintain and sustain his capability to take part in it safely.

**Exercise and activity in pups.**
You should always find the space and time, both in and outdoors, in which to engage and interact with your puppy, starting from day one, by teaching him or her the simple basics of good and acceptable behaviour— sit, stay, come, leave, seek, fetch and carry/hold. This will building to a special, lifelong unbreakable bond of companionship, trust, loyalty and shared enjoyment.

In exercise, a puppy’s endurance levels build up slowly and steadily, as it grows. So the duration and intensity of physical activity can be extended gradually over a period lasting months to years. If dogs are exercised heavily too early in life, this can lead to joint damage, and this is particularly likely in large breeds with rapidly growing and heavily loaded joints. As a rule of thumb, small dogs of up to 25 lb. can exercise fully at 8 months of age; medium breeds of 35- 90 lb. at 12 months of age and large/giant breeds at least 18 months - 2 years of age.

A reputable breeder, or for juvenile or adult dogs a rehoming organisation should always provide purchasers with guidance as to an applicable exercise programme, appropriate to the breed or type, age and size of dog they are selling.
Exercise in old or infirm dogs.
Older dogs or dogs that are temporarily or permanently health compromised still require the mental stimulation of play and activity. They should not be excluded from exercise, although this will be at a lower intensity or for shorter periods than previously.

Regardless of the age of your dog, following and during exercise, you should always look out for signs of stress such as exhaustion or overheating (excessive panting or collapse), particularly when it is warmer, or dehydration (lack of fluids). The activity should, if required, be stopped immediately and the dog given water to drink and allowed to rest and recover.

It is not usual for a dog to refuse or be unwilling to play or go for a walk. So for old or infirm dogs this is a pretty sure sign that they have had enough. If a healthy dog refuses to exercise, you need to make sure that nothing is physically wrong that could be preventing it from wanting to take exercise.

Are there problems?
After exercise, it is always a good idea to check your dog all over (especially feet and limbs) in case there is any evidence of cuts, abrasions, tenderness or pain. If the dog is not himself after exercise, it may be necessary to consult your Veterinary Surgeon even if there is nothing in particular obvious to you. There could be a pulled muscle, a significant injury or an unidentified health issue.

Never exercise your dog immediately after it has eaten. There is some evidence to suggest that, especially in the larger/giant (deep chested) breeds, it may be a trigger/cause of Bloat (Gastric Dilatation-Volvulus” ("GDV") which can be deadly.

Problems associated with lack of opportunities for exercise.
There is strong evidence that hyperactivity (incessant tail chasing, pacing, digging, inability to settle or relax, especially in the absence of the owner), irritability and nervousness (possibly leading to biting and aggressive behaviour towards both humans and other dogs), destructiveness (chewing of both personal belongings and household furniture), excessive barking (boredom, and unused pent up energy), abnormal and unwanted behaviours (abnormal toileting issues, often when left alone, excessive licking, scratching or chewing of its own body, feet or limbs) can be a result of the failure to provide a dog with sufficient regular daily exercise. Such undesirable detrimental behaviour can also affect both the dog’s mental (separation anxiety) and physical health (obesity, diabetes) all of which spells disaster for both dog and owner.

Appropriate physical exercise will increase your dog’s ability to focus and become a socially acceptable and adaptable member of both a human and canine family group.

Exercise Guidelines

- All dogs whatever their breed or type, size, age, state of health need both physical and mental stimulation.
- Exercise can come in many forms, but in every case the element of fun for both dog and owner should be combined with the object of maintaining mental and physical health and fitness.
- Make sure that any choice of activity is tempered to suit the character, personality, aptitude and ability of the dog, irrespective of the breed, type, size or age of the dog.
- Be mindful that puppies in particular have very different exercise needs to that of adult dogs. Too much exercise at too young of an age can hinder proper growth and bone development and in some instances cause injury. Although puppies are blessed with the natural mechanisms for frolic, fun and play, they, as well as adult...
dogs, still require control and direction and time in order for the body to repair itself by sleeping and resting. Mild exercise on a ‘rest’ day is advisable.

- Make sure the breeder, or source from which your dog has been purchased provides appropriate guidance as to the most suitable exercise programme tailored specifically for the dog you are purchasing.
- Always make sure that you check your dog over after exercise to make sure that it has not suffered any injury, paying particular notice to any obvious signs of physical stress, including dehydration and heat stroke.
- If your dog refuses to exercise or play, and there appears to be no specific reason for it doing so, it is advisable that you consult your Veterinary Surgeon.
- Never exercise a dog immediately after it has eaten – it is best to follow the adage of exercise, feed and rest. Always make sure that during exercise, especially in hot weather, that the dog has immediate access to water at all times.
- Pay attention to a dog’s breathing – it is the surest way to tell if he is starting to work too hard. If he starts panting excessively, ease back the activity to allow him to cool down. Remember that he wants to please you and he will likely push himself to keep up with you long after his body needs to rest; it is your responsibility to be vigilant on his behalf and give him the breathers that he needs.
- Interaction, during periods of activity, between an owner and his dog is key to helping your dog understand what is required of it and help it to become a welcome part of its family group.

How much exercise does a dog need?
Dogs tend to need more exercise than most of us humans think appropriate for our own needs. A rough idea of general exercise levels is given below

Very Light
- Dogs should go out on a walk at least once a day. Ideally, two short walks averaging thirty minutes including time off-lead to explore every day, plus a number of short play/training sessions during the day.
  - Suitable for some toy and miniature breed dogs.

Light
- Dogs should go out on a walk that lasts up to an hour or two shorter walks between half an hour and an hour in length. They will need some off-lead time and should also have some short play/training sessions during the day.
  - Suitable for many small to medium dogs, as well as some larger ones bred for short periods of heavy exercise.

Moderate
- Dogs must go out every day and preferably twice a day. Walks should take at least an hour and include both on- and off-lead walking. The walk should include the opportunity to run and possibly swim for significant periods. They should also have a number of play/training sessions during the day.
  - This will suit many medium dogs to large dogs.

Heavy
- Dogs require significant exercise and are happiest when a majority of their day is engaged in activity. They need to go out at least twice a day for up to two hours each time. The walk should include the opportunity to run and possibly swim for
significant periods. They should also have a number of play/training sessions during the day.
  - Suitable to breeds adapted for long periods of exercise (such as some sled dogs, some hunting and some pastoral breeds).

The information above refers only to guidance regarding exercise and does not address toileting needs. Please remember that a dog must have access to a fenced area of land or garden to be used for toileting on three or four additional occasions during the day.