



CANINE FITNESS: IDENTIFYING WHAT YOUR DOG NEEDS

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VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS

Nobody has the perfect canine fitness program. Every program has strengths and weaknesses. By not attending to the gaps and holes in our fitness program, however, you are holding your dog back from reaching his or her true potential. By not having a balanced fitness program, you might even be setting your dog up for injury. To help you identify the missing links, holes and gaps in your fitness program (we ALL have them!), I have created a [Canine Fitness Planning Guide](#) to help you achieve a more well-rounded program for your dog.

Identifying the “Holes” In Your Current Program

Before you think about what to change in your programs, you need to reflect on where you are now. Even if you don't have a structured fitness program, but you are training your dog consistently for a particular sport or job, you still have gaps in your program.

[Purina](#) has a body score system of 1-9. Nine is morbidly obese, and one is a dog that is unhealthily skinny. The ideal body condition score is a 4 or 5. A body condition score is not overall fitness; it's looking at your dog's weight. It doesn't look at muscle tone, but it's a good guide to start evaluating your dog's fitness.

Next on the **Canine Fitness Planning Guide** is a scale I have come up with for evaluating your dog's fitness level from 1-10. Ten is like an Olympian; their whole lifestyle is focused on achieving fitness at a very high level. A score of “1” would be your dog is either ill and not moving much or just sits on the couch all day. If you have an active pet dog, you might be around a 5 or 6 with a healthy diet and active program.

If you follow along on the **Canine Fitness Planning Guide**, I have also included sections for you to break down what you're doing in the realms of cardio endurance, strength training, body awareness and flexibility. I also have sections for you to think about what you're doing well, your strengths, and your weaknesses. When you are training for a sport or specific activity, you could be building imbalances, weaknesses, as well as strengths in your dog.

- What's appropriate for cardio exercise? When I think of cardio exercise, I think about getting your heart rate up. For a senior dog, a walk around the neighborhood may count. But for a healthy young dog, that wouldn't be much of a cardio workout! It could hiking, jogging, swimming, romping around in the backyard, and more. Think about the duration, the intensity, and the frequency of these activities. Structured cardio fitness should be done at least three days a week. I like to have my dogs engaged in some kind of physical activity every day,

even if it's not structured fitness training. I also like to balance my dog's cardio training between anaerobic (ex., short bursts of intensity such as sprinting) and aerobic activity (ex., a lower intensity, steady state 20+ minute trot).

- For strength training, you can target specific muscles by doing fitness exercises on equipment. But for my senior dog, strength training could also be simply walking up the stairs. Jumping can count as strength training, as well as climbing and crawling. Pulling on a harness while on a walk is also strength training.
- Cavaletti exercises could count as body awareness and balance. Trotting over low level cavaletti "jumps" could be part of your cardio warmup.
- Things you are doing well are things you are doing on a weekly basis, preferably more than once per week. If you are exercising your dog inconsistently, it will be challenging, if not impossible, to see your dog get stronger, faster, more agile or more flexible.

The next section in the **Canine Fitness Planning Guide** is all about thinking about how you can improve your dog's current fitness level. More specifically, it breaks fitness down into the categories of cardio, strength, body awareness, and flexibility. You can also think about specialized skills (e.g., sport or work specific training) if that applies to your dog.

Please note that most of what I am discussing here today is for a healthy, physically mature dog. If your dog is injured, you need to go to a vet to discuss what type of activity is safe and healthy for your dog. If your dog is a puppy, you must do puppy appropriate activities (which we aren't covering today). If you are interested in learning about appropriate fitness activities for puppies, [CLICK HERE](#).

Do not take a generic fitness program and apply it to just any dog. Each individual dog needs a program that is tailored to them, based on their individual needs.

Examples Fitness Activities for Healthy, Physically Mature Dogs

Below is a list of sample exercises for each category. For more detail on these exercises, be sure to [watch the video!](#)

Strength Training

- Squats
- Climbing
- Digging
- 3-Legged stand
- Hill work
- Jumping
- Weight pull

Cardio

- Swimming
- Jogging
- Sprinting
- Searching (e.g. IGP, SAR, Ring Sport)
- Treadmill
- Dryland mushing (e.g., canicross, bikejoring, skijoring, scootering)

Flexibility

- Luring “cookie” stretches nose to hip
- Nose to shoulder
- Nose to back foot
- Play bow
- “Paws Up”
- Massage (helps flexibility!)

Body Awareness

- Front feet & hind feet targeting
- Balance blocks
- Balance on equipment (e.g., wobble board)
- Obstacle course
- 2- and 3-legged stands (also great for strength training!)

Additional Resources

[Canine Fitness Planning Guide](#)

[Purina Body Condition Score](#)

[Facebook Live Video Replay](#)

*Are you a canine fitness fanatic who wants to learn how to design fitness programs for your own dog and others? Consider becoming a **Certified Canine Athlete Specialist (CCAS)**! [Download](#) our brochure for more information and message me to schedule a time to discuss your canine fitness interests and needs!*