

With the proper pre- and post-activity care, canine athletes can continue to compete in performance activities well into their senior years. Check with your family veterinarian or ProFormance Canine if you have any questions.

Q. What dogs can participate?

Certain breeds are better at certain events, but any size, age or breed of dog can be a performance dog. It is important that the dog is healthy with good conformation or they will have an increased chance of being injured. A pre-sporting exam is a good idea to make sure your dog is healthy and able to handle the physical demands of sports. This can include a general health exam, orthopedic and neurologic exam, as well as, radiographs of the hips, elbows and spine. An ECG of the heart may also be beneficial.

Q. When is my dog old enough to start performance activities?

There is increasing evidence that dogs performing activities that are stressful on their legs and joints before their bone growth plates close can cause permanent orthopedic damage. On average, a dog's growth plates close around 1.5 years of age; small breeds close a little sooner, while giant breeds close a little later. Early spaying and neutering of dogs has been found to keep growth plates open longer. Non-impact training **can** be started before 1.5 years of age.

Q. What should I feed my performance dog?

Generally, any name brand high quality diet can be fed, but keep your dog lean and muscular. An over-weight dog has unnecessary stresses on its joints. A muscular dog can often avoid injuries that would result in strains or sprains in a less muscled animal. You should easily be able to feel your dog's ribs. Even though there are multitudes of food supplements available, most supplements have not been tested for safety and efficacy. The morning of an event consider a meal higher in protein to balance glucose usage. After competing, be certain to keep your pet hydrated with water or electrolyte drinks. Simple sugars and electrolytes in these drinks may be beneficial for stressed muscles and to help your dog quickly recover for its next event that day.

Q. How can proper warm-up prevent



Figure 2: Figure-8 jumps at partial height for warm-up practice.



Figure 1: Passive stretching muscles and joints.

injuries?

The objective is to increase circulation and gradually stretch muscles prior to strenuous performance. You can start with 5-10 minute walks of gradually increasing speed. Recalls can also be performed in a safe area. General passive stretching of limbs can then be done like having your dog stand on its hindlimbs (Figure 1). Individual limbs and joints can be stretched if your dog has pre-existing condition. Three to five repetitions of a comfortable stretch for 10-15 seconds should be sufficient (Figure 4).

Practice jumps can be used psychologically to get your dog in the mood, but also to stretch muscles and joints (Figure 2). Keep your dog moving until the event, but don't over-heat or wear them out.

Q. How can proper cool-down prevent injuries?

Immediately after heavy exercise, gradually slow your dog with walks of decreasing speed. You can massage your dog, feeling for hot or swollen areas, or areas that may be sore. Passive stretching and range of motion of affected joints can also be useful. Cold packing hot and swollen areas can be done now. A cool electrolyte solution can be given for hydration, to replenish electrolytes and to flush waste products from their system. Let your

dog rest in a comfortable quiet place like their crate.

Q. How can proper grooming prevent performance dog injuries?

Foot injuries can often be prevented by keeping toenails trimmed short (use a drummel). For better traction, make sure the fur around your dog's foot pads are trimmed short and be certain to wipe wet feet prior to competing on synthetic flooring. Finally, keep hair out of your dog's eyes by trimming or using rubber bands or berets.

Q. How can I keep my dog fit?

Regular consistent training will build muscle memory. This can be done with a trainer and should be continued on a regular training schedule at home. Additional endurance and strength training can be done with land and water treadmills, swimming, exercise on physioballs, as well as, other events like weight pull.

Q. How do I deal with environmental conditions?

Environmental temperatures need to be closely monitored since dogs adapted to temperature different than people. On cold days, keep your dog warm in the car, with warming blankets or jackets and bring them up to a performance temperature prior to going in the ring. This is general a problem for short haired dogs.

On hot days, keep your dog cool with A/C, fans, misters, cooling vests, ice to lick as it melts and plenty of liquid water. Dogs

compensate for heat by panting. On hot humid days, this method works poorly. Do not keep your dog in a closed car even with the windows rolled down. Do not push your dog to perform if they seem too hot. A

dog's normal temperature is 101.5 F. Their temperature can easily sore over 105 F for short periods during heavy performance. This is a dangerous temperature for extended periods of time.



Figure 3: Weight pull for core strength building.

Q. What about field conditions?

Field conditions can be very different; from rubber mats, natural turf, artificial turf, or dirt. Know your dog. If they can adjust their speed for the conditions, you are in great shape. If they are lacking self-preservation instincts, you will need to slow them in areas of turns or jumping on and off of obstacles. If the field and obstacles are wet from rain or heavy morning dew, strongly consider not performing until the field is dry. Some of the most devastating injuries to a performance dog can occur during wet field conditions.

Q. What should I do if my dog is injured?

If your dog has an injury, consult your veterinarian or ProFormance Canine. Performance events will often have a veterinarian on site (officially or unofficially) and a local emergency hospital will be listed with directions to the hospital. Minor injuries may resolve with rest and anti-



Figure 4: Passive range of motion stretching of the hip.

inflammatories, but severe injuries, or injuries that persist more than a couple of days, should be seen by a veterinarian. Heat emergencies and trauma should be treated immediately.

Q. Can my injured dog get back in the game?

The most common problem we find at ProFormance Canine is a dog not being rested an appropriate period of time and too rapidly brought back to perform. While there are some injuries that will prevent future competition level performance, that is often the minority. Many injured dogs with fractures, ruptured cranial cruciate ligaments, patellar luxations or other soft tissue injuries can get back to a performance level of activity. This will require a highly experienced surgical and rehabilitation team, like ProFormance Canine, and can take months of committed rehabilitation.



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