

# Canine Stretching

## STRETCHING AND STRENGTHENING PROGRAM FOR YOUR CANINE COMPANION

Starting a routine physical activity and stretching program for your animal is important to maintaining your pet's comfort, flexibility, and quality of life. Daily walks, followed by gentle stretching, can improve your pet's physical and mental well-being. Consistency is the key component to this program to increase the range of motion, decrease pain, and improve your animal's health.

### Warm up and Tips

To be most effective, muscles should be "warmed" up. You can warm the muscles with a 5-10 minute walk, a heating pad, or gentle massage. The leg stretches can be done standing or lying down. It may be easier to stretch the legs when the animal is relaxed and lying down on its side. Stretching should be done slowly and gently. If your dog resists, return to a relaxed, comfortable position, and ask again. Never try to force a stretch!



*Dog front leg stretch*

*Dog hind leg stretch*

*Dog neck stretch*

### Front Leg Stretches

Start by being close to your dog's back and reach over the animal and support the leg close to the body. For the front leg, place one hand by the dog's elbow, and place your other hand by the dog's paw. Gently motion the leg as if the dog were peddling a bicycle. Ask the dog to gently stretch the leg forward to straighten the elbow, and then stretch it back toward the hind leg. You can rotate the leg about 3- 4 times in a circular motion, staying in one plane like peddling a bicycle. You can also hold the leg in an extended position for about 15-30 seconds and repeat 2-3 times. This is a great exercise for the shoulder flexors and helps to keep the front legs moving freely.

### Hind Leg Stretches

For the hind leg, place one hand above the dog's stifle, close to where the hind leg attaches to the dog's body. The other hand should gently cup the dog's hock. Gently motion the hind leg as if the dog were peddling a bicycle. Ask the dog to gently stretch the leg forward, then flex the leg, and stretch the leg back to straighten the leg. You can rotate the leg about 3- 4 times in a circular motion, staying in one plane like peddling a bicycle. You can also hold the leg in an extended position for about 15-30 seconds and repeat 2-3 times. This is a great range of motion exercise to keep the dog's hips loose

and moving freely.

## **Neck and Back Stretches**

Use a treat or favorite food to help the dog stretch its neck. Have the dog follow the treat around to each side, by the dog's elbow, without moving its feet. Then have the dog follow the treat, out in front of its nose, and above its head to stretch the neck up and forward. Then have the dog follow the treat around to its hind legs, while keeping its feet planted in the same position. This is good to stretch the dog's neck and back. You can also run your hand on the dog's belly or midline, to have the dog round and lift its back. This is a good exercise to engage the dog's abdominal and back muscles.

## **BALANCE AND STRENGTHENING EXERCISES**

### **Balance on 3 legs**

On a stable surface, have the dog stand squarely on all 4 legs. Gently hold up 1 leg and have the dog balance on the other 3 legs for 20-30 seconds to start with. This is a good balance exercise to engage the core muscle of the dog's back, abdomen, shoulders and hips. Repeat the exercise on the other 3 legs. Start with one repetition. As your animal gets stronger you can increase the repetitions and the time spent holding up the limb. You can also increase the difficulty of this exercise by varying the surface, such as using a large exercise or "Fit Paw" ball. The unstable surface of the ball will stimulate the animal's core muscles even more.

### **Flamingo**

When your animal has mastered balancing on 3 legs, increase the degree of difficulty by holding up a front leg and the opposite hind legs at the same time. Start with holding up the diagonal pair of legs for about 15-20 seconds, and then rest. Gradually increase the number of repetitions and length of time holding up the limbs. Start on a stable surface. When the dog is strong enough, you can increase the degree of difficulty by using a large exercise or "Fit Paw" ball.

### **Balance Ball**

To prevent back injuries, especially on the short legged, long back dogs such as dachshunds and corgis, it is important to promote strong core muscles. Using an exercise ball or "Fit Paw" ball is an excellent way to engage the animal's shoulder, back, hip, and abdominal muscles. It is important that the ball is large enough and long enough so the dog can comfortably fit all 4 paws on the ball at the same time without over flexing its back. Stabilize the ball with your own legs, or the assistance of another person so the ball does not move. Start with having the dog balance on all 4 legs on the ball. The uneven surface of the ball will stimulate the animal's core muscles. When the animal has mastered balancing on 4 legs, you can engage new muscles by doing the exercises listed above on the uneven surface of the ball. You can also have the animal stand and sit on the ball. Be sure to stabilize the animal and the ball to avoid injuries.

### **Wheel Barrow**

To increase the strength in the animal's front legs, hold up the dog's 2 back legs and have the animal balance on its front end. When the animal is strong enough, have the dog take a few steps forward and backwards to engage the shoulder muscles.

## **Dancing on the Hind Legs**

To increase the strength in the animal's hind legs, hold up the dog's 2 front legs and have the animal balance on its hind end. When the animal is strong enough, have the dog take a few steps forward and backwards to engage the hip muscles.

## **Stand/Sit Exercises**

To build up strength in the hindquarters, have your dog sit square, and then stand up. Repeat this exercise about 3-4 times. This is similar to a human doing squats. This will engage the dog's hindquarter muscles. Gradually increase the number of repetitions. It is important the animal sits squarely to work both sides evenly.