



Increase the Strength and Flexibility

of Your Dog in 6 Weeks!

with Dr. Christine Woodford and Mary Drexler

Week One: Cool Down Stretches

These stretches are best to do at the end of a workout when the dog has time to rest and let their muscles, tendons, ligaments and joints a recovery period:

To be most effective, muscle should be warmed up. If you have just finished with your dog's workout, the muscles are already warm, or 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 leg when the animal is relaxed and lying down on its side. Stretches 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!

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. Start by gently flexing the leg up close to their body, then extending it back to the starting, or neutral position. If you flex their toes, it helps the dog to flex the other joints on their leg. When they are relaxed, gently motion the leg as if the dog were pedaling a bicycle. Ask the dog to gently stretch the leg forward to straighten the elbow and then stretch it back towards the hind leg. You can rotate the leg about 3-4 times in a circular motion. Be sure to keep the leg in one plane like pedaling a bicycle. You can also hold the leg in an extended. 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 dogs stifle, close to where the hind leg attaches to the dog's body. The other hand should gently cup the dog's hock. Start by gently flexing the leg up close to their body, then extending it back to the starting, or neutral position. If you flex their toes, it helps the dog to flex the other joints on their leg. Ask the dog to gently stretch the leg forward, then flex the leg, and stretch the leg back to straighten the leg. Then gently motion the hind leg as if the dog were pedaling a bicycle. You can rotate the leg about 3-4 times in a circular motion. Be sure to keep the leg in one plane like pedaling 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 dogs 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 dogs abdominal and back muscles.