

# Using a Treadmill in Canine Training

There are many reasons to train a dog on a treadmill. At Animal Friends, we use this tool to reduce boredom, stress, and anxiety, increase fitness levels, build muscle tone and strength in rehabilitation and to reduce weight.

Dogs require daily physical and mental exercise to maintain a healthy lifestyle. When this need is not met and a dog cannot get rid of pent-up energy, he or she can become frustrated and distressed. Unwanted and destructive behaviors may start to appear, such as chewing, digging, inappropriate soiling, excessive barking, unhealthy weight gain and nipping.

Using the treadmill regularly can help some dogs lessen or lessening or eliminate these problems.

## **Remember:**

The key to training on a treadmill is to go slowly—don't force it!

Use moderation and positive enforcement and make it fun!

**Never** leave a dog unattended around a treadmill.

**Never** tie a dog's leash to a treadmill.

How to train a dog on a treadmill:

1. Make sure YOU know how to use the treadmill before attempting to get on with a dog. Try it, walk on it, push the buttons and experiment. Straddle the moving panel with you feet. That is the position you will be in while working with the dog.
2. Know the dog you are going to train. Know the dog's age, any physical limitations, the weight and any behavioral concerns.
3. Introduce the dog to the treadmill while he is leashed and the treadmill is turned OFF. Always have treats and toys ready. As the dog walks around and sniffs the machine, give lots of treats and praise. Put treats on the treadmill and see if you can get him to walk around on it. You can try getting on with him.
4. When the dog is comfortably taking treats off of the treadmill, turn the treadmill on the slowest speed and let the dog explore while you are treating and praising. Just let him get used to the noise and movement. DO NOT put the dog on the moving panel at this point.
5. When your dog is completely comfortable, you and a partner can try getting him to get onto the treadmill. Have your partner get in front of the treadmill. Your partner should be ready with lots of treats. Get on the treadmill with the dog. You will be holding the dog with your hand on the leash and collar. Now, get in the straddle position. The dog will be between your legs. Have your partner start to treat the dog as you turn on the treadmill at its slowest speed. Keep treating and praising the dog!

6. Your first walk on the treadmill should be short – 30 seconds if possible.
7. As you build the level of fitness and confidence of the dog, you can GRADUALLY increase the time, distance, or speed. You can also increase and decrease the elevation level for the dog as he gets stronger.
8. If, at any time, the dog panics, stop the treadmill and help the dog off. You may be able to reintroduce him SLOWLY.
9. As in workouts with people, always have a cool down period after the workout. Consider giving the dog a massage. This helps to keep the blood moving and reduces the chances of cramping, keeps the dog motivated for the next time, and promotes relaxation.
10. It is helpful to keep a chart of the daily progress made in time, distance and speed.
11. Keep an eye on your dog as far as getting too tired. Symptoms to watch for are:
  - Heavy panting
  - Slowing down
  - Trying to keep looking at you
  - Trying to sit down
  - Lowering the head and tail with tongue hanging out

