

LET'S TALK ABOUT HEALTH

BY MOE STRENFEL

Congratulations on your first step towards creating a rewarding, close, and athletic relationship with your dog. You will be amazed at how deep your bond with your partner will become as you progress towards the goal of competing.

WEIGHT

Your dog depends on the decisions you make about his health. The top concern for many first time agility trainers and handlers is weight. Your dog's weight should be thin to ideal but never overweight. Even an extra 1/2 pound on your dog can result in injury or decreased (slow) performance.

The following links can help you gain a better understanding what your canine partner should look like and feel like:

<http://www.caninesports.com/fatdogs.html>

<http://www.caninesports.com/fitness.html>

Once your dog is at an ideal weight, be prepared as your regular veterinarian will probably say your dog is too thin. Don't fret; most vets do not see many performance canines in their practice.

DIET

Since your dog will be working harder than ever before in his life (and having more fun as well!) we also want to make sure your dog is being fed a high quality premium food. Active dogs need more protein to build, maintain and repair muscle. Most performance dogs require some type of supplements such as high doses of Salmon Oil, Vitamin E, C, Bs and joint supplements.

The following website lists high quality foods that you can choose from as well as discussing supplements that your dog may benefit from:

<http://www.dogaware.com/>

<http://www.dogaware.com/dogfeeding.html>

As with any diet changes, take about 5 to 7 days to gradually switch over from the old food to the new one. If your dog has special needs, such as pancreatic or kidney, then we suggest

consulting a veterinarian with an advance degree in nutrition (your regular vet does NOT have a degree in nutrition). You can find one here:

<http://www.holisticvetlist.com/>

Here you can do a search on NU (nutrition) while adding the filter of state to find one close to you.

Remember that you will be doing a lot of training with your dog to get ready for agility competitions. It is important that you REDUCE your dog's meals (or cut at least one out completely) on days you are using a lot of treats.

DAILY RATIONS

How much to feed? DON'T rely on the amounts listed on most dog food bags. It is WAY too much! Remember that dog food companies are out there to sell food, not to tell you to feed less (and therefore save money). Just to give you an idea, my adult 6 year old red border collie who is very active on his own around the house, receives training every day and swims or hikes 20-30 minutes per day. He is fed EVO twice per day and gets one cup per meal. Yes, you read right. ONE cup. He also gets supplements for joints and antioxidants. When he is worked harder than normal that day, he may get an extra ¼ cup that meal. If he is worked less, he gets a bit less.

A good system to use every day is to measure out your dog's entire daily ration of food. Place in a plastic bag (this is the ration bag) and use that in training around the house or when in least distracting circumstances.

When you use other treats (such as a cup of Natural Balance, diced chicken, steak, etc.) then remove the same amount from your dog's daily ration bag.

If your dog is on a strict reduction diet, then make sure to exercise your dog daily (training is NOT enough exercise) and keep firm, exact control over all "extras" such as chews and snacks (rawhide, biscuits, pig's ears, etc.).

EXERCISE

Training is NOT exercise. Your dog needs daily exercise in order to perform at their best. We suggest getting into the habit of at least walking your dog at least once daily for 20 to 40 minutes (good for you too!). ***Then provide some other type of aerobic exercise such as jogging, swimming, or hiking at least 4 to 5 times per week.***

When starting any exercise program with your dog for the first time, check with your veterinarian and use common sense. Start with short amounts of time (1-2) minutes and then gradually increase the time until you are at 20 to 30 minutes of sustained aerobic exercise. If your dog is especially out of shape, then we suggest only 1 to 2 minutes of light exercise interspersed with 2 or 3 minutes of rest.

During exercise your dog is still learning things so practice your recalls, stays and sends (to a stationary toy) and circle work with you.

SPINAL HEALTH

We highly suggest you find and establish at routine of visiting a pet chiropractor to attend to your dog's spinal health. The more we start to ask of our dogs, the higher the possibility that your dog will need an adjustment.

For more information, visit:

<http://www.avcadoctors.com/>

My dog's chiropractor is Dr. Wendy Wallace at Four Seasons Animal Hospital in Concord, CA:

<http://4seasonsah.com/>

I also use Dr John Red Eagle: <http://www.redeaglechiropractic.com/index.html>

Run Happy, Run Healthy!