

## LIFESTYLE

# Canine Calisthenics=Better Behavior

Anyone who works out regularly knows that the benefits include increased relaxation, along with decreased reactivity to normal stress-producers. There is also less need to channel excess nervous energy into other activities. It's the same for your dog. Some of the most common canine behavior problems, i.e. digging, chewing and other destruction, can be considerably lessened by simply increasing the dog's daily exercise.

Labrador and golden retrievers are two of the most popular breeds in the Santa Clarita Valley. Labs and goldens were bred to work! They have a high energy level and therefore require lots of exercise. The sad fact is that many are severely understimulated both physically and mentally. From Murphy the Lab to Fifi the Poodle, every dog has a daily exercise requirement. Unfortunately, most of us don't have hours to spend exercising our dogs. However, with a little creativity, even those with the most stringent work schedule can provide their dogs with some form of exercise.

Following are some suggestions. Note: Be sure to check with your vet before starting your dog on any exercise program. Avoid over-exercising

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*Going to the Dogs*



and high impact activities for older or infirm dogs and growing pups. Proceed gradually, at your dog's own pace.

Many breeds love to retrieve. If you have a back yard, throw a ball, soft doggie frisbee or other toy, and encourage Fido to bring it back. Parks are a great back yard substitute. Remember, a walk around the block is great exercise for us, but is not enough for most dogs. Find a place to let Fido run full-out.

Take a hike! Santa Clarita boasts miles of lovely hiking trails. If you're not sure where to go, call the local Parks and Recreation department. (Be sure to ask about leash laws as well.) Hiking is an enjoyable workout for both you and your dog. Even if you hike only on weekends, it can be a great supplement to a weekday exercise routine.

Is your house a two-story? If so, you have a built-in Doggie Stairmaster! Stand at the top of the stairs, with a friend positioned at the bottom. Take

turns calling Fido to you. When he comes, reward with a yummy treat and happy praise. This game not only provides great exercise, but is also excellent practice for a reliable recall. And, it's a good option on cold or rainy days.

Get involved in a dog sport such as Agility or Flyball. It's not only great exercise for your dog, but is a great social opportunity to meet like-minded dog folk.

Do you jog? Take Fido along! Bicycle? There are devices you can purchase to attach Fido's leash to your bicycle, so he can safely jog alongside. (Be sure to read the instructions carefully and start out slowly.)

If you truly don't have time to provide exercise for your dog, let someone else do it! Dog walkers, also called pet sitters, may be contracted to come to your home while you're at work. They can take Fido for a walk, or play with him in your yard. Do you have a neighbor with a lone dog? See if you can arrange play dates a few times weekly. Their dog will love the company too. Another option is doggie daycare. Just drop your pooch off in the morning, and let him spend the day romping and playing with other dogs. Fido gets exercise, and you get

to spend the evening relaxing with a pleasantly worn out, mellow dog.

Be sure to provide your dog with mental exercise as well. Mental exercise can be as tiring, or even more so, than physical exercise. (Think about taking a half-hour walk versus doing a half hour of calculus. What makes you more tired?) Stuffing your dog's meal in a food toy such as a Kong™ where he has to work to get the food out, is a great way to stimulate his mind and expend energy. (This type of toy requires wet food or other "mortar" to keep the kibble from falling out too easily.) Or, if you feed dry kibble alone, put it in an interactive food toy that must be rolled around to dispense it. And let's not forget the best mental exercise for dogs—training! Even two ten-minute training sessions daily are helpful.

Now that you've got a few ideas, get out there! More exercise will make both you and your furry friend feel better, and you'll reap the benefits of a better-behaved companion.

*Nicole Wilde runs Gentle Guidance Dog Training, offering in-home behavior modification and obedience training. For information call 299-5704 or visit [www.gentleguidance4dogs.com](http://www.gentleguidance4dogs.com).*