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Running With Dogs

By Dr. Erin Forbes, DVM, VVMA Communications Chair

If you are an avid runner and have a dog, your dog may be accompanying you on your runs or you may be considering bringing your dog with you. Make sure you are taking the necessary precautions to ensure your dog is happy and healthy when running.

While there are many pros to running with a canine companion, there are also some downsides. Just like us, dogs can get injured when running. When dogs run they do not get to wear sneakers like humans, so while running on natural surfaces is fine, when they run on pavement or any hard surfaces extra stress is being put on their body. This can cause muscle, ligament, or paw pad injury. If your dog ever seems lame or stiff after running, seek veterinary care right away.

It is also important to take your dog's breed into consideration. Huskies and similar dogs with thick hair coats will not enjoy running in the hot weather while short-coated dogs (like Whippets) do not do well running in cold weather. If your dog is brachycephalic (short nosed), such as a bulldog or pug, it can be incredibly risky to take them running as brachycephalic dogs have abnormalities in their airways that can make it hard for them to breath when they exercise. They also are at increased risk for heatstroke in warm weather.

In order to keep your pet safe when running, there are some simple guidelines to follow. First, consult your veterinarian before starting your dog on any exercise program. If your dog is overweight, start with a weight loss program and walks before working up to running. When you start running,

start with short distances and build up to longer runs. Always plan your route so you know where there are safe places for breaks and know how long the run will be. Bring water for your dog. Do not go running during the warmest or coldest part of the day and during extreme weather leave your pet at home.

If you notice any problems when running, stop the run and seek veterinary help. Signs that are concerning include limping, stopping suddenly, labored or difficulty breathing, excessive panting, and reddened gums. Check your dog's paw pads and legs after each running session for skin damage, swelling or pain. If you run in ice or snow, rinse your dog's feet (including the spaces between the toes and paw pads) thoroughly after each running session to make sure you've washed off salt or de-icer and consider using paw protectors.

Overall, taking your dog out for a run can be great for their physical and mental health, however, it is important to take precautions to keep them safe. Recognize signs of distress, make sure your dog is strong enough to go on the run with you, and always know your route. Most importantly, speak with your veterinarian about what is best for your dog and how best to keep them safe and healthy when running.

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