Puppy Program

Summary

- You can start puppies as early as 4 weeks of age with 1- to 2-minute sessions on the ball, several times a day.
- Gradually build up to longer sessions, but never more than 10 minutes in length.
- Most puppies can start the Beginner Program at 6 to 9 months of age; be aware that larger dogs and slower-developing dogs may take longer to advance to more challenging ball work.
- Remember that you want ball work to be FUN for your puppy. Don’t over do it and don’t rush your puppy’s progress. Some dogs take a long time just to become comfortable sitting or lying on the ball. Going slowly will help your young dog build confidence and keep sessions stress free.

Beginner Program

Summary

- The goal of the Beginner Program is to improve balance and eventually get the dog to work in a standing position. It is appropriate for some dogs, such as older dogs, never to advance from the Beginner Program.
- Getting your dog comfortable and confident with getting up on the ball and being bounced on the ball should be your first priority. You may need to work on just these skills for several weeks before you try the exercises in this program with your dog.
- Ball work should begin with 5- to 10-minute sessions each day for 10-14 consecutive days, unless the dog is actively competing in a sport or is sore after ball work. If your dog is sore, only work him every other day. If your dog is actively competing in a performance sport, don’t do ball work the day of an event or the day after. Gradually build up to 20-25 minutes per session.
- After the initial 10-14 days of doing ball work each day, it’s time to make ball work a part of your crosstraining program. Move your sessions to 2-4 times per week.
- If your dog is experiencing any problems during or after ball work, discontinue the exercises and consult your veterinarian.

Exercises

- Head movements up, down, right, and left: 3 repetitions in each direction.
- Weight shifting from side to side: 3 shifts or go to fatigue.
- Weight shifting from front to back: 3 shifts or go to fatigue.
- As your dog becomes more stable and comfortable, you can increase the repetitions.
- Each time you increase repetitions or the length of your sessions, look for signs that your dog has had enough: panting, muscle trembling and loss of control (rear end starting to slide off the ball, for example), disinterest in the treats, or trying to jump off the ball.
Intermediate Program

Summary

- The goal of the Intermediate Program is to build up to 15-20 minutes of active work with the dog sitting or standing (not lying down) and to further challenge the dog’s balance.
- If your dog is experiencing any problems during or after ball work, discontinue the exercises and consult your veterinarian.

Exercises

- Warm up your dog with gentle bouncing and the following exercises:
  - Weight shifting from side to side: 3 shifts.
  - Weight shifting from front to back: 3 shifts.
- Head movements up, down, right, and left: 3 sets of 10 in each direction. Gradually increase the distance that you’re asking the dog to move his head; for example, left and right all the way to the hip.
- 180-degree turns left and right: Begin with 3 sets of 5 and build up to 3 sets of 10.
- Sit to stand: Start with 3 sets of 5 and build up to 3 sets of 10.
- Stand to sit to down: Progress to this exercise once the dog is comfortably doing 3 sets of 10 of the sit-to-stand exercise. You can also do the reverse: down to sit to stand.
- Lifts, individual limbs: Lift one limb a few inches off the ball and then move to the next limb until you’ve done all four limbs. This is one set. Start with 5 sets and build up to 10 sets.
- Lifts, alternate limbs: Lift the opposite forelimb and hind limb a few inches off the ball and then lift the other two opposing limbs. This is one set. Start with 5 sets and build up to 10 sets.
- Waving: With the dog in a sitting position, have him wave one paw.
Advanced Program

Summary

- The Advanced Program is designed for younger, healthy, athletic dogs. The goal is to achieve 15-25 minutes of active work with the dog in a standing position.

- If your dog is experiencing any problems during or after ball work, discontinue the exercises and consult your veterinarian.

Exercises

- Warm up your dog with gentle bouncing and the following exercises:
  - Weight shifting from side to side: 3 shifts.
  - Weight shifting from front to back: 3 shifts.

- Head movements up, down, right, and left: 3 sets of 10 in each direction. When moving his head to the left or right, the dog should be able to reach a treat placed on his hip. When moving his head down, he should be able to reach a treat placed between his front legs. When moving his head up, ask the dog to reach as far as possible without shifting into a sit.

- 360-degree turns left and right: Begin with 3 sets of 5 and build up to 3 sets of 10. If the dog is too large to do these, continue doing 180-degree turns.

- Stand to sit to down: 3 sets of 10 doing stand-sit-down and then 3 sets of 10 doing down-sit-stand.

- Lifts, individual limbs: Lift one limb a few inches off the ball and then move to the next limb until you’ve done all four limbs. This is one set. Start with 5 sets and build up to 10 sets.

- Lifts, alternate limbs: Lift the opposite forelimb and hind limb a few inches off the ball and then lift the other two opposing limbs. This is one set. This is one set. Start with 5 sets and build up to 10 sets.

- Waving: With the dog in a sitting position, have him wave one paw.

- Side-lying sit-ups: Start with only 3 repetitions. Build up to 10; be aware that this may take quite awhile. Do not do this exercise if your dog has any back pain.

- Sit-ups from back: Only attempt these if the dog is comfortable with side-lying sit-ups and with being put on his back on the ball. Start with 3 repetitions and build up to 10; again, this may take quite awhile. Do not do this exercise if your dog has any back pain.
Special Programs

Summary

Ball work is useful for most older dogs as well as for many dogs with physical problems such as osteoarthritis, hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, lumbar transitional vertebrae, etc. However, if your dog has a specific physical challenge, you should speak to a canine physical therapist or your veterinarian before beginning a ball program. The basic Beginner Program may need to be modified for your dog.

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