

**Add these powerhouse exercises to your walking routine—no special equipment needed.**

By Lindsey Dobruck

# Fit in Five



Lola takes a stroll in a spot that is a natural dog gym. It has two different surfaces—grass and pavement—and a hill.

**W**ant to level-up your dog's daily walk to a full-fledged workout?

Bobbie Lyons, of Pawsitive Performance in Hillsboro, Oregon, is one of the leading experts in canine fitness. She specializes in creating fitness plans specific to her client dogs and their handlers—from young puppies to seniors with mobility issues, and canine athletes from all sports.

Adding fitness exercises and stretches to your walking routine, Lyons says, encourages your dog to move his body in different ways than he's used to, which can help prevent injury.

"If you always do the same thing, then the body adapts to those same things and doesn't adapt to movements outside of normal," Lyons says. "So when the dog chases

a squirrel and does movement outside of normal, that's when they get injured."

*Family Dog* asked Lyons for her top five low-training, no-equipment exercises to help keep dogs of all ages in shape—here's what she recommends.

## 1. Folding Down

Most dogs learn to *down* from the *sit* position—but Lyons suggests teaching a "folding down," where the dog's shoulders and hips rock backward in sync to lower his body to the ground.

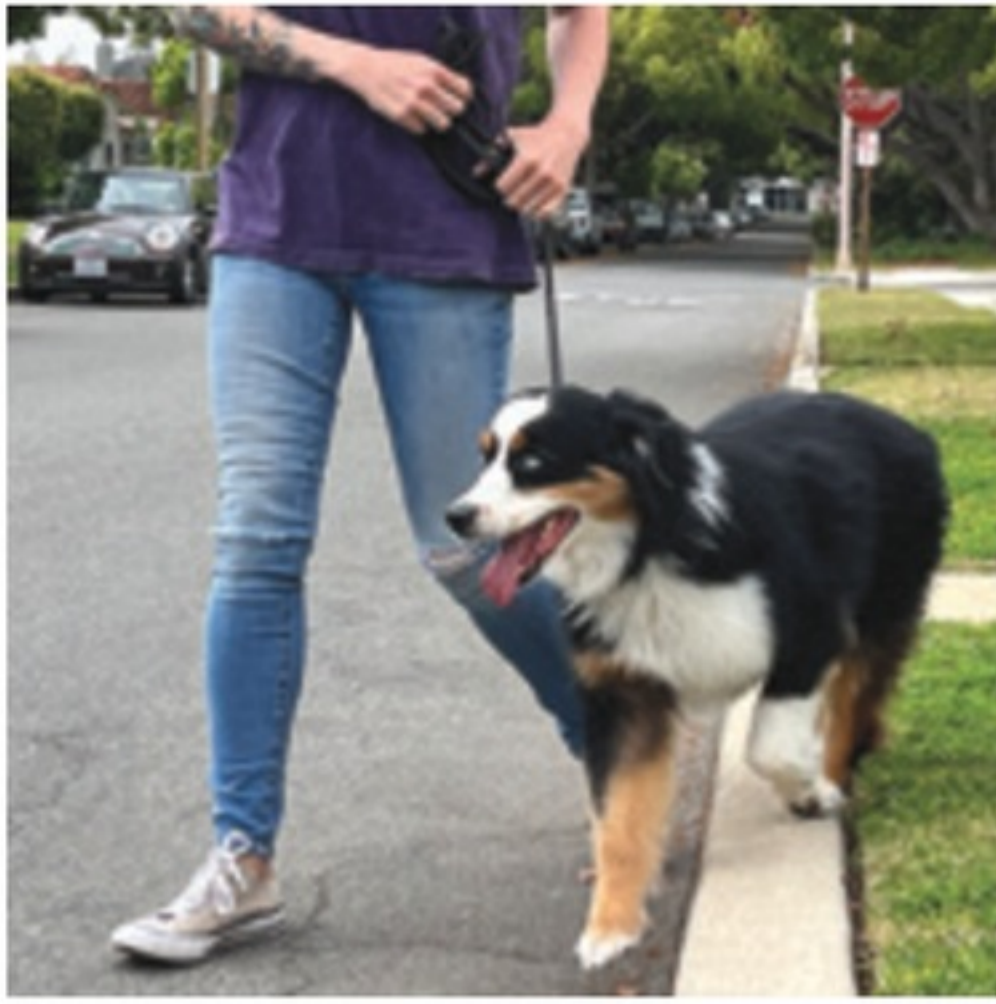
"You typically start with the dog bowing and then dropping their butt," Lyons says. "Then, over time, you want to get the shoulders and hips to move at the same time so that they are using their rear end and their core."

Practice this exercise on a slope, with



Going from a play bow into a down can reap many fitness benefits.

the dog facing downhill, for an added challenge.



“Curb your dog” takes on new meaning as Trax builds muscles with some fancy moves.

## 2. Zigzag Curbs

Find a curbed section on your walk and cue your dog to step off the curb for a few paces, then back on, then off again in a serpentine pattern for five to eight repetitions. This exercise helps train the lateral stabilizers—the muscles that support the legs as they’re moving away from the body.

“It also trains the muscles that they need when they’re turning,” Lyons says. “If you play fetch with your dog, for instance, they’re going to be driving forward, turning, and coming back. And that turn is usually what causes the injury.”

Remember to zigzag on that same stretch of curb when returning home or cross the street to work your dog’s opposite side if you take a different route.

## 3. Revved-Up Recall

A happy, rapid recall is a joy to practice—and it’s good for your dog’s body, too. Using a long line (or several leashes clipped together), recall your dog, encouraging him to come at a full run.



“I’m Coming!” A quick recall has many fitness benefits.

TOP AND RIGHT: COURTESY AUTHOR; BOTTOM: ©IRINA NEDIKOVA/GETTY IMAGES



Cue the “Rocky” Music: Scoop demonstrates you don’t have to be a prize fighter to benefit from exercising on stairs, hills, overpasses, and other inclines.

## The Cold Shoulder

“Not warming up their muscles prior to exercise is one of the leading causes of injury,” Lyons cautions. Whether you and your dog are heading to agility class or throwing a ball at the park, Lyons recommends taking 10 minutes to warm up your dog’s muscles before any vigorous movement.

“Even a runner would not jump up off the couch and go for a run without properly warming up their joints,” Lyons says.

“When you stretch the dog out like that, you’re going to be stretching the spine, you’re going to be strengthening the shoulders, strengthening the rear if it’s on an incline,” Lyons says.

## 4. Switch It Up

Make the most of your walk by varying your pace—jog for a bit, slowly amble, speed-walk—but keep moving. Lyons stresses that “sniffing walks” are beneficial for your dog’s mental wellness, but on fitness walks, try to limit sniffing opportunities to specific areas you’ve designated.

While you’re varying speed, change up your dog’s footing, too. “Pavement, dirt, grass—all the things,” Lyons says. Think of how your bare feet adjust when stepping from a boardwalk to a

sandy beach: “The different surfaces give them better awareness of their feet and their body.”

## 5. Add Incline

Hills hit the fitness jackpot. Take advantage of the incline by zigzagging, circling left and right, cuing a rapid recall, or practicing the folding down on a slope to strengthen your dog’s shoulders. (You don’t have to live in Colorado to work hills—be creative! A bridge, overpass, service road, or multi-level parking structure can provide enough incline to build that rear and shoulder strength.)

If you don’t have easy access to hilly terrain, stairs can help build your dog’s rear muscles—but take it slow. “It puts a lot of pressure on the shoulders going down if they’re running,” Lyons says. She recommends keeping the dog close to you, using a harness with a handle if extra support is needed, and climbing the stairs in tandem for a few laps. **FD**

*Lindsey Dobruck is the senior consulting editor for AKC Family Dog. Scoop, her Lancashire Heeler, recently earned his FIT DOG Bronze title, and is hard at work logging the miles for the Silver level.*

*Want more fitness inspiration? Bobbie Lyons teaches online fitness courses at: [www.bobbilyonscaninecampus.com](http://www.bobbilyonscaninecampus.com).*