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dog

RUN

It seems like a no brainer. You like to run, your dog likes to run—how about the two of you run together? With a little training, and these expert tips, you can train your dog to be your best running partner yet.

start with the right training

Because you'll want your dog's front feet even with or slightly behind yours during a run, the first mission is to teach him to walk nicely on-leash at your side. For the purpose of this article, we're choosing the left side.

Start with a hands-free set-up such as the Buddy System, or with a regular four- to six-foot leash that you hold while keeping your bent arm at your side in normal running position. The leash should be long enough to hang in a U when you're standing next to him. Then, move forward at a power-walking pace so it's clear you want him to come with you.

When he's walking next to you and looking at you, reward him. If his feet get ahead of yours, stop before he gets to the end of the leash. If you're holding the leash in your hand, be sure to keep your arm glued to your side rather than extending it forward. When he reaches the end of the leash, he'll likely pull and pull. Stand stock still and wait him out. When he turns to look at you, lure him back into a sit in front of you. Give several treats in a row until he's focused just on sitting and looking at you. When you're ready, move forward again at a brisk pace. Repeat this every time he charges ahead, until he understands that getting in front of you causes the walk to stop, and sitting and looking at you causes the walk to resume.

Next, work on about-turns and U-turns to train him to stay by your side. For the about-turn, walk forward in a straight line, turn 180 degrees to your right so your dog is on the outside, then head back on the same line. Do this randomly and when he gets even one foot ahead of yours.

The U-turn is like the about-turn, but in the opposite direction. Get slightly ahead of him and then cut him off as you make the U-turn. This teaches him that he should stay by your side so that you don't keep cutting him off. If you have problems getting around your dog, hold a treat in front of his nose; when he stops to eat it, complete the U-turn while he's stationary, then head in the new direction.

As you walk, alternate these three ways of training him to stay at your side, and reward him for sticking near you. Make sure to do this until it becomes a habit.

first run

Now, apply these techniques to your run. Your first runs should actually just be your dog's regular walks interspersed with periods of jogging. (Because it's important to stick to the training, don't initially try this on your regular run.) Start by jogging a half-block at a time, and be prepared to stop or do about-turns. When he gets better at staying at your side, you can run for longer periods, adding distance gradually. Avoid feeding large meals to your dog right before the run. Small treats or kibble during the run are fine.

First Steps: Running with Your Dog

By Sophia Yin, DVM, MS, and Claudia Kawczynska

rules of the road

Keep your dog near you so the two of you aren't hogging the entire track or trail and the leash isn't creating a tripping hazard for others. If you're running with a group, make sure he doesn't run up on others, as clipping their heels could cause a fall. In fact, it's often best to run between the dog and other people, since dogs sometimes veer off. If you're on a road, run facing traffic with your dog on your left. Always leash your dog when running on a street or road.

keeping your dog hydrated

If you're only running a few miles, your dog does not have breathing issues, and the weather is cool, you probably don't need to carry water. Conversely, if you'd need water during a run, you definitely want to provide the same number of water breaks for your dog.

nutritional guidelines

All dogs need a complete and balanced diet, that goes without saying. And most dogs, fed a high-quality, premium diet, can do well on their current food. But as you run longer distances (such as in marathon training) you may want to add more calories. It's a good idea to have your vet show you how to do a body condition score on your dog so you can monitor whether he's eating the amount of food to maintain an athletic body weight.

knowing when to stop

Dogs are less tolerant of heat than humans, and their main mode of cooling off is by panting. If your dog looks alert and is panting quietly with his mouth open but his tongue is just peeking out of his mouth, then he's probably okay in terms of heat. If his tongue is hanging out of his mouth, his mouth is open wide and the commissures are pulled back, then it's time to slow down, or stop for a rest. If his breathing doesn't go back to normal within a few minutes, end the run.

If you're running at a decent clip, you'll have other signs that he's tired: He'll slow down and start hanging behind you instead of trying to be slightly ahead or right next to you. And if he has to lie down to rest when you stop, then you've pushed him too far. Finally, avoid coaxing him to go faster than he wants; endorphins can mask dogs' pain just as they can our own.



Claudia Kawczynska is editor in chief and Sophia Yin, DVM is a contributing editor of *The Bark* magazine—the leading authority on everything canine and the indispensable guide to living with dogs.

For more tips on running with your dog, visit www.runnersworld.com/dogrun.