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SCHWEIZERISCHER VERBAND FÜR TIERPHYSIOTHERAPIE
FÉDÉRATION SUISSE DE PHYSIOTHÉRAPIE POUR ANIMAUX
FEDERAZIONE SVIZZERA DELLA FISIOTERAPIA PER ANIMALI
FEDERAZIUN SVIZRA DELLA FISIOTERAPIA PER BES-CHAS

How much exercise does a growing dog need?

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A puppy spends its first 10 to 14 days mainly sleeping and drinking. Its physical activity is limited to the search for milk and crawling toward sources of warmth. During its so-called paradoxical sleep phases, which constitute 95% of its sleep, it displays movements of the face, ears, and legs.

From its third week of life, the puppy begins to discover its environment, and its radius of movement continually increases. For the normal development of its brain, it is not just its impressions of the world and its mutual relationships with its mother, siblings, and people that are essential, but also the stimuli from the movement of its muscles and joints. The more impulses the motor system in its brain triggers, the better it will develop.

With increasing age, movements become more coordinated and more varied. The puppy moves until it is tired to then sleep until its next phase of growth and movement. Neither the breeder nor the dog's mother limits the dog's healthy urge to move.

If, after transfer to its new owner, a puppy is suddenly limited in its activity and can move freely only just a few minutes at a time and, occasionally, is carried up and down stairs, this treatment is in opposition to the newest advances in brain research. This research has established clear connections between increased physical activity and increased brain activity.

Physical activity supports brain circulation, promotes the new formation and networking of nerve cells, and stimulates brain metabolism. Physical activity is extremely important for control of emotions as well as for memory and learning performance for puppies and young dogs. Playful activity after a training session moreover substantially contributes to improving a dog's performance in learning new abilities.

Through activity, the various brain areas for perception, spatial recognition, physical awareness, coordination ability, and sense of balance are stimulated and further developed. Activity also promotes the metabolism and thus the strengthening of the bones as well as the development of muscles and organs. Complex movement processes can only be learned through repeated practice.

On a leash, a dog can only walk or trot in steps. These types of movement, however, do not challenge the movement apparatus enough. For healthy physical and emotional development, the dog needs to run free from the start and on a daily basis. Climbing stairs strengthens the thigh musculature, and good musculature protects its joints.

Free play with other dogs trains the musculature and coordination and promotes social competencies as well as impulse control and frustration tolerance, which help prevent later behavioral disorders.

It is important that the puppy can recover after physical and mental activity and can sleep for one to two hours. During this time, it relaxes its body and its brain processes its experiences, separates the important from the unimportant, and reinforces its learning. Thus, it is not so important how long the puppy is active, but it is important that it can recover sufficiently afterward before it is in line for its next activity.

An eight-week-old puppy of average breed is active for around 6 to 7 hours per day. These active phases each last 30-40 minutes, and twice a day for an hour or more. In between, it sleeps 1 to 2 hours. Sleep at night is eight hours, and this is generally broken into two sessions.

Recommendation

A puppy should be able to move unhindered until it is tired. Occupying it longer or keeping it from sleeping should be avoided. In excursions outside, long distances should not be covered. Instead, the tempo and distance should be adjusted to the puppy. These trips may be 30-40 minutes long or even an hour at times. Sports activity of the owner together with the puppy, such as throwing objects, jogging, bicycling, etc. overstrain a young dog and are not recommended.

Rather, the owner should promote their relationship to the puppy through joint discovery of its environment. In addition, free play with other dogs and learning through experience by allowing the dog to make its own decisions should be strongly promoted.

With the increasing age of the dog, the length of movement and the distances covered can be extended. But, as soon as the young dog shows that it is tired, there should be a pause. Overtaxing, just like undertaxing, is disadvantageous for its development, and thus should be avoided. According to its maximum size, dogs of 15 kg should have developed enough musculature and conditioning after 5-6 months, dogs up to 30 kg after 7-8 months, and larger dogs up to 9-10 months, that they can move without limitation.

Dr. Marianne Furler, Veterinary behaviourist STVV, Animal physiotherapist SVTPT

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