

# A LINE ON LIFE

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## "Going to the Dogs" with Exercise \*

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How can you "go to the dogs" with exercise? Well, as a jogger, you can exercise *with* dogs or *against* them. First, let's discuss exercising with your dog.

Just like humans, dogs need exercise too. If you jog, you can jog with your dog. However, if you do, here are a few basic tips to keep in mind.

- **Keep your dog leashed.** This will keep your dog from getting lost, running into traffic or getting into other dangerous situations.
- **Carry a plastic bag** to clean up after your dog. Other joggers or pedestrians will appreciate your efforts. (For midsize to smaller breeds, a plastic fold-over sandwich bag will do nicely. Insert your hand in the bag, scoop up the droppings with your "*bagged*" hand, reverse the bag over the droppings and deposit the whole thing neatly into the nearest trash receptacle.)
- **Stop for water frequently.** Dogs don't sweat like we do. They control their body temperature by *panting*. Since this isn't a very efficient system, they can get overheated easily. If your dog is well trained and you do not stop periodically, it might just continue until it drops of exhaustion. Especially in hot, humid weather, there is a risk of canine heat stroke.
- **Let your dog run on grass or dirt.** Concrete and blacktop are hard on a dog's paws, especially in hot weather. After each run, inspect the dog's paws for pebbles and other debris.
- **Make sure your dog will obey basic commands**, before you take it running. A leash may not be enough restraint, if the dog gets overexcited by a human or another animal. (A *muzzle* can be used, if you are concerned about your dog biting someone.)
- **Reflective strips** are needed for your clothes and your dog's collar, if you exercise when it is dark.
- **Don't cycle with a dog.** According to the *Humane Society*, it is too easy to lose control of either the bike or the dog. Also, some dogs find it hard to keep up with a bicycle. In addition, tethering your dog to the back of your bike places both you and your dog at risk.

If you want more information about exercising your dog, you can consult David Gallup's *Running with Man's Best Friend* (Alpine Publications, 1986).

On the other hand, other people's dogs can cause real problems for joggers, cyclists and ordinary pedestrians. According to the *Humane Society*, about 3 million dog bites occur in the United States every year. The attacking dog is not necessarily vicious. It usually is attracted by the rapid movement of some stranger crossing its territory. Sometimes the dog might only be curious or friendly, but don't assume that this is always true. The dog might feel the need to defend its territory.

In dealing with an aggressive dog, there is no foolproof advice. What can we do if an aggressive dog approaches us?

- **Stop and face the animal.** Whether you are running or cycling, it is better to face the animal rather than turning your back and fleeing. (If you try to outrun an unleashed dog, it might trigger an attack response.) Stand your ground and tell the dog in an assertive voice, "No!" or "Go home!" (Screaming or threatening might trigger the attack. Try not to stare into the dog's eyes, since the dog is likely to see that as a threatening move.) If you stay put, the dog is most likely to sniff you, satisfy its curiosity and back off. A bicyclist can get off and use the bicycle as a barrier in front of the dog. If the dog is coming at you, you can "feed it" your jacket or sweatshirt, if you have one handy.
- **Ask the owner to keep the dog leashed or inside**, if you frequently encounter a dog on your exercise route. If the owner does not comply, loose dogs can be reported to your local *Humane Society*. They will take calls 24 hours a day.
- **Carry protection** of various sorts. A *water pistol* or a *pop-open umbrella* are cheap and handy. United States postal carriers use *Halt* – a ground pepper in aerosol form, which does not harm the dog. (Most sport and bike shops sell it.) The Canadian Postal Service uses a *Dazer* – a device that emits high frequency sound waves that can only be heard by dogs. Since Canadian postal workers began using this device, the annual number of dog bites has dropped from 459 to 287. The 5-ounce, hand-held Dazer comes with a belt clip and costs about \$30 with its battery.

Jogging or cycling can help to keep you healthy. However, the hints given above will keep both you and your dog healthier and safer. It is less likely that your exercising will "go to the dogs."

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\* Adapted from "Dog Jog," *UC Berkeley Wellness Newsletter*, October, 1993, page 6.