

# The Whole Dog Journal™



VOLUME 19 | NO. 12 | \$5.95

A monthly guide to natural dog care and training

DECEMBER 2016

## FEATURES

### 3 On the Low (Thyroid) Road

*An integrative approach to treating a dog with hypothyroidism.*

### 6 Do Collars Damage the Thyroid?

*A number of studies indicate this is possible, particularly in dogs who pull hard or are yanked by the collar.*

### 8 Senior Fitness

*Exercise do's and don'ts for older dogs.*

### 10 Trick Training Sharpens Skills

*Five benefits of teaching your dog new tricks.*

### 12 Therapy That Smells Great

*Aromatherapy and topical use of essential oils for sore or arthritic dogs.*

### 14 Good Growling

*Dogs growl for a number of reasons – and you should be thankful that they do! Here's why.*

### 18 Great Gifts!

*What dog owner do you know who wouldn't love another leash – especially if it's way cooler than any leash she's seen before? Check out these dog-friendly holiday gift ideas for your best dog-owning friend.*



**Stop Pulling!**  
Just one more reason to train your dog not to pull  
Page 6



**Great Tricks!**  
How trick training is good for you and your dog  
Page 10



**Breathe Deeply**  
Aromatic remedies for sore or arthritic dogs  
page 12

## ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 Editor's Note
- 22 2016 Editorial Index
- 24 Resources





Journal™

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#### WHOLE DOG JOURNAL DOES NOT ACCEPT COMMERCIAL ADVERTISING

**B** THE WHOLE DOG JOURNAL (ISSN #1097-5322) is published monthly by Belvoir Media Group, LLC, 535 Connecticut Avenue, Norwalk, CT 06854. Robert Englander, Chairman and CEO; Timothy H. Cole, Executive Vice President, Editorial Director; Philip L. Penny, Chief Operating Officer; Greg King, Executive Vice President, Marketing Director; Ron Goldberg, Chief Financial Officer; Tom Canfield, Vice President, Circulation. Periodicals postage paid at Norwalk, CT and at additional mailing offices. Copyright ©2016, Belvoir Media Group, LLC. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is strictly prohibited. Printed in U.S.A. Revenue Canada GST Account #128044658. Canada Publishing Agreement Number #40016479.

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**Subscriptions:** \$39 annually (12 issues). Bulk rate subscriptions for organizations and educational institutions available upon request.

**Postmaster:** Please send address changes to THE WHOLE DOG JOURNAL, PO Box 8535, Big Sandy, TX 75755-8535

In Canada, send to THE WHOLE DOG JOURNAL, PO Box 39, Norwich, ON, N0J 1P0



# A Tale of Two Puppies

*Dogs live such disparate lives in our world; the least we can do is help the most unfortunate a bit.*

BY NANCY KERNS

It's easy to forget just how miserable life in our human society can be for some dogs, especially if your time is spent almost exclusively traveling in a tightly scheduled, insular circle of home, work (or school), exercising, shopping, eating, and sleeping at home again. Most of us see our beloved dogs snuggled in their beds (or ours), romping in our yards or local parks or play groups, on walks along the most picturesque paths we can find, and then back at home, on the couch or by the fireplace. It's easy to forget about all the homeless dogs, the ones who have homes but who are locked out of them in all weather, and those who are abused out of anyone's sight.

I've been obsessing about this because for the past week, I have been preoccupied with two puppies with very different lives.

The first is a three- to four-month-old shepherd-mix whom I spotted in my local shelter's kennels. She had been brought into the shelter by a good Samaritan who had seen her wandering by the side of the road on the outskirts of my town. She had gone unclaimed in the shelter for more than two weeks; I snatched her up the day she was made available for adoption – not because I need another dog; after spending an hour with her in the “get acquainted room” at the shelter, I thought she'd make a terrific pet for my seven-year-old niece, Ava, who has been wanting her “own” dog for the past two years.

I brought the pup home to stay with me for a couple of weeks so I could get her started on crate-training, house-training, and basic manners. Within days she was going potty outside on cue, sleeping in the crate without protest, and had learned sit, down, and a reasonably reliable recall for a pup of her age!

She and Ava hit it off right away. She's since she started life in her new home, where she's never going to be hurt, scared, or locked outside. “Rosie,” as Ava named her, is spending her day romping at the heels of my niece, curled on her lap on the sofa, or

snoozing in a deep, soft bed next to Ava's bed. She'll have daily visits from a dog walker for at least a few months, and will be enrolled in a puppy training class in a few more weeks. She's going to have a great life, full of love and attention.

The second puppy is *also* female, three to four months old, and a ward of my local shelter who was saved by a good Samaritan. But this puppy, a pit bull-mix, came to the attention of my local animal control officers in the form of a 911 call reporting that someone had beaten and burned a puppy, and it was still alive and suffering. The responding officer rushed her to a 24-hour vet hospital, where she's been fighting for her life ever since.

I've been following the daily reports of her condition, as well as helping the shelter staff in any way I can, writing press releases and Facebook posts asking people to *please* help police and animal control officers find out who so cruelly tortured this sweet puppy. I've donated money to help pay for her care, and will add another donation to a reward fund if her attacker isn't found soon.

I wish all puppies had safe, secure, loving homes. If your dog or puppy does, please consider giving a dollar or two to your local animal shelter, to benefit the ones who have not been so fortunate.

NK



# On the Low Road

## An integrative approach to treating a dog with hypothyroidism (low thyroid).

BY STEPHANIE COLMAN

**D**ogs can teach us lots of things. In watching dogs, I learn about enjoying the moment and finding your bliss. In training dogs, I learn about patience, consistency, and the importance of meeting dogs at their level. In being responsible for dogs, I sometimes learn more than I want to know about assorted health challenges – such as retained testicles and, most recently, low thyroid.

Earlier this year, my dog, Saber, unexpectedly gained eight pounds. He has the heavily muscled build of a working Golden Retriever, so it wasn't glaringly obvious, but there was definitely less "dip" in his waist.

I confirmed the weight gain while consulting with our vet about his then pending re-neuter surgery to extract the undescended testicle not found when neutered with his previous owners. My vet warned that, with the reduction of testosterone, he'd be prone to weight gain. I reduced his daily intake by half - to just one cup of high-quality kibble per day. We are avid walkers, and he gets regular off-leash exercise, so I was certain the weight would melt away.

It didn't.

As the weeks passed, I realized he wasn't growing coat at the shaved surgical site, and the area experienced a series of pigment changes. He seemed a bit less energetic, but not alarmingly so, and I initially attributed that to his newfound maturity as a four-year-old dog. His coat, overall, had taken on a dull appearance, and he seemed to lack what little under-

coat he'd ever had. He also developed a hotspot on the underside of his tail. We went back to the vet.

I suspected a thyroid issue. My vet agreed, and outsourced a comprehensive thyroid panel to the Diagnostic Center for Population & Animal Health at Michigan State University. Ten days later, our suspicion was confirmed: autoimmune thyroiditis.

### THYROID 101

The thyroid is a small, butterfly-shaped gland in the neck, in front of the trachea. It's part of the endocrine system, and is responsible for producing two main hormones, T3 (tri-iodothyronine) and

T4 (thyroxine), that regulate metabolism. We often associate metabolism with how quickly bodies burn calories in relation to weight gain or weight loss, but the body's metabolism affects a variety of vital functions such as breathing, heart rate, body temperature, central and peripheral nervous systems, muscle strength, cholesterol levels, and more.

Hypothyroidism (underactive or low thyroid) is a common disorder in dogs. A variety of breeds are known to be genetically predisposed, including the Labrador Retriever, Golden Retriever, Dachshund, Boxer, Doberman, and Cocker Spaniel. (It's normal for sight-hounds such as the Greyhound to have relatively low thyroid levels as a result of their unique physiology; these levels are not a sign of pathology in these breeds.)

Inbreeding of close relatives has predisposed individuals to many health issues including autoimmune thyroiditis. According to Sally Lane, DVM, who specializes in integrative and complementary care in Southern California, genetically inherited autoimmune dysfunction of the thyroid gland (autoimmune thyroiditis) is thought to be responsible for the majority of cases – up to 80 percent.

We don't yet fully understand what triggers the dysfunction, but the veterinary community is exploring several ideas. One theory is that widespread nutrient depletion in the soil impacts the food chain, creating foods

**Saber, a four-year-old Golden Retriever, suddenly gained a lot of weight, and held that weight even after his food ration was cut in half! If his hypothyroidism had not been diagnosed and properly treated, he could have developed nutritional deficiencies from being restricted to such a small amount of food.**



that are lower in iodine or selenium, minerals necessary to proper thyroid function.

Another theory is that individuals with low thyroid may have some component of adrenal depletion due to excessive cortisol release from stressors to the system and metabolic demands, which can disrupt thyroid function. Over-vaccination, highly processed foods, widespread use of antibiotics, and exposure to anesthesia all strain the body, which could potentially push a genetically predisposed individual over the edge into clinical hypothyroidism.

Physical damage to the thyroid, from strong pullers straining on leash, or at the hands of owners issuing collar corrections on training collars, is another theory being considered as a cause of hypothyroidism.

## COMMON CLINICAL SYMPTOMS

Saber presented with a laundry list of the most common clinical symptoms: weight gain; dry, flaky skin; recurring hot spots; and lack of energy. Other possible symptoms include cold intolerance, muscle weakness, especially in the rear, fertility issues, and even behavior changes, such as the sudden onset of anxiety or aggression.

(Note: The latter is why good trainers always recommend a full medical work-up when clients report sudden behavior changes. All the behavior modification in the world can't overcome an issue with a medical component!)

If left untreated, dogs with low thyroid can experience seizures, liver and kidney problems, and reproductive issues

– not to mention the health and quality of life issues that accompany prolonged skin conditions and obesity.

## THE WESTERN APPROACH

In cases of full-blown autoimmune thyroiditis, the thyroid has been damaged by the body's own abnormal antibodies. As a result, it is no longer able to produce sufficient amounts of hormones to support the body. In these cases, treatment typically involves replacing the lacking hormone, traditionally with a synthetic thyroid medication such as levothyroxine, commonly sold under the brand name Soloxine, or more recently, ThyroKare.

The synthetic hormone is usually given twice per day, ideally at 12-hour intervals. Some vets feel absorption is improved when given away from meals. Other patients report just as much improvement when the medication is given at mealtimes. Blood levels must be re-checked after starting or adjusting medication dosage, as well as annually to ensure hormone levels remain in a healthy range.

## OTHER OPTIONS

Patients wanting a more natural approach to hormone replacement can consider Nature-Throid, a natural thyroid hormone designed to boost the T3 and T4 levels. Dr. Lane says Nature-Throid is more drug-like in that it's very targeted in its purpose – to help boost lagging thyroid values – but unlike synthetic levothyroxine, it's a natural product made from dried pig thyroid. Both the synthetic and natural replacement hormones are dosed similarly, and

blood values must be closely monitored to ensure proper dosage. According to Dr. Lane, it sometimes takes a bit more fine-tuning to determine the right dosage of a natural replacement hormone as compared to the synthetic hormone.

With either product, Dr. Lane encourages owners to discuss the benefits of an adaptogenic herb such as ashwagandha, which is known for its immune-modulating effects, with their dog's treatment team. Adaptogens help the body adapt to stress, and exert a normalizing effect on bodily processes. Products such as Vet Ashwagandha by Ayush Herbs or Withania Complex by Standard Process can help support thyroid function, but do not directly treat hypothyroidism.

The good news is, with either the natural or synthetic replacement hormone, the dog is likely to experience swift relief from many symptoms – especially the weight gain and lethargy. The bad news? Once a thyroid replacement product is started, it's likely the patient will need it for life, because once the replacement hormones are on board, the thyroid says, "Oh, we have enough of these hormones, I don't have to work harder to make more." Dr. Lane says it's entirely safe to switch from a synthetic product like ThyroKare to a natural product like Nature-Throid while monitoring blood levels to ensure proper dosing.

## INTEGRATIVE SUPPORT

Ideally, potential thyroid issues are recognized early, when they can likely be reversed via supportive care (see "Catching Problems Before they Start," facing page). Once the gland has become so damaged that replacement therapy is



Saber developed many of the classic signs of hypothyroidism, including dry, flaky skin and hair loss.



He also started to develop hot spots; his skin was evidently very itchy. Treating only these symptoms would be a big mistake.



## CATCHING PROBLEMS BEFORE THEY START?

Since it's rare to successfully wean dogs off of thyroid replacement products (synthetic or natural) once a dog has a well-established hypothyroid condition, one idea is for owners of breeds genetically predisposed to thyroid issues to proactively look for changes in thyroid numbers. Subtle changes in blood work will precede clinical signs. According to Hemopet, classical clinical signs will appear only after more than 70 percent of the thyroid gland is damaged.

This requires a more complex thyroid panel, traditionally offered by Hemopet or Michigan State University, but when findings reveal subtle changes, or show a dog as being in the "low normal" range, Sally Lane, DVM, who specializes in integrative and complementary medicine, says that's the perfect time to start supportive treatment.

"The conventional approach might be to not do anything other than make a note to re-check the numbers in 6-12 months, but, from a holistic medicine perspective, we're trying to give the thyroid a little boost of support and see if that helps the individual," Dr. Lane says. Additionally, Wendy Jensen, DVM, a homeopath from Bow, New Hampshire, notes dogs who develop hypothyroidism are more likely to eventually develop megaesophagus and laryngeal paralysis, making it even more important to prevent full-blown thyroid disease whenever possible.

When caught early, Dr. Lane typically recommends supportive treatment such as a whole-food glandular product given in combination with a high-quality vitamin and mineral supplement matched to the dog's diet. Glandulars are supplements made from organs and tissues of mammals, and are based on the idea that an extract of a specific organ can strengthen the organ. Dr. Lane often recommends T-150 by Xymogen, or one of the Standard Process thyroid products such as Canine Thyroid Support.



Kelp is often touted as a beneficial supplement for dogs with hypothyroid, due to its high iodine content. In the early stages of thyroid dysfunction, Dr. Lane says a high-quality kelp product can be beneficial. However, dogs who are being treated with some form of thyroid replacement (synthetic or natural) should not be given additional iodine or iodine-rich seaweed supplements, such as kelp, as it can create iodine excess and interfere with medication. A commercially prepared food, or high-quality vitamin and mineral supplement for dogs fed home-prepared diets, will offer sufficient and safe amounts of iodine to help support proper thyroid function without compromising medication.

"Once the dogs are already hypothyroid, adding kelp or something rich in iodine can cause this cascade effect where

the body reacts by destroying the thyroid gland even more," Dr. Lane says. "But when it's a case where we're looking at a low-normal and we want something to boost the system, kelp can support the body and, in certain individuals, it may help prevent the dog from developing hypothyroidism."

### A SHIFT IN THINKING

Similarly, Dr. Jensen encourages dog owners to develop a willingness to look at health challenges as potential puzzle pieces to a bigger picture, not just as stand-alone incidents. For example, in a young dog with reoccurring ear infections or other skin issues, it's important to consider why these issues are developing.

"Ears don't just get infected," she says. "It comes from the inside out; the whole dog is involved in creating that gunky ear. The cells that affect that ear are coming from somewhere else inside the body – the whole dog is producing the gunky ear. When you can treat the whole body versus just making the symptoms go away, the dog will have a much healthier life."



**A dull coat, ear infections that are so frequent that the dog's ear suffers permanent damage from broken blood vessels, and behavior changes (which may have led to this dog's surrender at a shelter) may all have been caused by hypothyroidism. It's always worth asking your vet to run a complete thyroid blood panel if these anomalies are seen.**

In many cases, the willingness to think proactively and explore what is creating the susceptibility to ear infections or other reoccurring, seemingly minor issues – rather than simply suppress the symptoms – can reduce the likelihood the dog will experience thyroid or other issues later in life, Dr. Jensen says.

Another sign to watch for, she adds, is the cessation of symptoms – the dog who used to get ear infections, but hasn't had one in a long time, or the dog who used to battle digestive issues, but now has a calm GI tract. This seems like it would be a good thing, but, for Dr. Jensen, it's a red flag that an underlying disease is getting deeper and attacking the organs and glands. For her, it can be a clear warning sign of thyroid problems.

## DO COLLARS DAMAGE THE THYROID?



In a July 2015 blog post on [peterdobias.com](http://peterdobias.com), Peter Dobias, DVM, notes the high rate of thyroid disease among large breeds of dogs who often pull strongly when on-leash. "It seems obvious that the collar actually pushes on the throat exactly in the area of the thyroid gland," he says. He postulates that the trauma created by the pulling can inflame the thyroid, triggering an aggressive immune response when the body tries to remove the inflamed thyroid cells.

In a January 2013 issue of Dr. Jean Dodds' Pet Health Resource Blog, she addressed the issue via a reader-submitted question about collars and thyroid health. She said, based on the location at the front of the neck, the thyroid gland and neighboring salivary glands "can be easily injured by trauma and sudden pressure forces, like could occur from the slip ring and chain of a metal collar, and a metal prong or hard braided leather collar," recommending harnesses or head halters for strong-pulling dogs.

Additionally, in 2011, Anders Hallgren studied the connection between problem behavior and back problems in dogs. In looking at 400 dogs, Hallgren found dogs who were strong pullers, or who were exposed to collar corrections, were most likely to display cervical injuries. In discussing the findings in his book *Back Problems in Dogs: Underlying Causes for Behavior Problems*, Hallgren notes, "The soft tissue at the front of the throat could also be injured, depending on how you handle the leash."

Pulling on leash is problematic for many reasons. It's likely uncomfortable for the dog (even when the desired forward motion trumps the discomfort); it's uncomfortable for the human handling the dog; and it skews natural dog body language, potentially contributing to conflicts between dogs.

We'd say the additional potential for contributing to the development of thyroid disease, particularly in breeds known to be genetically predisposed, makes using a well-fitted front-clip harness a wise choice.

(Note: WDJ is working on a review of the 10 leading front-clip harnesses on the market; it will appear in an upcoming issue.)

considered the best option, there are several alternative modalities also thought to be beneficial. They include:

■ **DIET AND NUTRITION** – Feeding minimally processed, whole foods is always a wise choice to help improve overall nutrient absorption and reduce strain on the organs from filtering impurities. However, with any known medical condition, it's wise to learn about possible disease-specific considerations in order to make educated food choices.

For example, many green, leafy vegetables such as broccoli, kale or bok choy, contain goitrogenic substances that disrupt the production of thyroid hormones by inhibiting iodine uptake. Dr. Lane says green leafy vegetables are important in the diet, as they help with detoxification, metabolic function, and cancer prevention, but they should be steamed to reduce the iodine-blocking effect, or fed raw in moderation. Some whole foods thought to support thyroid function include foods high in omega-3 fats such as sardines, salmon, eggs, summer squash, and sweet red peppers.

Certain supplements can be beneficial, such as milk thistle to support liver detoxification, fish oils to support skin and coat health, and biotin to promote coat growth in dogs experiencing thyroid-induced alopecia.

■ **CHIROPRACTIC HELP** – Chiropractic puts the body in a better position to support overall wellness. Dr. Lane says chiropractic adjustments can also be helpful in cases of hypothyroidism where it's possible trauma to the neck, potentially via a collar, may have contributed to thyroid dysfunction.

■ **TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE AND ACUPUNCTURE** – TCM serves to support and strengthen the body as a whole, which allows the body to more effectively combat the effects of symptoms commonly associated with hypothyroidism, and return to balance.

### UNDERSTANDING ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

Many of these modalities draw on some version of the body's energy. In TCM, that energy is called "qi." Practitioners of homeopathy often refer to it as the "vital force." It can be a challenging concept for those raised on conventional veterinary medicine, but Wendy Jensen,

DVM, a homeopathic practitioner from Bow, New Hampshire, and author of *The Practical Handbook of Veterinary Homeopathy*, explains it this way:

“Think about the last time you were getting a cold. You probably knew something was wrong before you were stuck in bed. But if you had gone to the doctor at that point, nothing would’ve shown up – there’d be nothing on your blood work, and you didn’t have a fever. That’s the energetic level; it hasn’t changed anything in your body yet, but your energy has been impacted. That’s the energy where illness starts, and that’s the level we treat,” Dr. Jensen says.

In holistic medicine, practitioners are more concerned with what they’re seeing in the animal in front of them, rather than in the patient’s diagnostic label.

“You note the Western component, but you don’t treat with specific herbs based on that Western diagnosis,” Dr. Lane says. “You’re looking at lots of things with the goal of supporting the body. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, we might look at the tongue and the pulse, and if what we’re seeing there corresponds with dry skin, we’d pick an herbal therapy to enhance circulation.”

Dr. Jensen takes a similar approach as a homeopathy practitioner. It’s not about picking the homeopathic remedy that is designed to treat hypothyroidism; it’s about looking at all aspects of the individual – from physical issues, to emotional and behavioral issues – and identifying which remedy best supports those symptoms. Whereas as a vet of traditional Western medicine is likely to look at an ear infection and dose antibiotic ointment designed to treat the infected ear, Jensen will dig deeper, often inquiring about personality changes or even if there was difficulty housetraining the dog. This all serves as important information to help detect – and correct – imbalance. “I’ve never known my patients as well as I do now,” she says.

As the unique imbalances are addressed, the body is put into a better position to heal itself to the best of its ability, which leads to an overall improvement in health.

## INDIVIDUALS ARE UNIQUE

With so much information available at our fingertips, it can be tempting to scour the Internet in search of a magic bullet. A quick Google search offers a well-stocked list of proprietary tonics and

tablets, many advertised as “natural” or “holistic.” Owners should always discuss new therapies with a member of their dog’s healthcare team, as even seemingly harmless vitamin supplements can be contraindicated in some cases. Proper holistic care relies heavily on looking at the patient as an individual.

## EXPERIENCES VARY

On the recommendation of my primary vet (a member of the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association whom I would describe as being “largely conventional, but alternative-savvy”), we started Saber on a combination of synthetic thyroid replacement (ThyroKare 0.4 mg) and a Standard Process thyroid supplement.

His T4 levels were checked in 30 days, where the 0.4 mg dose was determined to be too high, as evidenced by blood work (the desired range is 0.8-3.5; he tested at 5.8!) and some telltale clinical symptoms of his hormones being thrown into high gear, such as a voracious appetite and mild panting, even at night and early in the morning. The dose was lowered to 0.2 mg and, when re-tested again, his T4 measured at a comfortable 2.2. This is why regular monitoring is important.

Saber’s energy level increased, and he lost the excess weight within a very short time of starting this protocol. But he was still left with itchy, flaking skin, re-occurring hotspots, and intermittently “gunky” ears.

He also started losing massive amounts of coat; he went from a sparsely coated Golden I could brush and hardly pick up any coat, to a dog I’d brush twice per day and get multiple brushfuls each time! My vet assured me the hair loss would cease as the medication worked to normalize the recent roller coaster of hormone levels, and it did.

However, as the other symptoms remained, I switched him to a raw diet and decided to work with a Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) practitioner. We are still early in this course of treatment, but so far, she has recommended a couple of minor dietary changes specific to Saber, not as a hypothyroid dog, but based on how he presents as an individual. She also started him on a homeopathic thyroid support product (Professional Formula’s Thyroid Liquescence), has counseled us on supplements both for whole-body support and for specific needs, and has

performed two acupuncture treatments.

So far, he’s still itchy and very prone to hot spots. With this news, our TCM practitioner is re-visiting Saber’s intake notes to see if she feels a specific Chinese herbal remedy would be beneficial.

## INTEGRATED APPROACH

While some people have an overall approach they are steadfastly most comfortable with, Dr. Lane believes treating hypothyroidism doesn’t have to be about choosing between “conventional” or “alternative” options.

“It’s important to take an integrated approach,” she says. Whether or not it’s determined the patient needs hormone replacement therapy (a more conventional veterinary medical treatment, even when using a natural hormone replacement product), an integrated approach – designed to support the whole dog, not just the thyroid – can help produce better patient outcomes.

In contrast, some alternative practitioners, such as Dr. Jensen, *do* feel their modalities work much better when not paired with more traditional approaches to medical care. They believe traditional approaches interfere with the “vital force’s” attempt to restore balance with the help of alternative therapies.



In the end, we believe what’s most important is for dog owners to be willing to educate themselves about available options, consider their resources (both in terms of access to qualified alternative practitioners, and financial resources), and choose a course of treatment, or combination of treatment options, with which they are most comfortable. 🐾

See also “Properly Diagnosing Canine Hypothyroidism,” *WDJ* August 2012 and “Help for Dogs With Hypothyroidism,” June 2005.

Stephanie Colman is a writer and dog trainer in Southern California. See page 24 for contact information.





This canine senior citizen is in good shape for a dog of his age (9 years): he's not too heavy, and still has good muscle tone, even though he's beginning to show some stiffness upon rising. Continuing his regular exercise program, consisting of several long, slow walks each week, will preserve his mobility.

PAW HEALTH PAW

# Senior Fitness

## Exercise do's and don'ts for older dogs.

BY CJ PUOTINEN

**W**e want our dogs to last forever, but they don't remain puppies for long. By the time they reach middle age, most dogs start to slow down because of arthritis, illness, injuries, or the aging process. Being overweight makes all of these problems likely to occur at a younger age.

Exercise is essential for dogs of all ages. It helps maintain muscle tone, a healthy weight, joint flexibility, good circulation, and overall health and happiness – but when movement causes pain, it's only natural to slow down or stay still. That creates a vicious cycle in which inactivity contributes to pain, pain reinforces inactivity, and the dog's health deteriorates.

How can you safely help your sedentary older dog resume an active lifestyle? Here are some exercise do's and don'ts.

## Do:

**1** Before starting an exercise plan, take your best friend to your veterinarian, who can check his weight, overall condition, and range of motion. (When you schedule the appointment, be sure to let the staff know that you want an in-depth wellness examination, not a cursory

appointment.) Your vet can then help you plan an effective exercise strategy.

**2** Consider seeing a Certified Canine Rehabilitation Therapist (CCRT), the veterinary version of physical therapists for humans. CCRTs design exercise programs for individual dogs to help them recover from injury and safely improve their strength, balance, and range of motion.

Ask your vet for a referral to a CCRT or check with the Canine Rehabilitation Institute ([caninerehabinstitute.com](http://caninerehabinstitute.com)), the University of Tennessee Canine Rehabilitation Certificate Program ([ccrp.utvetce.com](http://ccrp.utvetce.com)), or the American Association of Rehabilitation Veterinarians ([rehabvets.org](http://rehabvets.org)).

**3** Help your overweight dog lose weight, as that's one of the best things you can do to help an older dog remain mobile. It also helps to feed a diet that doesn't contribute to inflammation.

For weight-loss tips and recommendations, see "Canine Arthritis," WDJ October 2016, and "Counting Calories," September 2009.

(Note: An article on "Weight Loss for Older Dogs" will appear in the January 2017 issue.)



**4** Help your dog start exercising gradually, starting with short, low-impact walks on smooth or flat surfaces. Watch for symptoms like limping, wanting to rest, or other signs of discomfort, and let your dog take breaks as needed. When starting an exercise program, soreness the next day indicates that you did too much. Exercise can be increased gradually as long as it doesn't make the dog feel worse.

**5** If she enjoys the water, take your dog swimming, as swimming puts less pressure on sore joints than walking or running. Some veterinary clinics have therapeutic swimming pools or underwater treadmills that help arthritic dogs exercise without stressing their joints.

**6** Play games that your dog enjoys to keep him active and interested, such as hide and seek. Keep the game short (10 minutes or less) and simple.

"I have to put in a plug for nose work and sniffing games," says WDJ contributor Mary Straus, "because they tire dogs out without strenuous activity. We have dogs competing in nose work at very advanced ages who are no longer able to participate in other activities." For more information about K9 Nose Work, see "Sniff This – You'll Feel Better" (WDJ, April 2013) and the National Association of Canine Scent Work ([nacswnet.net](http://nacswnet.net)).

**7** Experiment with nutritional supplements ("Canine Arthritis," WDJ October 2016), medicinal herbs ("Herbal Remedies for Arthritis Pain," November 2016), essential oils

("Therapy That Smells Great," page 12 of this issue), and other remedies that may increase your dog's range of motion and activity level.

**8** Hire a canine massage therapist or learn basic massage techniques and use them to improve your dog's flexibility, circulation, and muscle tone. Massage helps relieve stiffness and joint discomfort, and speeds recovery from accidents and injuries. As a bonus, massage can deepen the bond between pets and people. For guidelines, search for books on canine massage at [DogWise.com](http://DogWise.com) or visit [petmassage.com](http://petmassage.com) or [dogmassage.com](http://dogmassage.com).

## Don't:

**1** Don't strain your arthritic dog's joints by playing catching games, spinning, running on sand or other soft surfaces, running on streets and other hard surfaces, racing up and down stairs, or expecting your older dog to jump onto or off of furniture, car seats, or other heights, even if she shows no signs of pain or discomfort. Keep movements slow and steady, and provide assistance or a support ramp or pet steps as needed.

**2** Don't be a weekend warrior. Just like their human companions, dogs who exercise infrequently are more likely to injure themselves than those who do a smaller amount every day. A few minutes of daily or twice-daily exercise will produce greater benefits than longer sessions once or twice a week.

Let your dog show you what her comfortable pace is, and respect that. "For the last few years of my Shar-Pei Piglet's life," Straus says, "I let her choose where, how far, and how fast we walked. She knew her limits and never went farther than she could handle, though she would stop and rest in a shady spot for a while when she needed to before continuing on. Despite severe arthritis in all four limbs, she was still mobile when she passed away at age 17."

**3** Avoid roughhousing games, even if your dog loves them. Too-vigorous activity can damage arthritic joints, surrounding muscles, and supporting ligaments. This includes racing around with other dogs and crashing into each other.

**4** Don't ask your dog to get up from a prone position and immediately take off with you as you run or jog. Warm-ups are crucial. Start with five to 10 minutes of slow, gentle movement, such as a slow-paced walk. If your dog is comfortable moving faster, increase the pace for another five, 10, or 15 minutes, depending on your dog's condition and ability.

If he enjoys games like running from one person to another when called, or searching for someone who's hiding, take time to play. Then, before going home or back into the house, spend five to 10 minutes cooling down with a slow-paced gentle walk.

**5** Don't let your dog gain weight, especially if he isn't as active as he used to be. Reduce food portions as needed, and pass over high-fat or high-carbohydrate diets in favor of foods with high protein levels, which help maintain lean muscle mass.

Keeping your older dog mobile depends on the right exercise as well as the right diet, and learning what works is worth the time and effort involved. Best of all, helping your dog feel better and remain active is a project you can both enjoy. 🐾

*CJ Puotinen is the author of The Encyclopedia of Natural Pet Care and other books. See "Resources," page 24 for more information.*



**Swimming is the ideal exercise for senior dogs, as it maintains muscle without stressing their joints. Increasingly, canine therapy "gyms" have warm exercise pools that can be booked for swimming sessions.**

# Trick Training Sharpens Skills

Five benefits of “trick training” with your dog.



BY MARIAN DEANGELO

It's fortunate that there are many positive training options for our dogs today! Increasingly, people are choosing to extend their dogs' education past classes in good manners, and I strongly advocate following up those basic classes with a tricks class! Learning even just a few basic tricks is fun for you, your dog, and your potential audience! And while the benefits to you and your dog are many, I will describe my top five:

## 1 DEVELOPMENT OF PATIENCE.

Have you ever felt frustrated or lost your patience with your dog? Raised your voice or used coercion, or other training methods that made your dog uncomfortable? Guess what: You're human! But your dog knows when you're not pleased, and that's likely to negatively affect his ability to learn, as well as potentially damage your relationship with him.

Training a dog to do fun (or funny!) tricks helps many owners let go of their expectations and just “be in the moment” of training their dog to do something in small steps. Perhaps it's because the goal behaviors are “just tricks,” rather than behaviors that they feel their dogs *must* learn, lest they be judged as “bad owners”!

When you don't expect instant results, it's much easier to break down your training goal into a progression of small steps. This will make it much easier for your dog to succeed, you will be less likely to lose your patience, and the two of you will be much happier training together.

As an example, here's how I taught my dog, Bella, to do a handstand. It took many steps and months to achieve, but the result was worth the effort and time.

First, she had to learn to back up. I had Bella standing in front of me. As I walked toward her she instinctively walked backward, and I marked the behavior with the “click” of a clicker and rewarded her. After enough repetitions, we had a nice “back” behavior.

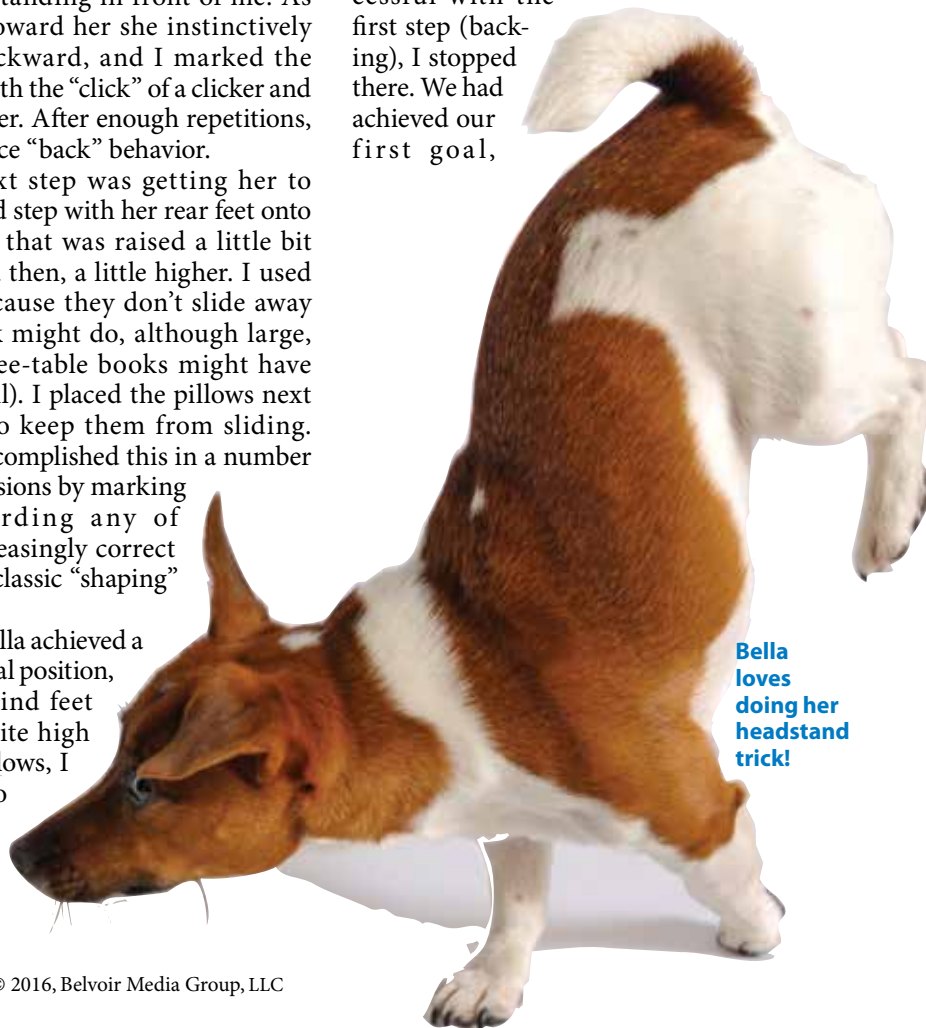
The next step was getting her to back up and step with her rear feet onto something that was raised a little bit higher, and then, a little higher. I used pillows because they don't slide away like a book might do, although large, heavy coffee-table books might have worked well). I placed the pillows next to a wall to keep them from sliding. Again, I accomplished this in a number of short sessions by marking and rewarding any of Bella's increasingly correct efforts – a classic “shaping” technique.

Once Bella achieved a fairly vertical position, with her hind feet up on a quite high stack of pillows, I was able to ask her to back up to a wall in a spot

where there were no pillows. Because we've done so much shaping, she was eventually able to figure out that the behavior that I would mark and reward was putting her rear feet on the wall. The repetition of backing and raising her rear legs gave her the strength and muscle memory to kick her back legs up and place them on the wall.

Each of these behaviors was practiced in numerous short training sessions. All the while, I was rewarding her with treats and loads of verbal praise, and she was slowly building endurance and gaining confidence. I mention strength because it is particularly important to *not* rush this trick. Think of it like this: If you were going to train for a marathon and hadn't been running regularly, it might not be a wise idea to start running 10 miles right away. You could injure yourself because your muscles weren't prepared for such an effort. However, when you run longer each week, your muscles slowly reach the level of conditioning that would lessen your chances of injury. When a dog does a handstand, he uses abdominal muscles that aren't necessarily conditioned. Don't be in a hurry!

To reiterate, when Bella was successful with the first step (backing), I stopped there. We had achieved our first goal,



Bella loves doing her handstand trick!



ended with positive results, and we were both happy. I got her to do what I wanted; I didn't push it to the next level during that session.

As you can see, the process of learning a complicated or physically difficult trick can take some time. Keep your training sessions, particularly for a new trick, to a maximum of five to 10 minutes. Your dog will be less likely to get tired, bored, or frustrated – and *you* will be less likely to get frustrated. When you spend too much time on a particular part of a trick, especially if it's not going smoothly, you may find yourself losing patience. Your dog will sense this and may become shy or timid, lose interest, or just shut down.

It's okay to train more than once a day, but it's best to space these short sessions out over several hours. Make sure to reward your dog and give lots of verbal praise. Your dog will have fun and be eager for the next training session. When I was teaching Bella her handstand, I only spent about five to 10 minutes on each new behavior. She could see I was pleased at the end of the session and was therefore so eager for the next training time that she often offered me the desired behavior before I asked for it. She learned in a stress-free manner and was ready to move on to the next step.

**2 WALKING AWAY HAPPY.** If you end your session on a positive note – and with tricks, it's kind of hard not to, as it's all fun and games! – you and your pup will walk away cheerful and satisfied.

I'm currently teaching my male dog, Mario, to jump in the air with a ball in his mouth. He knows how to take the ball in his mouth and he knows how to jump. I am trying to put the two together. When we've practiced, he'll sometimes take the ball and then drop it at the jump cue. Or he'll jump without picking the ball up at all.

However, he's had moments of jumping with the ball in his mouth. When he achieves this behavior, I give him a jackpot – extra treats, fed one after another after another, and *tons* of verbal praise. Then I stop there. We are both genuinely thrilled about his success.

If you do not achieve your goal in a session, do your best to hide any frustration you may be feeling. Move on to a trick that your dog can already perform successfully and end with him receiving a nice reward. You can come back to the new trick later.

**3 YOUR DOG'S CONFIDENCE WILL INCREASE.** Recently, an elated student in my tricks class told me that since she started teaching her dog tricks, the dog was showing signs of confidence, an interest in training, and an overall enthusiasm that my student had not seen before.

She had no idea that this is *often* the case in tricks class!

For my part, I've noticed that Bella has gained confidence as she watches her brother, Mario. Mario is not afraid of moving objects and loves to ride a skateboard. When I first tried teaching the same trick to Bella, she was timid and reluctant to participate. After watching Mario do this trick over and over, on her own, with no prompting by me, she jumped on the skateboard to hitch a ride with him. Hooray! Now she *insists* on jumping on the board. She doesn't yet push it on her own, but when I see that she's ready, I may teach her to do this trick.

Mario also hops on top of and can balance on a rolling barrel; again, Bella used to be afraid of the moving barrel. Then, one day, she started going through the barrel. I reinforced this behavior, and with time, she gained the confidence to run in and out of this barrel while Mario is on top!

If your dog is a little timid, enrolling in a tricks class in your area may be a good idea. If your dog is in a room with other dogs doing tricks, he may gain confidence from even just watching the other dogs. If he's like Bella, he'll start to develop an interest in doing whatever is causing that upbeat, giddy behavior from the other dogs' humans!

**4 YOUR DOG WILL LEARN TO WORK WITH DISTRACTIONS.** Tricks classes present a dog with many distractions, but if you consistently reward your dog for watching you and listening for your cues, soon your dog will pay much less attention to extraneous stimuli in any setting when you ask him to focus.

This ability to focus on you will come in handy when walking outdoors; it even increases your dog's safety while he is walking with you near busy streets or crowded areas.



**5 TRICKS SOAK UP ALL THAT EXCESS ENERGY.**

Does your dog seem to have excess energy and you don't know what to do with it? Trick training may be the answer. Jack Russell Terriers, as well as many other breeds, tend to have an extraordinary amount of energy, but I've found that trick training helps channel that energy into behavior that I enjoy more! Mario and Bella are very calm and well-behaved, and I credit their trick training with at least *some* of their good behavior.

Many dogs who are bored will display undesirable behaviors, such as chewing or barking, that could put them out of house and home. This energy can be put to good use. Redirecting your dog's excess energy into fun tricks, and enthusiastically praising him for his efforts, will likely make him increase the behaviors that make you happy.

**BONUS: STRENGTHEN THE BOND.**

Taking a little extra fun time with your dog and practicing patience will both strengthen the bond with your dog and produce unique, enjoyable results. If a holiday family event gets dull, you can "wow" your relatives and spice up the party by showing off your dog's amazing tricks. Those of you who take your dog to senior centers or work with children can share the tricks with a very willing audience. Your dog will relish the extra attention! In the end, you and your dog will build a strong and trusting bond, and that is the best reward of all. 🐾

*With her two Jack Russell Terriers, trainer Marian DeAngelo of Rockville, Maryland, performs tricks for senior centers, libraries, schools, and birthday parties, and teaches dog trick training classes. See "Resources," page 24, for contact information.*

# Therapy That Smells Great

*Aromatherapy and topical essential oils that can make your arthritic dog feel better.*

BY CJ PUOTINEN

In addition to their use in teas, capsules, and other applications as discussed in last month's article, "Herbal Remedies for Arthritis Pain," medicinal plants provide pain relief and other benefits through their essential oils and hydrosols.

**Essential oils** – the volatile substances of aromatic plants – are collected, usually by steam distillation, from leaves, blossoms, fruit, stems, roots, bark, or seeds. The water that accompanies an essential oil during distillation is called a **hydrosol** or **flower water**. Hydrosols contain trace amounts of essential oil and are themselves therapeutic.

## AROMATHERAPY

It isn't fragrance that imparts the medicinal properties of aromatic essential oils but rather their constituent chemicals.

Essential oils may contain antibacterial monoterpene alcohols or phenylpropanes, stimulating monoterpene hydrocarbons, calming esters or aldehydes, irritating phenols, stimulating ketones, anti-inflammatory sesquiterpene alcohols, antiallergenic sesquiterpene hydrocarbons, and expectorant oxides.

In addition, each chemical category may have several different effects. Aromatherapy is a modern healing art, and the therapeutic quality of essential oils is still being discovered. In other words, aromatherapy is a complex subject that deserves careful study and expert guidance.

There are many ways to deliver essential oils into your dog's environment. You can:

- Send them into the air with an electric nebulizing diffuser (available from aromatherapy supply companies).
- Add a few drops to a small spray bottle of water and spritz it around the room, being careful to avoid wood or plastic surfaces and your dog's face.
- Place a drop on your dog's collar, scarf, or bedding.
- Place two drops on your hand; then rub your palms together and gently run your hands through your dog's coat.
- Add 15 to 20 drops of essential oil to eight ounces (1 cup) of unscented natural shampoo, or add one drop to shampoo as you bathe your dog.
- Add two to five drops essential oil to a gallon of rinse water, shaking well before applying (avoid your dog's eyes).

Quality is critical when it comes to essential oils, and there is much debate over which oils, sources, production methods, and testing procedures are best. For therapeutic-quality essential



**These are some of our favorite commercial essential oil products that help sore, achy, arthritic dogs. In addition, you can make your own aromatherapy blends.**

oils and blends that can help your dog lead a comfortable, active life, see the suppliers mentioned in "Reliable Sources of Quality Oils," next page.

## ESSENTIAL OIL BLENDS

At FrogWorks, Colorado aromatherapist Frances Fitzgerald Cleveland does more than consider which essential oils will work; she lets canine patients make the selection. "For any condition, there are several essential oils that could help," says Cleveland, "and I let the dog smell each of them, usually by offering the cap. If she runs to the other side of the room or turns her head away, that's not the right oil to use. Don't ever force an essential oil on your dog. Wait for her to find an oil she's interested in, one that she wants to smell more of. She may even try to lick the cap."

This approach is called zoopharmacognosy, a term coined by Cornell University biochemistry professor Elroy Rodriguez, Ph.D., to describe how animals self-medicate with plants, soils, and insects to treat and prevent disease.

Sometimes dogs are cautious because a fragrance is unfamiliar. If your dog



turns away from an essential oil, offer it again tomorrow or the next day. Once you've found an essential oil that will treat the problem and that agrees with your dog, Cleveland suggests blending it with an easily digested vegetable oil, such as cold-pressed safflower oil.

"Diluting essential oils for use with dogs is an important first step," she explains. "I strongly believe that full-strength, undiluted essential oils are too strong for animals, who are very sensitive to essential oils and plant medicine. Some essential oils, due to their chemical constituents, can cause skin irritation if not diluted and, because their olfactory systems are much stronger than ours, dogs can be overwhelmed by undiluted essential oils."

Cleveland created the massage oil she calls "Path to Comfort" for her dog Oscar. "He was so active in his youth," she says. "His favorite activity was chasing rabbits and he was good at it. Then one day when he was 11, a rabbit came into the yard and Oscar got into his chase mode. The rabbit took off, but Oscar stopped, sighed, and laid back down. He looked so sad that I made a blend to help him cope with his senior years."

To a safflower oil base she added sweet marjoram essential oil for its analgesic, nervine, and vasodilator (blood vessel dilating) properties; ginger for its antispasmodic benefits; helichrysum for its analgesic, anti-inflammatory, and nervine properties; carrot seed, which is a vasodilator and smooth muscle relaxant; grapefruit for its detoxifying and emotionally uplifting benefits; vetiver, which is a deeply relaxing antispasmodic; and rose otto, distilled from rose petals, which has antidepressant and antispasmodic properties.

You can use this blend by placing a small amount of the oil in your hands and applying gently to areas on the dog's

## RELIABLE SOURCES OF QUALITY OILS

- ✓ **FROGWORKS** – Littleton, CO. (877) 973-8848; frogworks.us
- ✓ **NATURE'S Gift** – Madison, TN. (615) 612-4270; naturesgift.com
- ✓ **THE PET ALCHEMIST** – Lawrence, KS. (785) 887-1030; joanclark.com
- ✓ **ROCKY MOUNTAIN OILS** – Orem, UT. (866) 493-8159; rockymountainoils.com
- ✓ **SILK ROAD OILS** – Leicester, MA. (508) 892-9330; silkroad oils.com

body that seem stiff, sore, or restricted, or massage a few drops into painful joints.

You can learn more about Path to Comfort, individual essential oils, other canine massage blends, and Cleveland's home study course, "Working with Essential Oils for You and Your Animals," at the FrogWorks website (see sidebar above).

Pet Alchemist aromatherapist Joan Clark makes a massage blend for acute pain relief that she calls "Arf-itis," containing angelica, arnica, wintergreen, marjoram, peppermint, and tansy essential oils, in a base of arnica-infused oil, St. John's wort, jojoba, fractionated coconut oil, flower essences, and lavender hydrosol. The blend is also available as a hydrosol mist, which can be sprayed on painful areas and gently massaged in.

"Both blends contain flower essences and the best in essential oils and carrier bases," Clark says. "Regular application is needed to get the full benefits of natural treatments. Our two Chihuahuas, Spirit and Sabrina, loved this blend. Every evening before bed we massaged them and we applied it again in the morning and before any physical activity. As they got older we had Sunday Spa nights starting with a massage using the blend and ending with a warm towel over the area."

Arf-ritis Pain Relief massage oil from Silk Road Oils was developed by canine aromatherapist Faith Thanas, who blends AromaDog Products. "This is a serious treatment for stiffness and arthritis pain in dogs," she explains. "Rosemary and ginger increase circulation to the area, while juniper acts as a detoxifier, and lavender and birch calm and help relieve pain. The oils are blended with arnica and jojoba.

"This is one product that takes a little time, but you will soon see improvement. Place a drop on the affected area and gently massage it into skin."

If you search online for "aromatherapy canine arthritis remedies" you'll find many other recommendations. One popular blend combines 60 ml or ¼ cup carrier (vegetable) oil with four drops of helichrysum, two drops peppermint, three drops ginger, and three drops valerian essential oil. Another combines 120 ml or ½ cup carrier oil with eight drops lemon, six drops lavender, and eight drops ginger essential oil.

## EASY AND INEXPENSIVE

It's sad when our aging dogs slow down because of arthritis – and a joy when natural remedies that are affordable and easy to use provide relief from pain and discomfort. Incorporating medicinal herbs and essential oils into your dog's daily schedule may help him act like a puppy again. 🐾

*Next month, we'll discuss assistive devices that can help support a dog with limited mobility due to arthritis or other issues.*

*A long-time contributor to WDJ, CJ Puotinen is the author of The Encyclopedia of Natural Pet Care and other books; see page 24 for purchasing information. CJ and her husband live in Montana.*

## PAST ARTICLES ON USING ESSENTIAL OILS FOR DOGS

For more about canine aromatherapy, essential oils, and hydrosols, see:

- ✓ "Smell This, You'll Feel Better," WDJ December 2004
- ✓ "Essential Information," WDJ January 2005
- ✓ "Canines in a Mist," WDJ April 2005



PAW TRAINING AND BEHAVIOR PAW

# Good Growling

*Dogs growl for a number of reasons – and you should be thankful that they do!*

BY PAT MILLER, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA

**F**inishing up my morning chores, I am sweeping the barn aisle when I hear ferocious growling erupt in the feed room. Do I drop my broom and run to break up a dog fight? No, I chuckle to myself and keep on sweeping. I know that two of my dogs are playing tug with their favorite rope toy and that the ruckus is nothing to be concerned about. I can easily interpret the tone of the growling, and recognize it as healthy, mutually enjoyable play. Also, my experience and education in canine behavior has led to my understanding that canine growling, in *all* of its various presentations, is a *good* thing, not a bad thing.

In the old-fashioned dog training world, generally all growling was perceived as bad – an aggressive threat. Anything that elicited a growl from a dog was bad, too, which is why many

dog owners have been warned against playing tug with their dogs – because it encourages aggression, as evidenced by the dog’s growls. I give myself a mental smack on the forehead every time I hear

Many tiny dogs seem to feel they have to be quite dramatic in order to have their message “heard.” This little guy’s growl, in combination with his stiff, braced posture; high, stiff tail, and snarl, is clearly warning that he’s uncomfortable with whatever the person is doing at the other end of the leash.

this; it’s inconceivable to me that some dog training “professionals” still perpetuate this myth despite all the evidence to the contrary. My clients are invariably thrilled when I give them permission – no, *encourage* them – to play tug with their dogs.

Modern trainers know that dogs growl for a variety of reasons, and that *all* growling communicates important information to an educated dog owner.

So what are the various kinds of growling, and why are they *all* good?

■ **PLAY GROWL** – Like my dogs in the feed room, dogs often growl while playing, just as they exhibit other behaviors in play that are often associated with aggression, such as bites, snarls, muzzle punches, and body slams. Whether the growls happen during a rousing game of tug or a more physical play encounter, the key here is that the *dogs* know they are playing. Often accompanied by play bows and other body language cues that telegraph to the playmates that it’s all in fun, pseudo-aggression is just part of the game.

Some owners, uncomfortable with any growling, stop perfectly healthy play, preventing their dogs from engaging in a normal, beneficial social activity. In reality, dog-human tug is a great game: it’s good exercise, an excellent reinforcer for other behaviors, and strengthens the bond between dog and owner when they engage in a mutually enjoyable game. (See “Rules for Tug,” facing page.)

In healthy dog-dog play, if Dog A starts to escalate his level of arousal to a level that makes Dog B uncomfortable, Dog B signals his discomfort with appeasing body language and Dog A tones it down a couple of notches. Dog A happily rejoins the fun, and the growling and biting resume.

Aggressive, aroused play goes sour when Dog A ignores Dog B’s discomfort and continues to escalate. Rather than happily continuing to engage, Dog B clearly tries to avoid the activity – often unsuccessfully as Dog A continues his



pursuit. When this happens, Dog B may escalate to defensive aggression in order to try to get Dog A to back off.

While Dog B often gets blamed for “starting” the fight, Dog A is really the culprit. The problem here is not the growling, but rather Dog A’s inappropriate play style and poor social skills. It is appropriate for the human to cheerfully intervene (before the fight happens!) when one dog is clearly not enjoying the interaction.

■ **“TALKING” GROWL** – There are several breeds of dogs that are well-known for growling as a way of “talking.” Rottweilers are the most notorious for this, but there are many more. Just as the submissive grin is often mistaken for a real snarl by uninformed humans, the growly talking dog is often misunderstood by people who may think he is being aggressive. Not so!

That said, you have to pay attention

to the entire package of body language with growly “talkers.” Perhaps your neighbor’s Rottie is leaning against you in what seems like a friendly manner. You oblige with a good butt-scratch. As your fingernails find that spot just above his tail, you feel the rumble of a growl vibrate through him. Yikes! Is he about to bite you? Should you stop scratching? It depends.

If the dog is still leaning against you, with relaxed ears, eyes a little squinty, and an open, relaxed mouth, this dog’s growl is just expressing his pleasure; he’s really enjoying his canine massage. If, however, he stands up, his body tense and still, his eyes hard, and his mouth closed, then yes, he has taken offense.

There’s a good chance it’s the first scenario, not the second. If you’re sure he’s loving it, resume scratching. If not, sit still, avoid eye contact, and calmly ask the dog’s owner to call him away. When the dog has moved away, explain to the

owner what happened, and ask for her interpretation. Owners of growly dogs are sometimes pretty good at being able to decode their dogs’ messages. (But not always, so trust your own instincts, too!)

These dogs may also growl-talk as a means of communication in other situations, and the tone of the growl can even vary slightly, providing even more information to the educated ear. That deep grumble might mean, “I’d like my dinner, please,” while a higher-pitched, more intense growl might mean, “I need to go out to potty, *now!*”

■ **ALERT GROWL** – Your dog may also growl to let the rest of his social group (including you) know there’s something to be concerned about. A noise outside, or elsewhere in the house, may elicit what I call the “alert growl,” meaning, “Hey, everyone, pay attention! There’s something out there and I’m not sure what it is, but it could be a threat.

## RULES FOR TUG

A couple of decades ago, when positive reinforcement-based training was in its infancy, we were quite sensitive to criticism from the dog training community about this new “permissive” style of dog training. When we began encouraging people to play tug with their dogs, conscious of the fear that it would cause aggression, we created a detailed set of rules for playing tug, including the caveat that the human had to always “win” the game by gaining possession of the tug toy.

As the passage of time supported our contention that tug does not cause aggression, we have softened those rules considerably. Here are the simplified tug rules that I now play by:

- ✓ Dog needs to sit politely and wait for the invitation to tug. If he leaps and grabs for the toy before being invited to do so (I use the cue “Tug!”) – I whisk the toy away and hide it behind my back. (In the language of behavior modification, this is called “negative punishment” – the dog’s behavior makes the good thing go away.)
- ✓ When he remains sitting politely until invited to tug, we play. (This is “positive reinforcement” – the dog’s behavior makes a good thing happen.)



- ✓ If dog’s teeth leave the toy and touch human skin or clothing, the game stops with an “Oops!” (no-reward marker) and the toy goes away (negative punishment). Just for a moment – and then we can play again. (If he persistently mouths skin or clothing and/or mouthing escalates with tug play, that’s another behavioral issue; I would stop playing tug until the mouthing is under better control.)

That’s it! I don’t care who “wins.” We can alternate! I don’t care who initiates play; he can bring me the toy and ask me to play, or I can pick up the toy and start the game. There’s just one last really important rule:

- ✓ Have fun!



**Some dogs growl (rather than bark) to let you know there is something to be concerned about outside.**

more. “Please,” he’s saying gently, “I don’t want you to be here.”

If you ignore those signals and continue to invade his comfort zone, his threats may intensify, with more tension, a hard stare, and a low growl. “I mean it,” he’s saying more firmly, “I want you to leave.”

If those are ignored, he may become more insistent, with an air snap, a bump of the nose (called a “muzzle punch”), or even open-mouth contact that closes gently on your hand or arm but doesn’t break skin. “Please,” he’s saying, “don’t make me bite you.”

If that doesn’t succeed in convincing you to leave, or to stop whatever you are doing that’s worrying him, the dog may feel compelled to bite hard enough to break skin in his efforts to protect himself, his territory, members of his social group, or other valuable resources.

Aggression is caused by stress. The stressor may be related to pain, fear, intrusion, threats to resources, and past association or anticipation of any of these things. (See “A New Threshold,” WDJ October 2010.) An *assertive* dog acts aggressively because he’s stressed by the intrusion of another dog or human into his territory. A *fearful* dog bites because he’s stressed by the approach of a human. An *injured* dog lacerates the hand of his rescuer because he’s stressed by pain.

## HOW TO RESPOND TO A WARNING GROWL

Lots of humans who understand that the above-described growling situations don’t indicate aggression may *still* overreact to a growl that clearly is a warning and a possible precursor to aggression. The problem here is a failure to understand that a warning growl is a really *good* thing; it means he is doing his best to *not* bite you. A warning growl says, “I am very uncomfortable here . . . please don’t make me bite.”

The appropriate human response, in this case, is to quickly determine what is making the dog so uncomfortable, and remove the stressor so he doesn’t feel compelled to bite.

It’s usually not rocket science. If you are walking your dog and he sees someone coming toward you on the sidewalk and starts growling while looking at him

or her, that person is scary to him; quickly do a U-turn or step off the sidewalk or take other immediate action to put some space between your dog and the person that is scary to him at that moment.

If you are trying to put a new coat on your dog, and hear a warning growl, stop what you are doing and give him some space. He’s just told you that a slower approach to the coat, with some counter-conditioning and desensitization, is in order. (See “Counter-Conditioning and Desensitization,” WDJ February 2016.)

Unfortunately, the all-too-common human response to growling is to take offense. Many owners immediately think, “How dare you growl at me!!” They grab the dog’s collar, smack him, and/or thrown him on the ground in a misguided “alpha roll.” In some cases, the dog might be intimidated into silence, but in many cases, the punished dog will be pushed into biting the very human he was trying hard not to bite.

It can seem intuitive to punish growling. Growling leads to biting, and dogs who bite people often are euthanized, so let’s save our dog’s life by punishing him at the first sign of inappropriate behavior. I can see how it seems to make sense, but when you have a deeper understanding of canine aggression, it’s easy to understand why it’s always the *absolute wrong* thing to do.

When you punish a growl or other early warning signs (such as a snarl or snap), you may succeed in suppressing the warning behavior, *but this doesn’t remove the stress that caused the growl in the first place*. Actually, you increase the stress, because now you, the dog’s owner, have become unpredictable and violent as well. If you succeed in suppressing the warning signs, you end up with a dog who bites without warning. He learns that it’s not safe to warn.

If a dog is frightened of men, he may growl when a man approaches. You, conscientious and responsible owner, are well aware of the stigma – and fate – of dogs who bite people, so you punish your dog with a yank on the leash and a loud “No! Bad dog!” Every time your dog growls at a man you do this – and quickly your dog’s fear of men is confirmed: men do make bad things happen! He likes men even less, but he learns not to growl at them to avoid making you turn mean.

In contrast, you think he’s learned that it’s not okay to be aggressive to men, because the next time one passes by, there’s

Someone might want to check it out!!”

Often, if you do check it out and assure your dog that all is well (and thank him for doing his job), he’ll relax and go about his business. Absent that, he may feel the need to continue to warn about the perceived possible threat or intruder.

Of course, checking it out isn’t a guarantee that he’ll stop alerting. If he feels that something more needs to be done, he may continue his efforts to warn you that danger is afoot. If so, it may help to actually show him the source of the noise, so he can reassure himself that all is well.

■ **WARNING GROWL** – As long as they have not been punished for growling (and we’ll talk more about that momentarily), dogs will usually issue a warning growl to humans or another dog if they are uncomfortable. It’s important to understand that a warning is a *good* thing!

Most dogs don’t *want* to bite or fight. Social groups work because members tend to avoid violence, so a system of communication develops to facilitate avoidance of aggression. The behaviors that signal pending aggression are intended, first and foremost, to warn away a threat. The dog who doesn’t want to bite or fight tries his hardest to make you go away. He may begin with subtle signs of discomfort that are often overlooked by many humans – tension in his body movements, a stiffly wagging tail, a freeze, and hard stare, and



If your dog erupts in growling at the sight of something, don't yell, yank, or in any way punish him. Instead, immediately get him farther away. Then start counter-conditioning and desensitizing him to the sight and proximity of whatever it was that triggered his discomfort, at a distance that keeps him "under threshold."

no growl. "Phew," you think to yourself. "We dodged that bullet!" Convinced that your dog now accepts men because he no longer growls at them, the next time one approaches and asks if he can pet your dog, you say yes. In fact, your dog has simply learned not to growl, but men still make him very uncomfortable. Your dog is now *super*-stressed, trying to control his growl as the man gets nearer and nearer, but when the scary man reaches for him he can't hold back any longer – he lunges forward and snaps at the man's hand. Fortunately, you're able to restrain him with the leash so he doesn't connect. You, the dog, and the man are all quite shaken by the incident.

It's time to change your thinking.

A warning growl is a dog's cry for help. It's your dog's way of telling you



he can't tolerate a situation – as if he's saying, "I can't handle this, please get me out of here!" Instead of making things worse, heed the warning. Help your dog out of the situation that's causing him discomfort, and take behavior modification steps to help him become more comfortable with the stressor.

The next time your dog growls, don't panic. Just determine what kind of growl it is, and respond appropriately. Now, go play some tug! 🐾

Author Pat Miller, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA, is WDJ's Training Editor. She and her husband Paul live in Fairplay, Maryland, site of her Peaceable Paws training center, where Pat offers dog-training classes and courses for trainers. Miller is also the author of many books on positive training. Her newest is **Beware of the Dog: Positive Solutions for Aggressive Behavior in Dogs** (Dogwise Publishing, 2016). See "Resources," page 24 for more information on Pat's books, dog-training classes, and courses for trainers.



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# DOG DAYS— All Year Long!

For a dog lover, this is the perfect calendar! Not only will you meet a dozen of the most winsome, lively calendar canines we could find, but also, each month you'll get timely, pertinent guidance for keeping your own dog healthy and happy throughout the year. In this year's edition, each month is introduced with suggested goals – achievements that can improve the relationship between you and your dog!

WDJ's 2017 Calendar is generously sized to make it easy for you to fill in birthdays, anniversaries, vet appointments, and all the dates you need to remember.

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# Great Dog Gifts

*Holiday gift ideas for your favorite dog – or your favorite dog lover.*

**W**e've never published a gift guide before. But after spending three days at Superzoo, a gigantic trade show for pet-industry retailers, we came home with so many brochures and fliers and product samples – and so excited about some of the novel, useful, and fun things we saw there – that we had to share some of the best with you. We hope you get some ideas for great gifts for the dogs and dog owners you love.



## ▼ GOLD PAWS SERIES STRETCH FLEECE COAT

Simply put, this is the nicest coat we've ever seen for warmth, fit, and comfort. Gold Paws Series makes its Stretch Fleece Coat from a buttery-soft, four-way stretch fabric that moves with your dog, no matter how active or exuberant he is. The fabric is light, adding just enough warmth without the possibility of overheating even an active dog. The design is well-tailored, so even though the coat has no bothersome zippers, Velcro, snaps, or straps, it stays on the dog without shifting, bunching, or rubbing. We threw a toy for our model for an hour, and didn't have to adjust or straighten his coat even once.

The company is located in Oregon, and all of its products are sewn in the U.S., with

fabric milled just for Gold Paw Series in a bluesign-certified mill (which ensures the mill is audited for energy, water, and chemical usage to help achieve long-term environmental improvement). That's going the extra mile to do the job the right way.

This coat comes in 15 sizes, ranging from size 2 (for dogs who measure four inches or less from collar to tail) to 30 (for dogs who measure 29 inches or longer). If your dog is an odd size, for an extra \$10, the company will make the coat to custom dimensions. The coats slip over the dog's head, and easily stretch to accommodate maneuvering even the longest limbs through the arm holes. It's available in 14 solid colors and four patterns (one leopard, three plaid).

Dogs in the coldest climates may benefit from the Duluth double Fleece, essentially a two-layer, reversible version of the same Stretch Fleece coat. The Portland Pullover is the same design with a waterproof and dirt-repellent shell.

Look on the company website for a retailer that carries these coats; once you feel the fabric, you'll be a buyer.

**GOLD PAWS STRETCH FLEECE COAT**  
– \$20 to \$36 depending on size

**Gold Paws Series**  
Clackamas, Oregon  
(503) 387-6920  
[goldpawseries.com](http://goldpawseries.com)



## ▼ SLEEPYPOD'S YUMMY TRAVEL BOWL

A \$30 bowl? Have we lost our minds? Nope! We found the first travel bowl we don't ever want to live without.

It's actually three pieces that fit together, allowing you to bring along a bowl of water, as well as a serving of your dog's food, and keep them separate and secure. When you arrive to your destination, you pull apart the pieces so that the food and water can be served in their respective sections. And the water section of the bowl has a spill-resistant design, with a wide rim



that keeps water from sloshing out (or being lapped out by a sloppy drinker). But wait, there's more!

Removed and turned upside down, the lid serves as an extra bowl with an attached "saucer." Pour a little water in the "saucer," you now have an ant-proof bowl.

If you fill the water bowl and freeze it, you can either allow it to melt during the day, keeping the water fresh and cold, or use it to keep your dog's raw diet (stored in the food section of the bowl) fresh and cold for a feeding later in the day. Wow!

The bowl is made silicone, a, FDA-approved food-grade, baby-safe alternative to BPA-containing plastics. Plus, , silicone is freezer-, microwave-, and dishwasher-safe!



### YUMMY TRAVEL BOWL – \$30 to \$40

**Sleepypod**  
Pasadena, California  
(877) 763-6963  
[sleepypod.com](http://sleepypod.com)

The Yummy Travel Bowl comes in two sizes; both are three inches deep but the smaller size is six inches wide and the medium is 7 ½ inches wide. (The medium size is \$10 more.) Both sizes are available in five attractive jewel-tone colors. We like to mix and match them.

We can no longer imagine spending a day in the car (or a night in a hotel) with our dog without one or two Yummy Travel Bowls along for the ride!

## ▼ PLANET DOG'S ORBEE-TUFF SQUEAK BALL

We've long been fans of the Planet Dog Orbee-Tuff Sol ball – or rather, we should say, the past two generations of our *dogs* have been fans. Planet Dog got the "mouth feel" of this ball just right to suit all the dogs we know: not so hard that the dog can't squish them as they return from a retrieve, but not so soft that they get chewed and

ground between the dog's molars, either. That makes for a very short-lived toy!

But the company has outdone itself with its new Squeak ball. At three inches in diameter, it's large enough for most dogs to hold and fetch comfortably, but also small enough that all but the tiniest dogs can get chomp down hard enough to make it loudly SQUEAK! Our dog Otto, a serious squeakaholic, just about went off the deep end in squeaking bliss with this ball.

The Squeak ball comes in just two colors, blue and orange. Like all Orbee-Tuff balls, Squeak is made in the U.S., non-toxic, durable, bouncy, chewy, buoyant, and always 100% guaranteed. *But this is the only one that squeaks!!*

Also, it's not just the fact that the ball squeaks that makes it special, it's how Planet Dog made the ball squeak that's extra cool. A patent-pending squeaker is built right into the ball; it's not a separate piece that can be "chewed out of" the ball.



### ORBEE-TUFF SQUEAK BALL – \$16

**Planet Dog**  
Westbrook, Maine  
(800) 381-1516  
[planetdog.com](http://planetdog.com)

At a suggested retail price of \$15, this is a ball that you spend the time searching for when it goes astray in an errant throw. But you can feel good about spending your hard-earned cash on Planet Dog goods. The company gives two percent of every sale to the Planet Dog Foundation; more than \$1 million has been given in the past decade to support the Foundation's mission : promoting and supporting assistance dog organizations.

Dogs who prefer a harder, less squishy ball might prefer the Orbee-Tuff Diamond Plate ball or the original Orbee ball – the one with the raised facsimile of the continents. But for dogs who like to chomp a bit, we'd recommend filling their stockings with Sol or Squeak balls for a raucously happy New Year (and maybe some earplugs for their humans!)

## ▼ WHOLESOME HIDE'S SUPER THICK RETRIEVER ROLLS

Some of you don't approve of giving your dog rawhide to chew, and that's fine. The vast majority of rawhide chews on the market are horrible, anyway. They are generally either made of tiny scraps of rawhide glued together with dog-knows-what, or made from foreign-sourced hides that have been soaked in dog-knows-what chemicals in an effort to knock down the bacterial count. Your dog is better off without this sort of chew!

But what if we told you that there is a domestic manufacturer of rawhide chews, a company that uses fresh, refrigerated hides and nothing stronger than peroxide to clean and preserve them? And what if we told you that this company offers one product in particular that is made from a

single sheet of rawhide – one large square sheet that is rolled up, without any little pieces of scrap hiding inside?

That's the holy grail of rawhide chews, because a dog has to chew and chew to remove even tiny pieces of hide. True, you don't want a dog eating a lot of it in any one session. But because it's impossible to swallow large pieces, and it takes so much work to remove tiny pieces – and given the quality of the materials and manufacture – we feel confident that this is the safest rawhide chew out there.

We don't recommend giving dogs rawhide as a regular thing throughout their lifetimes. But when your dog is seriously teething, from about six months through



**The holy grail of rawhide: the Super Thick Retriever Roll (above), a single satisfying sheet of chewy goodness. Contrast that the thin-skinned, scrap-stuffed type of rawhide chew you see in most pet supply chains (right).**



young adulthood, there truly is nothing more satisfying to chew.

As with all things that you give a dog to chew, you need to limit his time with the Retriever Rolls, and supervise, supervise, supervise. Take the roll away and dispose of it when it gets anywhere close to small enough to be swallowed. With Woody here, that's about three or four inches long; a small dog could maybe be trusted with it down to one or two inches.

We've found the Rolls in quality independent pet supply stores; there is a list of retailers on the Wholesome Hide website. We've also ordered from an online retailer who sells 10 rolls for \$100. That should get Woody through the rest of his adolescence!

**SUPER THICK RETRIEVER ROLL – \$10**  
**Wholesome Hide**  
**Dolton, Illinois**  
**(888) 872-1110**  
**wholesomehide.com**

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## ▼ WEST PAW DESIGN'S HOLIDAY TOYS

West Paw Design is another highly reputable company with a penchant for producing creative toys and other products for pets. But when we saw their line of stuffed Holiday Toys, we were initially less than impressed; the plush reindeer, bones, pine trees, stars, and bears seemed like your average stuffed toys – something we'd be picking up the pieces of in 15 minutes or so after Woody started playing with them.

But not only did the toys survive session after session of rough play (including tug of war between Woody and a puppy), after a trip through the washing machine, they looked nearly good as new! The Holiday Toys are tougher than they looked. Well, that's what we would have expected from West Paw: good materials and good workmanship, and *always* handcrafted in Montana, U.S. of A.

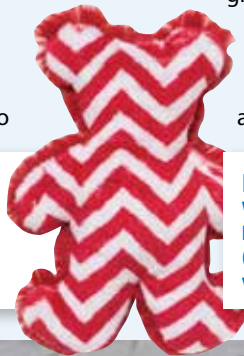
Most of the Holiday Toys come in two sizes, small and large, and there are a dozen different designs to choose from. West Paw also offers a number of non-holiday-themed stuffed toys to

choose from, including cute flamingos, giraffes, and other animals in their "Floppy Dog Toys" line.



If you are looking for a more significant gift than stocking stuffers, don't overlook West Paw Design's wide variety of dog beds. Their luxurious yet durable beds come in crate friendly sizes. West Paw Design's Heyday Bed Collection features low-profile, pillowy bolsters and double-stuff bases – not the thinly stuffed sort of beds that the giant chain stores tend to carry.

These beds are *truly* comfortable, attractive, durable, machine-washable, and dryer safe.



**STUFFED HOLIDAY TOYS – \$11 to \$16**  
 West Paw Design  
 Bozeman, Montana  
 (800) 443-5567  
[westpawdesign.com](http://westpawdesign.com)

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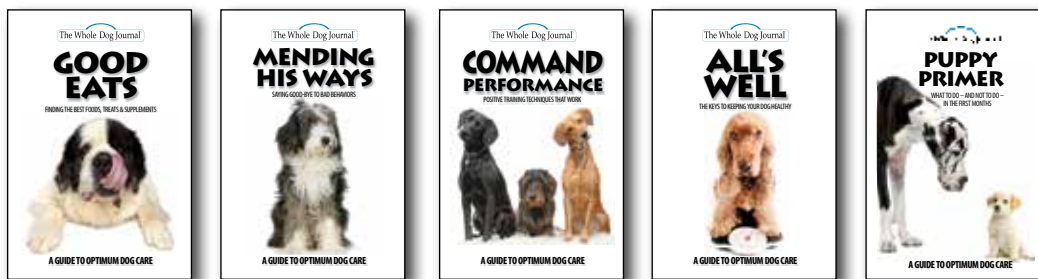
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Scoopin' for Science	Mar	12
Ready to Board (Boarding Facilities)	May	10
Dog House Beautiful	Nov	8
<b>EDITORIAL</b>	<b>ISSUE</b>	<b>PG</b>
To Train the Dog, Teach the Handler	Jan	2
Dog Building Blocks	Feb	2
It's the Pits	Mar	2
The Pros of Puppies	Apr	2
Lifelong Learning	May	2
Twice as Nice?	June	2
Hot Weather	July	2
Saying Goodbye	Aug	2
Superzoo	Sept	2
Ask For More From Pet Food Makers	Oct	2
Things Dog Owners Should Never Be Without	Nov	2
A Tale of Two Puppies	Dec	2
<b>HEALTH</b>		
What "Holistic" Use of Herbs Means	Jan	8
Puppy Vaccines	Jan	11
Scoot Away (Anal Sac Problems)	Jan	16
Helping Itchy Dogs	Feb	20
Nailing It: Why You Must Trim Nails	Apr	3
Top Four Herbs for Dogs	Apr	12
Taking Blood Pressure	Apr	18
Salmonella: Danger or Not?	May	6
Cayenne for Dogs	May	20
Gastropexies and Bloat	June	12
Vitamin D Is for Dogs	July	18
Reduce the Chance of Cancer	Aug	3
Soundness	Aug	16
Cryptorchid Dogs	Sept	3
Canine Gastritis	Sept	8
Puppy Vaccine Schedules	Oct	11
Osteoarthritis	Oct	19
Herbal Remedies for Arthritis	Nov	16
On the Low (Thyroid) Road	Dec	3
Senior Exercise	Dec	8
Therapy That Smells Great (Essential Oils)	Dec	12
<b>NUTRITION</b>		
Dry Food Shopping	Feb	3
Approved Dry Foods 2016	Feb	8
Profile: Nature's Variety	June	6
By What Standard: Nutritional Adequacy	June	11
Canned Food Review and Approved Canned Foods	Oct	5

<b>PRODUCT REVIEWS</b>		
Gear of the Year	Jan	3
Puppy-Walking Equipment	Jan	15
Recommended Dog Books	Jan	20
The Best Beds	Mar	3
Tough Chew Toys	Mar	11
More Gear of the Year	Mar	14
K9 PFDs (Life Jackets)	July	6
Best Bait Bags	Aug	6
Another Great Bait Bag	Sept	18
Winter Dog Boots	Nov	3
Gift Guide	Dec	18
<b>TRAINING, BEHAVIOR, AND MANAGEMENT</b>		
Puppy Conundrum: Socialize or Protect?	Jan	10
Leashless Leash Training	Jan	13
Book Excerpt: Beyond the Back Yard	Jan	18
Racist Dog?	Feb	12
Foundations of a Good Relationship	Feb	14
The Eyes Have It (Eye Contact)	Feb	16
Chews Wisely (Puppy Chewing)	Mar	8
The Meal Deal: Meals vs. Grazing	Mar	16
Cats and Dogs, Living Together	Mar	20
Tricks for Clicks	Apr	6
Training Walks	Apr	14
Apartment Life (With Dogs)	Apr	20
Close Encounters With Loose Dogs	May	3
Jail House Dogs	May	15
What Dogs Know About You	June	3
Unconventional Cues	June	15
Earn a Title at Home	June	18
Postpartum Depression and Your Dog	June	22
Breed Identification and Consequences	July	3
10 Most Important Puppy Lessons	July	12
A Good Enough Dog	July	16
Fear and Aggression	Aug	11
Professionals Qualified to Deal with Aggression	Aug	15
Your Dog's Advocate	Aug	20
Is Behavior Genetic?	Sept	6
Stopping Escape Artists	Sept	14
Why We Say No to Shock	Sept	17
More Unique Cues	Sept	19
Separation Anxiety	Oct	14
Pro-Choice: Empowerment for Your Dog	Nov	12
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❖ ***The Encyclopedia of Natural Pet Care*** and ***Natural Remedies for Dogs and Cats***, by WDJ contributor CJ Puotinen, are available from [dogwise.com](http://dogwise.com) and from [wholedogjournal.com](http://wholedogjournal.com)

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