

Your complete guide to natural dog care and training

Whole Dog Journal™



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Sure to Help

Pet health insurance relieves concerns about extraordinary veterinary costs.

I'm giving myself a big pat on the back. Late last year, not only did I *decide* to enroll both of my dogs in a pet insurance plan, I actually *did* it. I'm not exactly *happy* that both of my dogs have needed a lot of veterinary attention lately, but having insurance when they did has helped reduce the financial stress.

I had an epiphany when my adolescent Lab/pit-mix, Woody, swallowed a small tennis ball (after 6 on a Friday night, no less): Such an exuberant, athletic, and spontaneous dog needs insurance. And Otto, my scruffy heart-dog does, too. He's a big dog and closing in on 10 years old, an age that prompts concerns about things like cancer. I wanted a full-coverage plan for Otto, but I was tempted to buy young, abundantly healthy Woody a "major medical" plan only. However, such an active dog is prone to things like a torn ACL, and only the top-of-the-line plans cover knee surgeries and the like, so I ended up looking for a deluxe plan for him, too.

After a bit of research, I settled on a plan called "Whole Pet with Wellness" offered by Nationwide Pet Insurance (formerly VPI) for both dogs. It seems like it will cover anything that my dogs might need and reimburse me for 90 percent of the cost of vet visits after a \$250 (per year) deductible. Woody's coverage costs \$58 per month; Otto's costs \$122 per month. That definitely puts a dent in my monthly budget, but as it turns out, it's worth it.

Foxtails, the bane of a California dog's existence, prompted Woody's first, second, and third trips to the vet this year. His insurance hasn't quite paid for itself so far, but if he has just one more veterinary visit for an injury or illness this year, it likely will be a draw.

And, darn it, as I write, we're in the middle of trying to diagnose a concerning issue with Otto. Through July 31, I've spent \$854 on his insurance and \$1,550 on his medical bills for a total of \$2,404. But I've got \$1,170 coming back to me (\$1,550 minus the \$250 deductible equals \$1,300; Nationwide reimburses me for 90 percent of that, which is \$1,170), meaning my net cost so far, for insurance plus my share of Otto's medical bills, is \$1,234. Woohoo! I'm ahead so far – which is good, because I may end up spending a good bit more on him before this is through.

Knowing that I need only pay for the monthly insurance plus 10 percent of any more potential vet bills this year eases my mind – at least about the money, anyway. I'll explain more about what was going on with both dogs in a blog post; see wholedogjournal.com/blog. In the meantime, think good thoughts for Otto, would you?

NK





Oral Flea-Control Meds

What you should know before administering one of the many prescription flea-killing oral medications on the market.

There's no getting around the fact that the most common trigger for allergic reactions in dogs is flea bites. Flea allergy dermatitis is so common, in fact, that if your dog is persistently itchy, your veterinarian might not be willing to consider any other potential cause of his itching until your dog has been maintained on whatever flea-prevention treatment your veterinarian approves of for at least a few months!

If a dog is particularly itchy – and especially if he's focusing on itchy places such as his flanks and his back at the top of his tail – the first thing to suspect is that he's been bitten by fleas, or maybe even just one flea. All dogs itch when bitten by fleas, because flea saliva, which is injected into your dog when the flea bites and feeds on your dog's blood, is irritating. But dogs with an allergy to flea saliva may go berserk with pruritus (severe itching), chewing and scratching themselves until a hot spot (formally known as acute moist pyotraumatic dermatitis) forms.

Today, there are any number of tools and tactics an owner can employ to eliminate fleas as a source of her dog's discomfort. These include:

- Oral medications
- Topical “spot-on” pesticides
- Insect growth regulators (IGRs), which prevent the normal development of flea eggs and larvae
- Other topical pesticides: shampoos, dips, powders, sprays
- Treatments for the dog's environment
- Cleaning methods aimed at ridding/killing non-adult fleas
- An approach that encompasses several or all of these would be called integrated flea control, or more generally, integrated pest management

For several reasons, veterinarians tend to put the most stock in the first two on this list



– and more specifically, the prescription-only versions of these. In fact, these are the two most effective solutions for killing fleas – but they aren't without potential side effects and they *should* represent only a part of a dog owner's efforts to control fleas.

This month, we'll examine the prescription oral flea-control medications that kill adult fleas. Next month, we'll discuss prescription oral medications that help control fleas through the use of insect-growth regulators, as well as the over-the-counter oral products that kill fleas. In upcoming issues, we'll survey the spot-on pesticides and other flea-control strategies.

WHY ORAL OVER TOPICAL

Last year, I fostered a Great Dane who had a very thin coat and who was very itchy. When I took her to a veterinarian for a complete examination and discussion of what we could do for her itching, the vet essentially refused to consider any sort of allergy diagnosis or treatment until the dog had been on an oral flea-prevention medication for a *minimum* of three months. She said, that in her opinion

Most dogs who get bitten by a flea will itch. But flea-allergic dogs often itch and scratch and chew on themselves until they create hot spots (acute moist pyotraumatic dermatitis). For these dogs in particular, an oral flea-control medication may make the most sense.

and experience, “only longer-term oral medications offer enough protection from fleas to rule out an allergy to fleas as the cause of persistent itching.” To that end, she prescribed a medication called Bravecto, a drug that can kill any fleas that bite the dog for as long as 12 weeks after the dog is dosed.

I countered that I could repeat topical insecticides at regular intervals. But the veterinarian was firm in her belief that only a dose of Bravecto would ensure that there would be no gap in flea prevention for long enough to ensure that the Dane’s itching was not caused by fleas.

Merck, the maker of Bravecto, strongly promotes this point, taking slightly different tacks on its product website pages for owners and veterinarians. Owners are told that Bravecto makes flea control easy: “With Bravecto Chew, dogs get 12 weeks of flea and tick protection with a single treatment. That’s nearly three times longer than monthly treatments. This makes it easy for you to provide long-lasting coverage to your dog, without having to worry about remembering frequent treatments.”

On Merck’s pages for veterinarians, the most-promoted benefit is owner compliance: “Convenient long-lasting protection means less chance of noncompliance,” it says on one page. “Bravecto makes all the difference in improving pet-owner compliance,” it says on another.

EDIBLE EDGE

There are a number of other advantages to using an oral flea-control product:

- If you or your children pet the dog, you may prefer not to have contact with a topical product. This could also be true in a multi-pet household where pets groom each other.

- Dogs with longer coats often sport a “greasy spot” for several days after topicals have been applied, increasing the concern of petting the dog and coming into contact with the pesticide.

- Owners of dogs with skin prob-

lems, or who have had a reaction in the past to any sort of topical product, might prefer to use an oral one.

- Bathing or even swimming too soon after application may reduce the effectiveness of topicals.

- Some ingredients used to kill ticks, such as permethrin (used in K9 Advantix and other products) and amitraz (used in Certifect and the Preventic collar), are toxic to cats, which can be a problem in a household that includes both, especially if they are friendly with each other. In that case, giving the dog an oral product would be safer for the cat.

- Because the insecticides in the newer oral products haven’t been used for very long, they can be more effective in areas where fleas and ticks may have built up some resistance to the older topical products.

- Last but not least, oral flea-control medications have been proven to be more effective than topical pesticides in both killing fleas and helping to control a household infestation more quickly.

THERE’S ALWAYS A CATCH

Every product you feed or use on your dog poses some amount of risk, and some percentage of dogs will react badly to any product.

One disadvantage of these medications is that, once a dog digests one, it’s in his system for as long as it’s designed to be. If a dog has an adverse reaction to a topical pesticide, his owner can immediately bathe him to reduce the adverse effects. The effects of an oral medication can’t be mitigated in this way.

That said, the most common adverse side effects of oral flea-control medication are stomach upset and vomiting. The very fact that a dog *can* vomit up the medication – and the possibility that he might do so without you being aware of this – is a fairly significant disadvantage, too. If you don’t find the vomit, you may think the product was just plain ineffective. And

then there is the possibility the vomit is discovered and eaten by another one of your dogs!

It should also be noted that while all of these products are formulated with palatants to entice a dog to chew them up and eat them, some dogs may refuse. In this case, you will be forced to either sneak the medication into the dog’s food or give it to him like any other pill – and you’d have to break the larger doses for large dogs into pieces to “pill” them.

It should be noted that an oral medication can compromise the integrity of a necessarily strict food-allergy trial.

Only a very small percentage of dogs suffer the most serious adverse reactions posed by this class of medication: seizures and other neurological reactions.

TYPES OF ORAL PRODUCTS

There are several types of oral products that are marketed to dog owners to help with flea infestations:

- Prescription oral flea-killing medications. These work in the dog’s system for at least a month.

- Over-the-counter (OTC) oral flea-killing medications (Capstar, Capguard, FastCaps, Advantus). None of these products work for longer than 24 hours – but they do work quickly to kill fleas.

- Prescription medications that do not kill fleas, but contain insect-growth regulators, which help control flea populations by preventing the fleas from maturing and reproducing (Sentinel, Sentinel Spectrum). Fewer adverse reactions in dogs are reported for these products than for the flea-killing medications.

Again, this month, we’re going to discuss only the prescription oral flea-killing medications. We’ll look at the other two categories next month.

ISOXAZOLINES

There are not that many medications approved by the FDA for controlling

fleas on dogs. Most products contain one significant “active ingredient” that controls fleas, although a few contain more than one.

The newest class of insecticides are isoxazolines, chemicals that are selectively toxic to insects (fleas) and acarines (mites and ticks) in a way that does not pose a risk to mammals. Isoxazolines kill fleas and ticks by inhibiting their ligand-gated chloride channels, in particular, those gated by the GABA neurotransmitter. This blocks pre- and post-synaptic transfer of chloride ions across cell membranes, resulting in uncontrolled activity of the fleas’ and ticks’ central nervous system (CNS) and death.

In plain English? The operation of many physiological processes rely on ion channels, chemical pathways where charged ions from dissolved salts (including sodium, potassium, calcium, and chloride) pass through otherwise impermeable cell membranes. Most of these channels are gated, opening and closing in response to certain stimuli. Isoxazolines close the chemical gates on chloride channels that are essential

for the CNS of fleas and ticks, resulting in their death.

■ NexGard

The active ingredient in NexGard, a product introduced by Frontline Vet Labs, a division of Merial, Inc., in 2013, is an isoxazoline chemical called afoxolaner. It is given once a month. Each NexGard treatment kills fleas and the black-legged tick, American dog tick, Lone Star tick, and brown dog tick. It also kills the mite responsible for demodectic mange, though it has not yet received FDA approval for this use.

Studies indicate NexGard was 100 percent effective against fleas within 24 hours, and more than 97 percent effective against American dog ticks and Lone Star ticks, 94 percent effective against black-legged ticks, and 93 percent effective against brown dog ticks.

NexGard can be given with food or on an empty stomach.

The most common adverse reactions recorded in clinical trials were

vomiting, itching, diarrhea, lethargy, and lack of appetite.

Nexgard is said to be safe for dogs and puppies who weigh four pounds or more and who are at least eight weeks of age. No adverse reactions were observed in preapproval studies when NexGard was used concomitantly with other medications, such as vaccines, dewormers, antibiotics, steroids, NSAIDs, anesthetics, and antihistamines. The safe use of NexGard in pregnant, breeding, or lactating dogs has not been evaluated. Use with caution in dogs with a history of seizures.



■ Bravecto

The active ingredient in Bravecto, a product introduced by Merck Animal Health in early 2014, is an isoxazoline chemical called fluralaner. It is given once every three months. Each Bravecto treatment kills fleas and certain species of ticks (black-legged tick, American dog tick, and brown dog tick) for 12 weeks, three times longer

PRESCRIPTION ORAL FLEA-KILLING MEDICATIONS

Product Name Maker Phone	Effective Against	Chemical Class	Active Ingredients	Frequency of Administration	Efficacy	Date of FDA Approval	Minimum Age and Weight
BRAVECTO Merck (800) 224-5318	Fleas, ticks, demodex*	Isoxazoline	Fluralaner	Up to 12 weeks	>98% of fleas & 100% of ticks within 12 hours	2014	6 months and 4.4 lbs
NEXGARD Merial (888) 637-4251 (opt. 3)	Fleas, ticks, demodex*	Isoxazoline	Afoxolaner	Monthly	100% of fleas within 24 hours (no claims made for ticks)	2013	8 weeks and 4 lbs
SIMPARICA Zoetis (888) 963-8471	Fleas, ticks, demodex*, scabies*, ear mites*	Isoxazoline	Sarolaner	Monthly	Starts within 3 hours for fleas, 8 hours for ticks	2016	6 months and 2.8 lbs
COMFORTIS ACUGUARD Elanco (888) 545-5973	Fleas	Spinosyn	Spinosad	Monthly	100% of fleas within 4 hours	2007	14 weeks and 3.3 lbs
TRIFEXIS COMBOGUARD Elanco (888) 545-5973	Fleas, heartworms, roundworms, hookworms, whipworms	Spinosyn	Spinosad, milbemycin oxime	Monthly	100% of fleas within 4 hours	2011	8 weeks and 5 lbs

*Not yet approved in the U.S. for control of these parasites, though veterinarians might suggest them as “off-label” treatments

than any other oral flea treatment. It kills the lone star tick for eight weeks. It also kills the mite responsible for demodectic mange, though it has not yet received FDA approval for this use. Studies indicate that Bravecto kills more than 98 percent of fleas, and 100 percent of ticks, in less than 12 hours after administration.

Bravecto should be administered with food to maximize the bioavailability of the active ingredient.

The most common adverse reactions recorded in clinical trials were vomiting, decreased appetite, diarrhea, lethargy, polydipsia (excessive drinking), and flatulence.

Although its maker offers no specific warning about this in its product literature, Bravecto should be used



with caution in dogs with a history of seizures, similar to other drugs in this class.

Bravecto is said to be safe for pregnant, breeding, and lactating dogs, dogs weighing at least 4.4 pounds, and for puppies who are at least six months old (and 4.4 pounds). No adverse reactions were observed in pre-approval studies when Bravecto was used con-

currently with other medications such as vaccines, de-wormers, antibiotics, and steroids.

■ Simparica

The active ingredient in Simparica, a product introduced by Zoetis in 2016, is an isoxazoline chemical called sarolaner. It is given once every month. Each Simparica treatment kills fleas (100 percent within 24 hours) and certain species of ticks (almost 97 percent of Lone Star tick, Gulf Coast tick, American dog tick, black-legged tick, and brown dog tick) for one month.

Simparica also kills the mites responsible for demodectic mange (demodex), sarcoptic mange (scabies), and otodectic mange (ear mites), though it has not yet received FDA approval for these uses. (We've seen reports from veterinarians who are using it for this off-label use with great success.) Its claim to fame is its speed; Zoetis claims that Simparica starts killing fleas within three hours and ticks within eight hours of administration.

Simparica may be administered with or without food.

Simparica may cause abnormal neurologic signs such as tremors, unsteadiness, and/or seizures. Simparica has not been evaluated in dogs who are pregnant, breeding, or lactating. Simparica has been safely used in dogs treated with commonly prescribed vaccines, parasiticides and other medications. The most frequently reported adverse reactions were vomiting and diarrhea.

Simparica is said to be safe for dogs weighing at least 2.8 pounds, and for puppies who are at least six months old (and 2.8 pounds).

NEXT CLASS: SPINOSYNS

This class of chemicals does not kill ticks, only fleas. Spinosyns work in a similar fashion as the isoxazolines, in that they activate reactions in the flea's cellular ion channels (in this case, the nicotinic acetylcholine receptors or nAChRs), causing a fatal CNS reaction in the fleas. Insects treated with spinsyns show involuntary muscle contractions and tremors resulting from

Tips for safe use

Always read the instructions for use carefully before administering to your dog, especially the cautions and contraindications. It's always shocking when we hear that someone gave their dog a medication without reading the instructions – and often refusing to take responsibility. “My veterinarian prescribed it! How was I supposed to know it could make my dog sick?” While it's true that a veterinarian should inform her clients about the contraindications of any product she recommends, in reality, few vets have or take the time. If you read something in the product insert's cautions and contraindications that seems like it would apply to your dog and concerns you, call your veterinary hospital and ask for the vet to call you back to discuss it – again, before you give the product to your dog.

Always follow the directions carefully. Products for cats and dogs are not interchangeable; a number of products for dogs are potentially fatal for cats. Topical products should not be ingested. Pay special attention to weight and age minimums for safe use, as well as the cautions regarding administration to sick, weak, old, medicated, pregnant, or nursing dogs.

Observe your dog carefully after administering a flea-control medication. Most adverse reactions happen within a few hours. Contact your veterinarian with a speed that is congruent with the seriousness of your dog's symptoms. (Serious? Go the to veterinary ERI! Mild? Call your vet the next day to report and ask the staff to note this in your dog's chart.)

It's important to treat all dogs and cats in a household. Fleas can reproduce on untreated dogs and cats and allow infestations to persist.

Keep track of when you administer a flea-control product to your dog. It's advisable to write the date, time, product, and dosage on a calendar that you can easily refer to if your dog has an adverse reaction and you need to recount details to your veterinarian. Also note any abnormalities you may notice in your dog's health, appetite, digestion, and demeanor after administration.

activation of motor neurons. Prolonged spinosad-induced hyperexcitation results in prostration, paralysis, and flea death. The selective toxicity of spinosad between insects and vertebrates may be conferred by the differential sensitivity of the insect versus vertebrate nAChRs.

The prescription oral flea-killing products in this class of medications all utilize a spinosyn called spinosad.

■ Comfortis ■ AcuGuard

These products are the same thing; Elanco makes AcuGuard for the VCA chain of veterinary hospitals under the Vethical brand.

As previously mentioned, the active ingredient in Comfortis and AcuGuard is spinosad. These products were FDA-approved in 2007. They are given once every month. Each treatment kills fleas for one month. Flea count reductions of 97.9 percent were observed one month after the first treatment and 99.9 percent after three monthly treatments with Comfortis or AcuGuard.

Administer these products with food for maximum effectiveness.

The most common adverse reaction reported from Comfortis/AcuGuard is vomiting. Other adverse reactions reported in decreasing order of frequency are: depression/lethargy, decreased appetite (anorexia), incoordination (ataxia), diarrhea, itching (pruritis), trembling, excessive salivation, and seizures.

Following concomitant extra-label use of ivermectin (very high doses used to treat mange) with Comfortis/AcuGuard, some dogs have experienced the following clinical signs: trembling/twitching, salivation/drooling, seizures, incoordination (ataxia), excessive dilation of pupils (mydriasis), blindness, and disorientation. Products containing spinosad should be

safe when used along with the *normal heartworm preventive dosage* of ivermectin or milbemycin oxime, but use with caution in dogs who have or may have the MDR1 mutation that causes sensitivity to certain drugs. See “Dogs with a Drug Problem” (WDJ December 2012) for more information.

Neither should these products be combined with high doses of milbemycin oxime (Interceptor, Sentinel), used to treat demodectic and sarcoptic mange, as this combination can cause serious adverse neurological effects.

While Elanco says these products can be combined with other flea and tick products, we wouldn't recommend it. Nor should Comfortis/NexGuard be used for dogs with epilepsy or other seizure disorders.

Use with caution in breeding females. The safe use of Comfortis/AcuGuard in breeding males has not been evaluated.

Comfortis/AcuGuard is approved for use in dogs 14 weeks of age or older and 3.3 pounds of body weight or greater.

■ Trifexis ■ ComboGuard

These products are the same thing; Elanco makes ComboGuard for the VCA chain of veterinary hospitals under the Vethical brand.

Trifexis and ComboGuard combine spinosad with milbemycin oxime, a chemical that is used as a heartworm-preventive and is effective against intestinal parasites (hookworms, roundworms, and whipworms).

Trifexis/ComboGuard is approved for use in dogs and puppies eight weeks of age or older and five pounds of body weight or greater.

Administer these medications with food for maximum effectiveness.

Treatment with fewer than three monthly doses after the last exposure to mosquitoes may not provide com-

plete heartworm prevention. Prior to administration of Trifexis/ComboGuard, dogs should be tested for existing heartworm infection. Use with caution in breeding females. The safe use of these medications in breeding males has not been evaluated.

Use with caution in dogs with pre-existing epilepsy.

What Elanco calls “mild, transient hypersensitivity reactions manifested as labored respiration, vomiting, salivation, and lethargy” have been noted in some dogs treated with milbemycin oxime carrying a high number of circulating heartworm microfilariae. These reactions are presumably caused by release of protein from dead or dying microfilariae. Milbemycin oxime is more effective against microfilariae than most other heartworm prevention medications (including ivermectin) and may therefore cause anaphylaxis if given to a heartworm-positive dog.

Just as with Comfortis and AcuGuard, following concomitant extra-label use of ivermectin with spinosad, some dogs have experienced the following clinical signs: trembling/twitching, salivation/drooling, seizures, incoordination (ataxia), excessive dilation of pupils (mydriasis), blindness and disorientation. Spinosad alone has been shown to be safe when administered concurrently with heartworm preventatives *at label directions*.

Again, products containing spinosad should be safe when used along with the *normal heartworm preventive dosage* of ivermectin or milbemycin oxime, but use with caution in dogs who have or may have the MDR1 mutation that causes sensitivity to certain drugs.

The most common adverse reactions reported are vomiting, depression/lethargy, itching (pruritic), decreased appetite (anorexia), diarrhea, trembling/shaking, ataxia, seizures, hypersalivation, and skin reddening. Puppies less than 14 weeks of age may experience a higher rate of vomiting. 🐾

Nancy Kerns is the editor of WDJ.





“Keep” Calm? First You Need to Get Him Calm!

How to help your highly energetic dog control himself.



Most shelters and rescue groups have an abundant supply of adolescent dogs – and a lot of them are “high-octane” purebreds or mixed breeds, such as terriers, hounds, herding dogs, and retrievers. The oversupply is testament to the difficulty of dealing with this cohort.

It’s not uncommon for humans who are living with young dogs to bemoan the adolescent “wild child” phase of development – when the canine youngster naturally starts becoming a little more independent and, sometimes, a *lot* more active. Of course, dog personalities lie on a continuum from very calm to quite energetic. Some even display excessive jumping and biting as young puppies. If you’ve previously had the good fortune of only raising dogs at the calmer, naturally well-behaved end of the continuum, you may think they are all supposed to be like that – and it can be particularly alarming to discover you’ve adopted one at the high-arousal end of the continuum.

I had two clients recently with remarkably similar concerns about their dogs – one, a seven-month-old male Golden Retriever, the other a 13-month-old neutered male Labrador.

Both of these adolescent canines are from hunting lines, which means that they are at the high-energy end of the range of sporting-breed personalities. Both families described dogs who were “out of control,” biting and jumping in an aroused fashion when greeting people. Both families had sought advice from other professionals prior to coming to me; one dog had experienced only force-free methods, while the other had been on a prong collar and subjected to forced restraint and being “put on the ground.”

It came as no surprise to me that the behavior of the force-free dog was improving, while the dog who was being forced to the ground was starting to offer an escalating level of aggression in response. Time and again, we see dogs become defensively aggressive when their humans use confrontational methods.

What you can do

- *Make sure your high-energy dog gets ample exercise. A tired dog makes a happy owner.*
- *Enroll in a good, force-free, group training class.*
- *Provide plenty of opportunities for mental exercise, too. This also helps develop self-control.*
- *Implement one or more protocols to promote relaxation for your dog, and be sure to reinforce her for calm behavior.*

NORMAL, BUT NOT NECESSARILY DESIRABLE

I commended the first owner for pursuing a force-free approach to working with her dog, and the following day, counseled the other as to why we needed to take force and coercion off the training table. I explained to both families that they were seeing normal behavior in dogs who were bred to spend hours running through the woods, accompanying hunters in their quest for game birds.

“Normal,” of course, doesn’t necessarily mean acceptable. Both dogs need significantly more physical exercise and mental stimulation to meet their genetically programmed exercise needs, as well as a ramped-up management plan to prevent them from being reinforced for the unwanted behaviors.

I have fostered several dogs with similar high-energy behaviors, and without exception, every one of them was significantly helped by our standard exercise protocol for such dogs: a minimum of three off-leash hikes around the farm every day (or on a long line, if not trustworthy when off-leash). I explained to both clients that the two on-leash walks their dogs were getting each day were just an exercise *hors d’oeuvre* – an exercise appetizer for dogs like these. Of course, not everyone has access to an 80-acre farm they can hike on – hence the need to find other creative exercise alternatives.

OFF-LEASH PLAY

Without access to a farm, you’ll need creativity to find exercise alternatives for your high-energy dog. A fenced backyard can be a terrific ally in your quest for exercise options, but don’t think you can just turn your dog out in the yard and leave her to her own devices. You may *think* your dog is self-exercising in the backyard, but in reality she’s probably spending a lot of time lazing in the sun, with perhaps an occasional burst of energy if a hapless squirrel or bunny wanders inside the fence. If she is running a lot, there’s a good chance it’s a high-arousal fence-running frustration response to stimuli outside the yard, which only contributes to high-energy inappropriate behaviors.

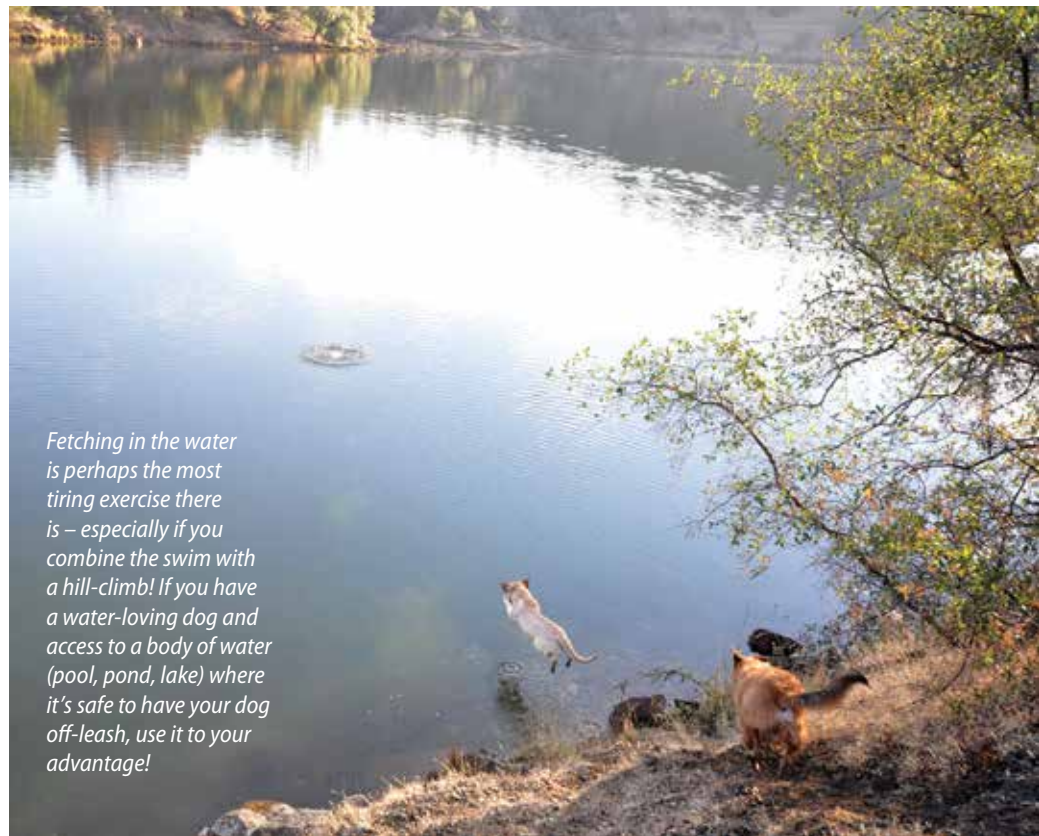
Instead, play *with* your dog! Here are a number of off-leash games that are perfect for tiring out dogs who otherwise have a bit too much energy:

■ **Fetch.** The aforementioned sporting breeds are usually more than willing to retrieve, over and over and over again. Yes, they do have a genet-

ic predisposition to chase things and bring them back – that’s why they are called retrievers! The herding breeds, also generally high-energy dogs, are also genetically predisposed to bring things back to you.

If your dog will chase things but not bring them back, or brings them back but won’t give them to you, you can play the multi-ball game. Have a bucket of balls, and each time she chases one and dances out of reach with it, pick another out of the bucket and hold it up. Most dogs will drop the one they have in order to chase the next one you throw. Collect the one she dropped for the next throw, or just keep picking balls out of the bucket to throw, and collect them all after the game is over.

If your dog will bring them back, but plays body-slam-and-grab when she reaches you, play the bucket-of-balls fetch game from inside an exercise pen (ex-pen). Safely protected by the portable fence, you can toss balls to your heart’s content without fear of injury, and until your dog is ready to call it quits.



Fetching in the water is perhaps the most tiring exercise there is – especially if you combine the swim with a hill-climb! If you have a water-loving dog and access to a body of water (pool, pond, lake) where it’s safe to have your dog off-leash, use it to your advantage!

Rules for Tug

Some unenlightened trainers caution against playing tug with your dog, with dire warnings about dominance and aggression. Modern, educated trainers recognize that as long as you play tug in a manner that doesn't reinforce unwanted behaviors, the game can be extremely beneficial. Tug is good exercise, can reinforce desirable behaviors, and has nothing to do with dominance. Here are a few important rules for safe and beneficial tug-play:

1 Your dog needs to wait for an invitation to play tug. Tell her to wait; then hold up the tug toy. If she jumps for it, say, "Oops!" and hide the toy behind your back. Repeat until you can hold up the toy and she doesn't try to grab it.



2 Now give her permission to grab the toy with your "Tug!" cue. Let her fiercely shake it back and forth and growl in play, while you hang onto your end and encourage her to tug.



3 Occasionally ask her to "Trade" and offer her a treat in exchange for the toy. When she gives it up, return to Step 1 and ask her to "Wait" until you invite her to play again.



4 If at any time her teeth touch your skin or clothing, she gets an "Oops!" and the toy goes away for a few minutes. You can then initiate play again. If necessary to keep yourself safe, you can stand inside an exercise pen with her on the outside when you tug, until she learns the rules. But don't forget to have fun!

■ **Tug.** If your dog prefers tugging to fetching, invest in a variety of sturdy tug toys, and encourage her to tug to her heart's content, as long as she plays by the rules. If she works her way up the tug toy and redirects her grip to clothes or skin, use a "flirt pole" – a toy attached to a rope at the end of a long, sturdy stick – to keep her teeth safely away from you. If she still redirects to you, stand inside your exercise pen and let her chase the flirt pole toy around the outside of the pen.

■ **Round-robin recalls.** This group activity is another great exercise option. You and one or more friends or family members stand at opposite corners of the yard and call your dog back and forth to tire her out. If needed, all the human participants can stand safely enclosed in exercise pens. Even standing in a pen, you can trot a few steps to encourage your dog's high-speed recalls and reinforce with treats or toys when she gets to you.

■ **Play dates.** If your dog gets along well with others, arrange for play dates in your fenced backyard with a dog friend several times a week. Appropriate dog-dog play can be an ideal energy diffuser – there's nothing more satisfying than watching compatible canine pals romping together until both relax on the ground in happy exhaustion.

If you don't have your own backyard, perhaps you can borrow one. A neighbor, friend, or family member may have a yard that you can use several times a week to give your dog some off-leash playtime. If that yard also comes with a compatible canine playmate, all the better!

■ **Exercise on a long line.** If you simply can't find a fenced yard to play in, consider alternatives. You may be able to use a long line (a 20- to 50-foot leash) in an unfenced open space – a beach, or a meadow in a public park that allows dogs and doesn't have a leash-length limit.

If you do use a long line, take precautions for your dog's safety:

- Teach your dog a solid recall, so you can call her back if she's headed for the end of the line at top speed – you don't want her to hit the end of the line with a full head of steam! (See "Rocket Recalls," September 2012.)
- Consider using a harness rather than a collar, with your leash attached to a back-clip connection, not front-clip, so if she does hit the end of the line she won't damage her trachea or twist herself sideways. (See "Harness the Power," April 2017.)
- Include a bungee-cord connection with the long line, so if she does hit the end there is some give in the line and she won't hurt herself.
- Manage the line carefully and responsibly so she doesn't get tangled around trees, brush, or other dogs.

■ **Dog park.** Many communities now offer fenced dog areas to provide off-leash opportunities for canines who don't have their own fenced yard. There are pros and cons to dog parks, and this may or may not be an appropriate option for your dog.

■ **Dog daycare.** The same is true of doggie daycare. There are some excellent ones out there, and some that aren't so great. A day at daycare can take a lot of the wind out of your dog's sails – but check the facility out very carefully before entrusting them with your dog. There are horror stories of daycare facilities using shock collars on dogs without telling the owners.

INDOOR PHYSICAL EXERCISE

For some of us, safe outdoor play options aren't available or frequent inclement weather prevails. So, when outdoor exercise isn't available – or isn't enough – consider the following:

■ **Stair fetch.** If you have a multi-level home and your stairs are safely carpeted, you are in luck! Stand at the top of the stairs and toss ball or toy to the bottom for her to chase. Again, have multiple balls or toys if necessary. You can put a baby gate across the top of the stairs if needed to protect yourself from jumping and nipping.

Note: If your stairs are not carpeted, consider purchasing and installing adhesive stair treads from your friendly neighborhood hardware store. Caution: If you think your dog will fall down the stairs and hurt herself in her

enthusiasm to chase, then this is not a good option for you. No stairs? Toss the ball down a long hallway, or from one room to the next.

■ **Remote treat delivery.** If your dog is more about treats than fetch, you can try a high-tech option: using a remote-triggered Treat & Train or the even higher-tech Pet Tutor (see page 13 for purchasing information). Relax on your sofa, watching TV or reading a book, and push a button to trigger the beep that tells your dog that the machine – located at the other end of your home – has just delivered a tasty treat. After your dog runs to get the treats, call her back and do it again. Over and over and over.

■ **Treadmill.** Yes, they make treadmills just for dogs, and yes, some dogs will happily use them – in fact, some dogs practically *beg* to use them. Not long ago, I went to see a client whose adolescent Labrador, Joker, was mercilessly pestering the two senior Labs in the home, biting and jumping on them. When I sat down on the sofa, Joker immediately began pestering *me* mercilessly. I ignored his inappropriate behavior, and after a few minutes he went to his human, barked once, and then walked over and stood on his treadmill. My client turned the treadmill on and Joker jogged for 20 minutes, then hopped off and calmly laid down on the living-room floor. I was impressed.

A treadmill is a big-ticket item, but if your dog is extremely hungry for exercise, the investment in a treadmill just might cost less than daycare, dog walkers, and/or private lessons with trainers, not to mention the cost of



There is nothing better than a compatible playmate for your rough-and-tumble youngster, if you can find one. It's a challenge to find a pal who won't be intimidated or triggered into aggression by his energetic antics.

Play With Your Dog's Nose

Elementary scent work or nose games can exhaust a dog just as quickly as hard physical exercise. Try it!

1 Teach your dog a "Find it" cue by dropping a tasty treat on the ground and telling your dog to "Find it!" (I tell my clients this is the easiest thing they will ever teach their dogs.) Repeat several times until your dog's eyes light up when she hears the cue.

2 Have her sit or lie down, and tell her to "Wait" or "Stay" or have someone hold her collar if she won't wait when you ask her to. Walk a few paces away and show her a treat. Place it on the ground as you remind her to wait. Return to her side, face the treat, and release her with your "Find it!" cue. Encourage her, if necessary, to run out and eat the treat.

3 Repeat Step 2 several times, and then let her watch you hide a treat in "easy" hiding places – behind the leg of a chair, under the coffee table, etc.



4 After several successful finds, let her watch you hide two treats, then three treats, in easy places. During this step, start rubbing the treat on a paper towel and ask her to "sniff" before you tell her to "Find it."

5 Next, let her watch you hide treats in harder places – on elevated surfaces, under things, and behind things. Continue to

ask her to sniff the scented paper towel before sending her to "Find it."

6 Now it gets really fun. Put your dog in another room while you hide several treats. Then bring her back in the room, let her sniff the paper towel, and tell her to "Find it." Don't help her! The whole idea is that she has to work hard with her nose to find the treats. If she can't find one or more after searching for some time, remove her from the room, pick up the hidden treats, and try again with the treats in easier places.

When your dog has learned how to search, this makes a great rainy day indoor exercise activity. You can also routinely scatter her meals around the yard so she has to search through the grass to find them; put her on a long line if you don't have a fence. You can also name her favorite toys and have her find them. You can even have family members and friends hide and have her find them. (Use their name and a scented clothing article with your "Sniff," "Find Joey" cues.)

all the things a bored adolescent dog might chew if he's not getting enough miles in. (For purchasing information, see "Product Information," below.)

■ **Scent work.** Indoors or out, you can use a dog's natural affinity for using her nose to your advantage. Most dogs love to use their noses and do it well with minimal training, so it's pretty easy to implement. In addition, nose exercise is surprisingly tiring. We tend to think that, because they are so good at it, it's effortless for them, but it actually takes a lot of energy to do all that scent detection. In the wild, where energy conservation is a life-or-death matter, most canids will hunt by sight first, using scent only when absolutely necessary.

Giving your dog a "job" to do with these scent-detection games is a very important and successful strategy for these high-energy, high-arousal dogs.

MENTAL EXERCISE

Mental exercise is very tiring for dogs. Cognitive training games are incredibly effective for using up your dog's excess energy. Here are a few mind-bending, energy-burning activities that you can use to help settle your wild child:

■ **Imitation games.** Claudia Fugazza, an Italian doctoral candidate in the field of ethology (animal behavior), developed a new training method she calls, "Do As I Do," in which the dog is taught a cue that means, essentially, "Watch me and then do something similar to what I do." Trainers have been having a lot of fun learning how to employ this new method for teaching new behaviors to dogs and their dog-training students. (For more information, see "Copy That," October 2013.)

■ **Puzzle toys.** We first reviewed an array of these toys in the June 2008 article, "Interactive Dog Toys." Dog puzzles offer hidey-holes where you can stash little bits of delicious treats or kibble; the dog has to work out how to open the holes to eat the treats. The puzzles may feature caps that have to

be nosed or pawed open or removed, layers that have to be spun, or levers that need to be nudged to one side to reveal the treats. There are *many* of these puzzle toys on the market now, ranging from very simple to quite complicated; the dog world keeps coming up with new variations on products designed to keep your high-energy dog's mind well-exercised.

■ **Cognition games.** These are activities that require significantly more mental energy than the simple “If I sit I get a cookie” response. They require your dog to understand and apply concepts such as choice (see “Pro-Choice” November 2016). Two examples of cognition games are:

- Object, shape, and color discrimination. Teach your dog the names of two different toys, a blue and yellow paper plate, or two different shapes pasted on white squares. Then ask him to touch the correct object, color, or shape with his nose or paw.
- Reading. We're serious! Dogs can be taught to recognize and remember what some written words look like. See “Teach Your Dog to Read,” October 2006.

Watch for an upcoming WDJ article entirely devoted to cognition games you can teach your dog.

LAST BUT FAR FROM LEAST: REINFORCE CALM!

Don't forget the training part of your wild-child rehabilitation program. As much as exercise is vital to help your dog calm down, you also need to manage her environment so she doesn't have opportunities to get reinforced for over-exuberant behaviors, such as jumping and nipping.

Have her greet new people only while leashed, to prevent her from being reinforced with petting and attention from the people who say, “It's okay! I *love* dogs!” You can solicit help from random strangers in public as well as visitors to your home; just

restrain your dog and prevent contact if she tries to jump. Instruct those who want to pet her to wait until she sits, or at least has four paws on the floor, and to step back if she jumps up. Meanwhile, make sure you and all your family members are doing the same, even when she isn't leashed.

If your dog gets aroused and tries to jump on or mouth *you* when you have her on leash, try threading her leash through a length of PVC pipe. You can use this similar to an animal control pole, to hold her away from you when she get into nippy mode.

A good, force-free training class can work wonders to help and support you in your quest for canine calm. Basic good manners are important for all dogs, and especially for those with more energy than they know what to do with. A well-run group class will help your dog learn how to control her behavior in the presence of other dogs and humans.

To find a trainer, I recommend looking among members of the Pet Professional Guild, trainers who are committed to force-free training; use the directory on the PPG website (petprofessionalguild.com) to find force-free trainers around the world.

Meanwhile, remember to look for opportunities to gently praise your dog when she is being calm. (If your praise is too happy or excited, you risk amping her up again.)

Several trainers have developed calming protocols specifically for working with high-arousal dogs. Dr. Karen Overall, veterinary behaviorist and strong force-free advocate, has created a 15-day thinly sliced “Protocol for Relaxation,” available in her *Man-*

ual of Clinical Behavioral Medicine for Dogs and Cats, that helps dogs learn impulse control. This detailed procedure begins with your dog sitting calmly for just a few seconds and works up to having her remain calm for minutes at a time while you move around, clap your hands, and even leave the room.

Trainer September Morn, of Olympia, Washington, created “Go Wild and Freeze,” another useful calming protocol. This one starts by having you encourage your dog to get slightly aroused with a “Go wild” cue, and then stand up, hands at chest, as you give the “Freeze” cue. When your dog sits, she gets a click and treat. Gradually increase the level of arousal, until your “Freeze” cue will work to settle her into a sit from any level of arousal.

HAPPY ENDINGS

I have yet to see a high-arousal nipping, jumping, body-slammng dog who has not been successfully helped by an appropriate combination of exercise and training. In fact, I received an email just today from the owner of the 13-month-old Labrador Retriever that I met with two weeks ago. She was thrilled to report that she has already seen significant improvement in her dog's behavior. I'll be checking in with the Golden Retriever client soon. 🐾

Author Pat Miller, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA, is WDJ's Training Editor. 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. See page 24 for information on her classes for dog owners and trainers, and book purchasing details.

PRODUCT INFORMATION

- *Treat & Train* – by Petsafe, petsafe.net.
- *Pet Tutor* – by Smart Animal Training, smartanimaltraining.com
- *Canine Treadmills* – by DogPACER, dogpacer.com
- *Dog puzzle toys* – Look for those by Nina Ottosson (nina-ottosson.com) and *Outward Hound* (outwardhound.com). Sold in many pet supply stores and online



Feed Me!

How to provide adequate nutrition at one of the most crucial developmental stages – puppyhood.



Properly feeding puppies (and especially large-breed puppies) is an art and a science.

For centuries, European farmers and livestock owners lived by the saying, “The eye of the master fattens his cattle.” It meant, in short, that no matter what you fed your animals, in the end it’s your vigilance – your attention to how that food agrees with them – that determines whether or not they will grow and thrive as you hope.

When it comes to feeding puppies, that adage still holds very true (well, except for the “fattened” part, but we’ll get to that in a bit). There are many different ways of feeding dogs – commercially prepared dry, wet, semi-moist, freeze-dried, and frozen options, as well as

home-prepared diets that are cooked or raw, including both BARF (bones and raw food) and prey-model methods. Because feeding can evoke a strong emotional response in the human who fills the food bowl – in our world, food is love, after all – our reflexive response is often to assume that the way we currently feed is the best way.

SLOW AND STEADY

But “the eye of the master” has to be objective. And when it comes to puppies, the first step is taking careful note of how he is growing: Is he too fat? Too thin? Is he growing too fast – or not at all?

Pet-nutrition consultant Susan Lauten, PhD, of Knoxville, Tennessee, says the ideal growing puppy is “a lean, mean puppy machine.”

You might notice that your little one eats almost as much as your adult dogs, even though he’s just a fraction of their size. That’s because, according to the National Research Council, a growing puppy has huge caloric demands, requiring about twice as many calories per pound of body weight as an adult dog of the same breed.

That doesn’t mean you should just *shovel* the groceries to your puppy, however. Studies show that slow, steady growth – with no dramatic growth spurts – is ideal for your puppy’s health, in particular his developing skeletal system.

The best way to determine how much to feed, Dr. Lauten says, is by “putting your hands on your puppy every week; you should be able to feel the last three ribs easily, with minimal pressure.” The spinal column shouldn’t be showing on a puppy in good weight, and unless you’ve bringing up a baby Afghan Hound, the hip bones shouldn’t be poking up – but you should be able to feel them under the skin.

If your puppy looks and feels too thin, then you might need to consider increasing and/or changing his food. Conversely, if he’s doing a convincing impression of a furry beach ball, you *must* reduce his rations – not for aesthetic

reasons, but rather out of concern for his health.

“With adequate nutrition, all puppies will grow to their genetic potential,” Dr. Lauten says. “But the rate at which they achieve that depends upon the amount of food the puppy gets. In research, puppies that were free-fed with other-puppy competition grew faster at early ages, but ran the risk of developmental orthopedic disease (DOD).” DOD refers to a constellation of problems, including hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, and osteochondritis dissecans (OCD).

While the puppies in those studies eventually evened out and grew to be the same size in adulthood, “The threat of DOD was present in the heavier dogs,” she explains. With increased caloric consumption, they got more calcium and uneven muscle, ligament, and cartilage growth – plus extra stress from excessive weight on developing joints.

In other words, overfeeding wreaks havoc with the growing canine body, disrupting normal skeletal growth, and potentially creating orthopedic disease that cannot be reversed.

WANT TO FEED HOME- PREPARED? DO IT LATER

As home-prepared diets, whether cooked or raw, have become increasingly popular, many puppy owners naturally want to feed them to new canine arrivals in the household. But feeding puppies is more complex than feeding adult dogs. Many non-veterinarian “animal nutrition consultants” who create customized or therapeutic diets for their clients’ dogs *decline* to tailor home-prepared diets for puppies; the potential for disastrous repercussions from any mistakes made in formulating a puppy diet are just too great.

“I would prefer that owners not raw-feed until five or six months of age,” Dr. Lauten says, citing concern over getting the puppy’s calcium levels just right. Instead, Dr. Lauten recommends that owners who intend to feed a home-prepared diet *start* their pups on a good-quality commercial puppy

What you should know

- *Because foods that are formulated for “adult maintenance” generally contain fewer calories than foods that are formulated for puppies or dogs of “all life stages,” owners often have to feed more of it and, inadvertently, give the puppy too much calcium.*
- *When feeding puppies, choose a food that is formulated for puppies **OR** for “dogs of all life stages” (which includes puppies).*
- *Keep in mind that over-feeding puppies can set them up for lifelong health problems. Keep them lean!*

diet, at least for the handful of crucial months when a puppy is most vulnerable to problems caused by inadequate or excessive calcium. Once the puppies have reached six or seven months of age, she suggests, they can be transitioned to a home-prepared diet, ideally one formulated by a qualified canine nutritionist.

Dr. Lauten even cautions about just *supplementing* a commercial diet for puppies, particularly large-breed ones, during the crucial developmental period before six months of age. “People do cottage cheese, they do eggs, they do kefir and yogurt,” she says. “I know that’s hard for people to just open the bag and put it down, but adding any supplemental food that’s more than 10 percent of their regular food consumption can set things out of balance – and this is not the time when you want an out-of-balance food.”

After four or five months, Dr. Lauten says, owners can start to supplement without fear of creating permanent damage. “The probiotics in yogurt and kefir are good, and cottage cheese and egg aren’t going to hurt,” she says. But if you are feeding a good-quality, well-formulated diet, “the supplementing is mainly for the people, not the dog.”

Note: This is one area where we differ with Dr. Lauten. In our opinion,

adding limited amounts of fresh foods to a processed diet is not just about making yourself feel good. It provides real nutrition that may well be missing from processed foods that rely on synthetic supplements to provide most needed nutrients.

FREQUENCY OF MEALS

While eating once or twice a day works well for many adult dogs, puppies need to be fed more frequently: four meals a day. When a puppy leaves for her new home at eight weeks old or later, she will likely be getting four meals a day, which can be reduced to three by the age of three or four months. As the puppy grows older and reaches the six-month mark, meals can be reduced to twice a day.

Remember, of course, that no matter how many meals a puppy eats in a day, the quantity of food she needs to receive for her age and size does not change: That amount needs to be divided among the number of meals the puppy receives daily.

HONE YOUR EYE

Now that you know a bit about the science behind feeding puppies, don’t forget that there is an art to it, too: The best “master’s eye” catches those tiny details – a lackluster coat, a lower-energy pup, digestive abnormalities like chronic diarrhea or constipation – that might signal you need to look a bit closer at the puppy’s diet. You might need to periodically adjust your feeding approach to give him what he needs to thrive. Even within a litter of puppies, there might be genetic differences and predispositions that would require you to tweak your approach.

So just be sure to cover the basics – satisfy your puppy’s energy requirements with enough (but not too many!) calories, and provide a nutritionally balanced diet, especially in those first crucial months. And then, just keep that master’s eye on things. 🐾

Denise Flaim raises 13-year-old triplets and Rhodesian Ridgebacks on Long Island, New York.



Three Reasons Your Dog Doesn't "Listen" to You

How to help him hear and understand you, and want to cooperate.

Dogs sometimes don't do what we ask them to do. Annoyed, we might repeat a cue several times – louder and a little more sternly each time – usually with very little effect. “Fido, come here. Fido. Come. FIDO. I said here! COME! I mean it!”

We all do it. I once heard someone threaten to count to three – or else! (It didn't work.) Often, the dog is then labeled as “stubborn.” It's easy to think that's the reason he “won't listen.” I get it. It does kind of look like your

dog is blowing you off. You ask him to come to you, and he just lies there, looking at you without budging. Or he might engage in a game of “Chase me!” Another time, you ask him to sit, and instead he stands and looks away. Or worse, he walks off. You may think, “But he knows this. He's doing it on purpose!”

Well, there are better explanations why this happens, and your dog being stubborn or willful isn't one of them. Possible causes can include simple things: Your dog may be suffering back pain and is trying to avoid activities that trigger his back pain, like jumping onto a high car seat. It may be that whatever you're using as a reinforcer is not valuable enough to your dog; a few pieces of dry kibble can't compare with the thrill of barking at a taunting squirrel on the back fence.

Of all the possible reasons for a dog's failure to “listen,” three of them seem to come up consistently in my practice:

- The dog isn't even aware he's been asked to do something.
- The dog doesn't understand what he's being asked to do.
- The cue you're using has been “poisoned.”

Thankfully, there is something you can do about it. With a little investigation into understanding what's happening and some easy training, you can polish your cues and improve the communication between you and your dog.

1 THE DOG ISN'T AWARE HE'S BEEN ASKED TO DO SOMETHING

I once visited a friend at her house, where I was greeted at the door by her dog, Bella. Bella was looking up at me excitedly, her tail was wagging, and it was evident she was getting ready to jump up on me. My friend noticed this and pre-emptively asked Bella to sit. “Sit.

Many owners are quick to say that their dogs are stubborn, stupid, or “mad” at them – that's why the dogs aren't “doing what they're told.” But there are far more logical and likely explanations for the perceived defiance. For example, the dog may be unaware that his owner is even talking to him!





Re-teaching down, from square one: Start by using a treat in one hand to lure your dog from a sit into a down. When her elbows hit the ground, release the treat onto the ground between her front paws. Repeat several times.



Next, use the same hand that previously held the treat to make the same luring gesture, but without holding a treat. When your dog's elbows hit the ground, put a treat on the ground between her paws with your other hand.

Sit. Sit!” Her cues were ignored and sure enough, Bella jumped up. My friend’s efforts became more hurried: “SIT! SIT!” She apologized to me and gently helped her dog down by using her hands.

At that moment I decided to do a little experiment. I explained that I would walk outside and come back in. Instead of just saying the “sit” cue, I asked my friend to say her dog’s name, make sure she had Bella’s attention, and then ask her to sit. I walked in as planned, my friend called out her dog’s name to get her attention, and when Bella glanced in her direction (it was barely a nano-glance, but it was there), she asked her to sit, which Bella did.

We often assume that when we utter a cue, our dogs know it’s meant for their ears. How are they to know? It’s our job to make it clear we’re addressing them before asking them to do something. Imagine waiting in a restaurant lobby for a table along with several other groups of people who are also waiting for a table. The hostess comes out, grabs a few menus, and announces to no one in particular, “Follow me, please.” Who is she talking to? Unsure, the people in the lobby would probably just stay put and wait for clarification. Half the group may not even be aware that the hostess has said anything at all!

You can let your dog (or anyone) know you’re addressing him by offering

direct eye contact before speaking. Better yet, say his name first. Best, say his name, wait for confirmation he’s heard you, then say what you want to say. In the case of giving your dog a cue, say your dog’s name and wait until your dog either turns toward you or, if he’s very focused on something else, at least watch for a quick ear flick in your direction that indicates he’s aware that you’re speaking to him.

This is an especially handy habit to get into if there are multiple dogs sharing your home. Saying the dog’s name first lets that dog know that what follows is intended for him.

So, if your dog appears to be particularly distracted by something and you want to call him over to you, say his name first. You may need to add some kissy sounds or whistle, too. Wait for confirmation that he heard you, however fleeting, and *then* give him your recall cue.

2 THE DOG DOESN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU WANT

This means exactly what it sounds like. Your dog simply doesn’t know the cue as well as you think he does.

If you ask your dog to do something and he gets it right *some* of the time, it doesn’t necessarily mean that he’s deliberately choosing not to do it the rest of time. It’s entirely possible that when he got it right, he was just guessing.

By doing exactly what you had asked him to do, it appeared as though he was responding to your cue because he “understood” it. Seen this way, it’s easy to assume that his occasional lack of response is some sort of defiance!

This is easy enough to fix with some fun training sessions. Even though you may think your dog “knows” a certain behavior, *start as though you are teaching your dog the behavior for the very first time.*

Let’s take “Down” as an example. A training plan for teaching “Down” might look like this:

- With your dog sitting facing you, take one treat and hold it to your dog’s nose with your palm facing down.

- Without saying anything, slowly lower your hand toward the floor in a straight vertical line, luring your dog’s snout to follow it. Your dog’s butt should remain on the floor. If he stands up, you may be moving your hand too quickly. Have him sit and begin again, more slowly.

- When your hand reaches the floor, slowly move it along the floor, horizontally and toward you. You will have shaped a letter “L” from snout to floor, and from your dog’s body toward you. The idea is to get your dog to keep following the treat with his nose, bend down toward the floor,

Thanks to TTouch practitioner Victoria Hieb-Swiger of Tranquil Paws Training in Oroville, CA, for demonstrating this method. See page 24 for contact information.



Once your dog shows that she understands the hand gesture for “down,” introduce a verbal cue. Say her name and the cue (“Fido, down!”), wait a moment, and *then* give the hand gesture. If you have performed enough repetitions, your dog should start to anticipate what you want and respond to the verbal cue before you add the hand gesture.

signal for the down behavior.

Note that you have not yet given a verbal cue of “Down,” you’re just using a hand gesture at this point. Even if this seems like too simple an exercise for you and your dog, remember that you are going back to square one with this training exercise in an effort to start fresh. Only when this exercise is going well and your dog is consistently following your hand gesture is it time to add a verbal cue.

and then, while following your hand on the floor, stretch his front legs out to lie down.

■ The second his elbows touch the floor and he is in a down position, “mark” the correct behavior with the click of a clicker or a verbal marker (such as the word “Yes!”) and deliver a treat to him on the floor between his front legs. I prefer to deliver the treat on the floor instead of directly into the dog’s mouth, because it encourages him to hold the down position. If, after a few repetitions, he expects the treat

to be delivered on the floor between his front legs, he’ll resist the temptation to stand up and reach for it in my hand.

■ Repeat this sequence two or three more times, and then quickly follow up with the exact same exercise, but with an empty hand (no treat/lure). When he reaches the down position, say “Yes!” before you reach for a treat and deliver it to him between his front paws.

■ Repeat this sequence with an empty hand several more times. You are teaching him the body language/hand

■ Say your dog’s name, followed by the word “Down” (or whatever other word you want to use as a cue). After you’ve said his name and given your verbal cue – *and not until you’ve finished saying it* – do your hand gesture, from snout level to the floor. At this point, you might not need to slowly move your hand horizontally to illustrate the bottom part of the letter “L.” Once you’ve moved your hand to the floor, pause and wait to see if your dog will lie down. Give him a moment to think about it, if necessary. Keep

Poisoned name?

If you’re planning to adopt a dog from a shelter or from any other scenario where you’re not sure about the dog’s history (or you know the dog’s prior experience was not

a positive one), consider changing his name when he comes to live with you. If he often heard his name prior to receiving a punishment (“Fido, NO! Bad dog!”), he may have formed negative associations with his name. In other words, his own name may have become a poisoned cue, predicting something aversive is about to happen. Give him a nice new name that doesn’t sound anything like his old name! (For more on the importance of a dog’s name, see “What’s in a Name,” in the January 2011 issue of WDJ.)



your eyes on the floor in front of him (don't stare him in the eye).

It's important not to say the cue and do the gesture simultaneously. You want your dog to build an association between the verbal cue and the hand gesture that he already knows. We want him to put 2 and 2 together, "Oh, I see. That sound she's making is always followed by that gesture. I know what that means."

When he lies down, say "Yes!" and deliver the treat on the floor between his front legs.

Repeat this sequence several more times.

■ Now, say his name followed by your cue – "Fido, down" – but don't use your hand gesture. Keep your eyes on the floor in front of him, and give him a few moments to think about it. If he hasn't made a move after 10 to 15 seconds, silently offer him the hand gesture. Reward him if he lies down. Don't repeat the verbal cue. Keep trying this sequence until he lies down with just the verbal cue. Reward him each time he succeeds.

■ Once he's got the verbal cue down pat, it's time to start changing the context a little bit. Change rooms. Try it outside. Try asking him to lie down (don't forget to say his name before the cue!) when you're sitting on a chair or couch instead of standing in front him. Or try asking him while you're standing, holding grocery bags or a laundry basket. Continue to reward him with a treat each time he gets it right, because you're still in the training phase.

Soon, when you're sure he understands the cue in many different contexts, you can start offering him "real life rewards" instead of treats. Ask him to lie down for a belly rub (if he likes that), or lie down before serving his food bowl.

We've used the "down" behavior as an example here, but the message remains the same for any behavior you think your dog "knows" but doesn't do consistently. Simply start from the beginning and gradually increase the

level of difficulty as your dog gets each step right almost every time you ask him (four out of five times is a good rate to aim for).

3 THE CUE'S BEEN "POISONED"

Now *there's* an illustrative term for you. A poisoned cue is one that has come to mean something unpleasant to your dog. It can be a baffling issue to deal with. Your dog used to respond happily to a cue, and now when you say it, he pins his ears back and slinks away. What happened?



Sometimes, we inadvertently cause a dog to form a negative association between a cue and an event he finds aversive or scary. It may be because of something we've done, like asking a dog to "Sit" and then "rewarding" him by scruffing the fur on each side of his face – something we aren't aware he doesn't like.

Another possibility is that there are cues in the environment that predict an unpleasant thing is about to take place. Say, for example, that you pick up the dog's leash and he runs and hides before you get a chance to attach it to his collar. It could be that he's anticipating that you are taking him someplace in the car, an event he's found to be scary in the past.

There is an easy way and a not-so-easy way to fix this.

The more complicated way is to counter-condition your dog's response to the cue he finds aversive. Since he's already formed a negative association with the cue, your job is to help him form a newer, more pleasant association. It can be a time-consuming task, but it works beautifully when done correctly.

The general rules that apply to successful counter-conditioning are:

- The cue must no longer predict that a bad thing will happen (ever).

- The cue must predict the good thing will happen (*every single time*).
- The good thing must happen only when that particular cue precedes it.

If we apply these rules to the formerly aversive "Sit" cue in our earlier example, the counter-conditioning process might look like this:

- "Sit" no longer predicts that the dog's fur will get scruffed. Ever.
- When the dog sits after hearing the "Sit" cue, he'll get some cheese. *Every single time*.
- Cheese will only appear when the dog sits after being asked to sit. Cheese will not appear at any other time.



The easy way involves simply using a new cue. It's not like we *have to* use the word "sit" for that particular behavior. Seriously, you can use any word you like! You can use "spaghetti" to mean "Please fold your hind legs and place your butt on the floor." Your dog doesn't care.

You can teach the new cue by following the instructions above (in the #2 section) for teaching a behavior from scratch. 🐾

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Don't Dash or Dart

Does your dog ever dash out a door ahead of you, or sneak out behind anyone who isn't paying attention at the door? Here's how to deny a dedicated door-darter.



TRAIN A "WAIT" AND A "GET BACK" BEHAVIOR

Teach your dog to patiently wait at a safe distance from the door. This is easiest to teach your dog in an environment that has an obvious threshold or change in flooring – the line where a carpeted living room intersects with a tile entryway. If an obvious line of demarcation isn't present, a marker can be created with a throw rug or even a strip of painter's tape.

As your dog follows you to the door, calmly say, "Wait!" and toss a treat behind him just before he reaches the "no-fly zone." Be ready to toss another treat as soon as he finishes and turns around. Repeat several times before reaching for or opening the door. The goal is to use a high

Is this you and your dogs? Time to employ some training, or at the very least, a management strategy that will prevent your dog from rewarding himself with a little footrace around the neighborhood.

It seems easy enough. You just want to answer the door to receive your pizza or welcome a visitor. And yet, in many homes, this seemingly simple task requires ninja-like reflexes as owners struggle to keep their dogs from squeezing past them, eager to embark upon a neighborhood joy ride.

Trainers call this behavior "door darting." Not only is it inconvenient, it's dangerous, especially if your dog fails to come reliably when called. Door darting can be an issue in any home, but it's often challenging in homes with heavy foot traffic, especially when young children are present.

Door darting is an impulse-control problem. It's also incredibly self-rewarding. Remedying the issue requires teaching the dog to exhibit self-control around an open door, while employing diligent management to prevent the rehearsal of unwanted behavior. The following tips can help.

rate of reinforcement to make the area *away* from the door a wonderful place to wait.

Unlike a formal stay, when I teach "wait," I don't require a specific position, nor do I care if the dog changes position during the exercise. He can sit, stand, lie down, or move laterally, so long as he doesn't drift past my line of demarcation. If he does, step into his path to block his forward movement, and then invite him back into his "safe zone" and reinforce him there. As soon as he's in the desired area, praise calmly, remind him to "wait," take a step or two backward to relieve the social pressure, and toss a cookie at the first sign of hesitation, which is the beginning of self-control.

The goal is to help your dog do the desired behavior (back up) so you can reinforce him for it, not to coerce, pressure, or frighten him. Use calm, controlled movements and adjust your technique as necessary, based on your dog's overall temperament.

As your dog demonstrates a willingness to hover in the “safe zone,” thanks to your generous reinforcement history, slowly start working toward opening the door. Split the behavior into several small pieces, repeating each step three to five times – or more, depending on what your dog needs – and rewarding his patience every time. Steps might include reaching for (but not touching) the door knob; touching and turning the knob without opening the door; opening the door an inch or two and then closing it, etc.

If, at any point, your dog steps into the “no fly zone,” immediately block his path and invite him to “get back.” If your dog makes the same mistake twice, revisit the easier step.

As you progress to opening the door, put your dog on leash or use an exercise pen as a second line of containment to ensure his safety, should he unexpectedly make a break for the open door.

SPOT ON

Another option is to teach a reliable sit- or down-stay away from the front door. This requires a very high level of impulse control since the main entryway to a home is a high-excitement area for most dogs. It’s important to increase the difficulty of this exercise *slowly*, and “pay” your dog well throughout the training process, in order for your dog to begin to believe it’s worth it to stay on his spot instead of rushing toward the open door.

Ideally, the finished behavior consists of three main parts: “go to your spot” (so you can “send” your dog to his spot as you move toward the door), a solid stay, and the ability to hold a sit-stay or down-stay around a high level of distractions.

My preference is a down-stay. I like to teach the basic down-stay first, practicing increasingly longer stays and stays in the face of small, and increasingly larger distractions, until the dog

What you can do

- *Teach your dog that good things happen inside, away from the open front door.*
- *Teach your dog a “wait” and a “get back” cue, and practice these behaviors frequently. Start when no one is at the door, and, as he improves, when a helper is at the door. Eventually, practice with actual visitors.*
- *Remove the potential for your dog to get out the door and practice the fun but naughty door-darting behavior. Use a baby gate, exercise pen, or tether to prevent your dog from bolting out the door.*

can confidently remain in position for about one minute, even as the handler walks around him or squeaks a toy.

Separately, I’ll teach the “go to your spot” behavior. Depending on the dog, I might use targeting, shaping, luring, or any combination of these to teach the dog to go to and lie down on a dog bed or mat.

Finally, the two behaviors come together and the dog is reminded to “stay” after he goes to his bed. From there, it’s all about slowly building the behavior such that it resists the myriad distractions associated with opening the front door.

Be sure to reward often. A Treat & Train or similar remote-operated treat dispenser is often helpful, as it allows you to reward the dog from a distance without needing to toss the treats. At the advanced level, you can even teach your dog to go to his “spot” on the cue of the doorbell!

TRAINING IS CRITICAL

Realistically, it’s difficult to actively train this behavior as actual guests are entering your home. *Training* is what happens when your focus is on your dog. *Testing* is what happens when you’re focused on visitors. As you work up to the distraction of receiving actual guests, recruit helpers to come knock on your door and play the role



If you practice frequently enough, and make staying inside until bidden to go out rewarding enough, your former door-dasher may decline to take the opportunity to escape, even when the door is left ajar and no one is paying attention.

of visitors – guests who understand they aren't there to socialize, but are playing an active role in your training program. Practice often!

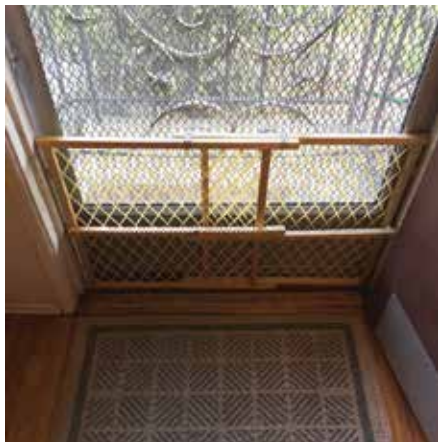
MANAGEMENT IS ALSO IMPORTANT

If you aren't in the position to actively train the desired behavior, it's important to use good management to keep the dog from practicing unwanted behavior. Some examples include:

■ **"Feeding the chickens."** Teach your dog that good things happen *away* from the front door. Any time you approach the door, toss a small handful of kibble eight to 10 feet from the door, and encourage your dog to "Find it!" Finding kibble on the floor is incompatible with rushing the front door, and it gives humans a chance to enter or exit. Play this game often, *not* just when you or your guests actually need to pass through the open door.

This approach often also works well for dogs who suffer from what I call "Excessive Greeting Disorder" – over-the-top excited jumping on people. A scattering of kibble, followed by some additional rapid-fire tossing of single pieces, helps change the dog's focal point, and the sniffing required to source the food bits even has a mild calming effect on some dogs. In homes with multiple dogs, be mindful of potential food-guarding issues.

■ **Gate in the doorway.** An inexpensive, pressure-mounted baby gate can be installed in the doorway to serve as



Another management alternative is an exercise pen air lock – so if your dog does dart outside, he can't run and start a game of keep-away.

an emergency barrier to prevent door darting. In many doorways, a gate will fit even with a screen door and will still allow the main door to close. A 24-inch gate is short enough for most adults to step over, making it realistic to keep this management strategy in place at all times in homes with accomplished door darters.

■ **Exercise pen air lock.** Use an exercise pen on your front porch to form an emergency corral just outside of the door. If your dog manages to slip past you, he's safely contained on the porch and can't embark on a neighborhood joy ride. This doesn't solve the root problem – the door darting – but it's especially helpful in high-traffic homes where many people might be opening the door and not everyone is as committed to active training.

■ **Tether station.** Another valuable management tool is a simple tether. You can use a spare leash or make a simple chew-proof tether with a length of vinyl-coated cable, cable clamps, and a couple of snaps.

Attach the leash or tether to a heavy piece of furniture (or an eyebolt screwed securely into something solid) near the main entryway to your home. As your dog follows you to the door, make it a habit to quickly tether him before opening the door. A sticky note on the door is a great reminder for everyone in the family. This works well

It's a minor inconvenience to step over, but if everyone in the family is reasonably agile, the addition of a gate to step over might just prevent a door-dashing dog from having a fatal accident.



when receiving visitors, or bringing the groceries into the house from the car, but it's not safe to leave him there, unsupervised, when you leave the house.

Last, but not least...

■ **Train a reliable recall.** While the end goal is to give your dog rewarding alternatives to door darting, mistakes sometimes happen. Should your dog unexpectedly get loose, it's important you be able to quickly call him back to you. Investing the time to train your dog to reliably come when called – even when distracted – is vitally important. A solid recall is a potentially life-saving behavior. It takes committed practice (training versus testing!) and ongoing maintenance. Fortunately, there are many fun training games designed to improve a dog's recall. For a review, see past WDJ articles:

- "Rocket Recall," Sept 2015.
- "Games for Building a Reliable Recall," Sept 2014.
- "Extremely Fast Recalls," Sept 2012. 🐾

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

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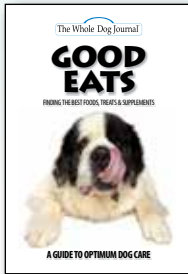
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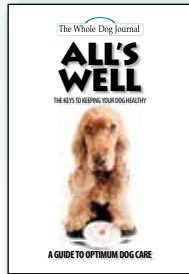
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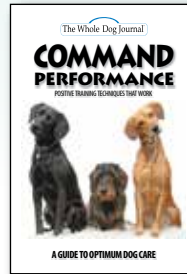
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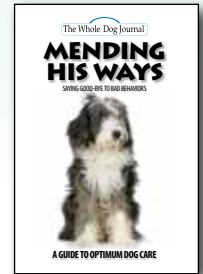
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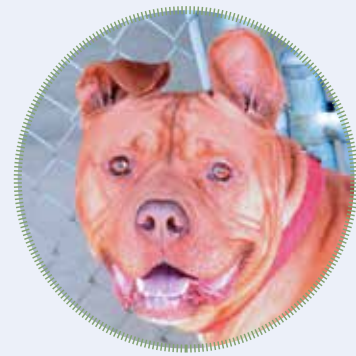
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