

Cold Weather Exercise, Think Water Treadmill

Fall is here and so is cold weather and if we are lucky lots of snow! Dogs, just like people tend to get less exercise in the fall and winter months. Many owners report their dogs also seem to put on weight during the winter. If you notice this trend in your dog it is important to take steps to keep them active and healthy.

Water Treadmill:



Twice daily controlled leashed walks for 15 -30 minutes is great exercise for your dog. Snow, ice and freezing temperatures can make this difficult during the winter. If this is the case for you and your dog I recommend bringing them in for weekly or bi-weekly water treadmill sessions. The water treadmill provides excellent exercise in a controlled environment. In the winter time the water is usually warmed to about 85-90 degrees. The warm water is soothing and helps dogs with arthritis or metal implants. Most sessions are from 10-30 minutes depending on the dog's fitness level. The water provides resistance (think about how it feels when you walk in the water at a pool or the beach) and helps to strengthen or keep muscles strong. Many of my clients report a surge in the dog's energy for several days after the session. Dogs that come on a regular basis really enjoy the sessions and will jump into the treadmill on their own.

Arthritis:

Dogs with arthritis tend to slow down and become less active. As they become less active their muscles, ligaments, and tendons become weaker and result in greater joint instability. Arthritis progresses as the joint becomes less stable. This becomes a vicious cycle resulting in a dog that is resistant to exercise and much less active. Controlled therapeutic exercise is one of the most valuable but also most underused forms of treatment for osteoarthritis. Physical rehabilitation including the use of the water treadmill will help to increase muscle strength and endurance, increase joint range of motion, decrease pain and discomfort and improve quality of life. The water treadmill works well for arthritic patients for several reasons. Buoyancy from the water reduces impact on the joints during exercise. By filling the water to shoulder height the dog's weight is reduced by about 60% compared to walking on land. This decreases pain and increases range of motion. The warm water is comforting and decreases pain during exercise. The resistance improves muscle strength and tone as well as balance.

Surgery Recovery:

Dogs recovering from surgery such as a torn cruciate (TPLO, TTA) benefit greatly from water treadmill therapy. Dogs that enter a physical therapy program as well as water treadmill therapy during the recovery period tend to do much better than dogs with surgery alone. A rehabilitation program including water treadmill will improve muscle mass, attenuate muscle atrophy that occurs following surgery, increase range of motion, improve weight bearing and reduce progression of arthritis. At Elk Meadow Animal Hospital we will call in a board certified surgeon to perform a surgery such as TPLO for a cruciate injury. After the surgery we will set up a 4 or 8 week rehabilitation program which includes instructions and demonstrations for at home exercises as well as twice weekly visits for in hospital exercises and water treadmill therapy.

What Is Involved With Getting Started?

There is an initial consultation with me. At that time a complete medical history is taken and a physical exam is performed. This helps to pinpoint trouble areas (hips, elbows, spine). I will then design an at home exercise program and demonstrate some of the exercises for the owner. The first water treadmill session can also start. The first session is usually an introduction to the treadmill and lasts about 5-7 minutes. The goal of the first session is to get the dog used to the treadmill and walking in water. Most dogs adapt quickly to the treadmill. Each additional session is increased in time and speed depending on the dog's progress.

Jason Kutz, DVM, CCRP is a certified canine rehabilitation therapist. Call 303-674-7400 to schedule an appointment or visit www.elkmeadowvet.com.