

## Canine Massage and Stretching – Improve your dog's performance

For a racing dog full mobility is essential for the dog to perform at its best. As canine physiotherapist I treat dogs with muscle, tendon, joint and ligament related problems and injuries and have experienced how massage and stretching improves performance.

Massage and stretching improve the quality of your dog's life. The dog may apart from running faster be able to enjoy the natural agility of youth for many more years of its life. Massage and stretching are no replacements for visits to the vet but they do help prevent injuries occurring. They are a complement to daily training and diet and are suitable for all dogs regardless of breed, age or size.

### **Background. (To editor. This section could be used as a separate text box)**

The fundamental rule for massage and stretching is that they are suitable for healthy dogs. Should any physical problems arise you should not apply massage and stretching since this could make the problem worse. Always consult your vet if you are unsure.

The main purpose of massage and stretching is to maintain and improve mobility, increase the blood circulation and have a relaxed and happy dog.

If a dog has shortened musculature or muscle tensions, pressure accumulates across the joints and this impairs mobility. Regular massage and stretching help prevent strain injuries. Impaired mobility is a contributing factor in muscle related problems and can, in the long term, lead to a number of different types of injury.

We should aim to achieve a balance in the musculature. Injury can be caused by training your dog too much with too little rest between training sessions. The muscles become tired and tense. Another dog might have poor stamina due to lack of exercise. The muscles atrophy, becoming smaller and weaker. A weak muscle is more easily tired and more easily injured.

If your dog is already suffering from an injury you should be extremely careful. Since the muscles have limited elasticity and blood flow, there is a great danger that the injury will be aggravated. Secondary problems may also arise if you continue to train the dog. When a muscle ceases to function as it should, other muscles take over and try to compensate. This can result in excessive strain or imbalance and new injuries.

Other causes of tension and stiffness might be psychological. The dog may have a tendency to become stressed in different situations. A nervous dog is tense and finds it difficult to relax.

If you learn how to massage and stretch your dog you also learn about its body and musculature. You can compare how the muscles feel and are better able to identify tension and impaired mobility.

## Racing.

You could compare your dog's racing to an athlete in a 100 or 800 metres race. For instance we know that a professional track and field athlete is training hard to perform competitively. As an owner of a racing dog we also train our dogs hard to perform at the track. When the race starts and the dog is released from the starting box it reaches a speed of 60 to 70 kilometres an hour in a few seconds. We want our dog to be first crossing the finishing line. To achieve that, our dogs need to get into shape for a race or active season. The physical training is a specific, goal oriented approach used to achieve our goal. Racing dogs are trained in various ways using cycling, swimming or by running on sandy surfaces and in hilly terrain. For our dog to perform the best it also needs to stay healthy and to avoid injuries such as ruptures, chronic inflammations and stress fractures. Too much training when the dog has insufficient time to rest and recover can cause injuries.

A racing dog, just as an athlete, is pressed hard and the muscles, tendons, joints or ligaments are liable to injuries. This all makes the preventive care so much more important. To perform well on the track we need our dogs to stay healthy and their mobility to be good.

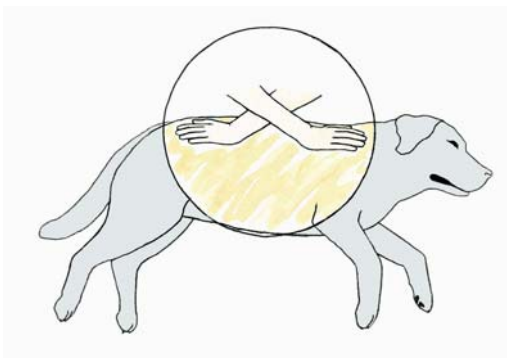
When it comes to the professional athlete he or she has a team of physiotherapists, masseurs and doctors helping him or her to make the outmost performance. The same approach is also very common in horse racing probably because of the big earnings in keeping the horse healthy.

You now have the opportunity to learn more about massage and stretching and to prepare your dog better for racing.

## Massage.

Massage is by far the best treatment for reducing muscle tension and the recovering period is reduced. You can progress faster with tougher training if you integrate massage and stretching because the muscles are assisted in the work of increasing the absorption of nutrients and the removal of lactic acid. Massage also extends the tissues and muscles we are unable to reach through stretching.

Massage and stretching will give you a relaxed and better performing dog.



Text to picture 1

"The greater part of the pressure you exert should be applied by the flat hand although your thumb and fingers are also engaged in manipulation."

## Stretching.

Stretching is when you extend an extremity towards its ultimate position, in other words you separate the muscle's root and insertion, holding this position for a moment. With stretching you work up good mobility in the muscle and around the joints and you also reduce the pressure on the joints.



Text to picture 2

“Hold the dog's elbow with one hand, grasping the wrist with the other. Move the leg forward and upwards, stretching the elbow joint and the flexor muscles of the foreleg (shoulder joint). “

## How to use this knowledge in racing?

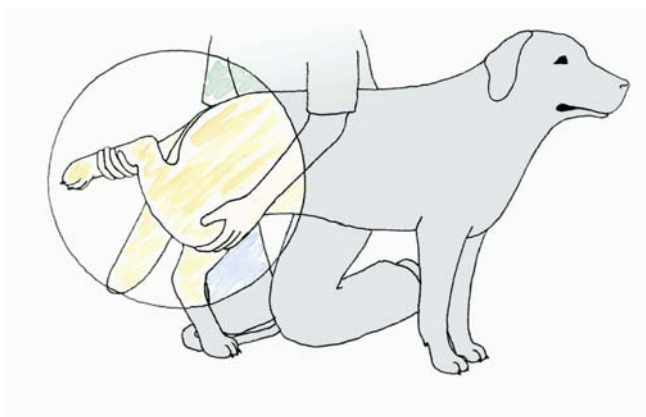
First remember that the dog should have warmed up and exercised *before* starting the race. I also strongly recommend that you allow your dog to wind down *after* the race before any stretching activities.

Here is a check list that could be used before the race.

- Let the dog walk slowly for a while and then increase the tempo for 2-3 minutes.
- Let the dog trot for 2-3 minutes.
- Let the dog gallop for one minute.
- Then let the dog make some short explosive moves.
- Let the dog wind down a little by going back to trotting and then walking.

Warming up does not tire the dog but rather increases blood circulation and warm up the muscles ensuring that the joints are lubricated and more supple. The dog is now ready to perform.

After the warm up you could also easily test your dog's mobility using the eight most common stretching grips. You should be sensitive to your dog's signals. The dog should not experience any discomfort. If it does, don't hesitate to contact the vet.



Text to picture 3.

“Place one hand directly above the knee joint and the other hand on the lower part of the leg around the hock joint. Lift the leg upwards so that the knee is bent. Push gently upwards and backwards with the hand positioned above the knee joint.”

After completing the race let the dog wind down and then carefully do some stretching exercises.

And when you come home reward the dog with massage and you will get a happy racing dog ready for new challenges.

Massage and stretching is an essential and low cost investment in your dog's health and future races.

Jörn Oleby, author of the book "Canine Massage and Stretching – A Dog Owners Manual.

Pictures used from the book.

You can find the book at these places: – Australia: [www.agilityclick.com](http://www.agilityclick.com) –

UK: [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) - USA: [www.puplife.com](http://www.puplife.com)- South Africa: [www.petpublications.co.za](http://www.petpublications.co.za)

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