

Mobility & the Aging Pooch

How do you mobilize an older dog with hip problems, arthritis, spinal nerve damage, weakness, or other ailments? Here are some tips and resources:

Traction

Keep the fur on your dog's pads trimmed close. This will give your dog more traction on slick floors. Put down skid-free carpeting in places where your dog normally lies down to make getting up and getting started easier.

Tile & vinyl floors are particularly tough for dogs – they do the “split” on them and can hurt themselves scabbling to get up. Consider an inexpensive indoor-outdoor carpet runner through the kitchen or foyer. Many dogs use these like they are on a hi-wire. It shows you how much they appreciate the traction.

You may wish to put coverings on your dog's paws - such as those "slipper" socks that have non-skid material on the bottoms. "Paw Tectors," sold by K-V Vet Supply (1-800-423-8211) are described as being non-skid. They come in five sizes from XS to XL.

Totes and Keds make some "booties" that are fleece-lined and have a non-skid bottom. These are often given to patients in hospitals, but can be adapted for a dog's paws. You can sew on a velcro tape to the top and then wrap it to fit snugly (but not too tightly!) around the dog's leg. It is suggested that you put these on one paw at a time until the dog grows accustomed to the "feel."

Slings, Harnesses, Stretchers, etc.

Use a sling made of fabric (an old winter scarf might work, depending on the size and weight of your dog) to help lift his rear end when needed. Place it close to the rear legs, tie it loosely to provide a 'tucked in feeling' then tie it again at the top to form a 'handle.' There is also a company that makes slings for farm animals and can tailor one for your dog.

The local Newfoundland Club makes stretchers and slings for large dogs as a fund-raising effort for their organization. Ask Jan our technician for help ordering these. The stretchers and slings are designed for the large dog. There are many situations in which stretchers and slings are very helpful. For example, when large dogs are injured or ill, moving them presents a serious challenge – watch your back! Or, in cases of injury, a dog's movement may cause additional trauma unless assistance is given. Then, too, a dog may need help after some types of surgery. And, when a dog has hip problems, old age may bring with it the need for regular assistance in getting up and in walking.

The stretchers & slings are made of nylon packcloth and will carry a 200 lb. dog. They're tough and machine washable. They'll last a lifetime.



A product manufactured by Python Products, Inc., is available at Petsmart for about \$10. A long fabric wrap with velcro tabs and handles, it's meant for carrying snakes. However, it is also useful for raising the rear end of a dog.

Some other ideas:

- (1) Use a vinyl briefcase that unzips all around. When it's upzipped, wrap it around the dog's torso and grab the handles on top. Watch the zipper as it can dig in.
- (2) Use a canvas log carrier in the same fashion, i.e., wrapping it around the dog's torso and grabbing the handles on top.
- (3) If descending the stairs is creating stress on the dog's front legs, put a t-shirt over the dog's front end. Hold the t-shirt, pulling up and back on it, to relieve some of the weight on the front end and to prevent slipping.

Animal Suspension Technology manufactures support harnesses for disabled and injured dogs. The AST Support Suit is a support harness for injured, weak or disabled dogs. It is designed to provide complete support and control for dogs that need help walking. (See photo at above.)

An on-line company that offers well engineered products is www.walkaboutharnesses.com. The walkabelly sling is good. Note that the walkabout harness is not tolerated by all dogs initially.

Steps and Ramps

One of the best ideas we've ever come across to enable an older dog to get up into a car or onto a bed is a set of steps constructed out of lightweight, inexpensive Styrofoam. There's a diagram for it at the bottom of this article.

Lisa Auen made one. "The Styrofoam is sawed to the dimensions in the schematic in the diagram and glued together with Liquid Nail for Foam Insulation. It cut's easily with a utility knife. I made two sets of steps for less than \$25, one for the SUV and one for the foot of my bed. The one for the car is covered with Astroturf, which is very lightweight and gives good traction. We couldn't do our daily trek to the pastures without them."

There are many ramps available on-line. They come in different sizes and are made of various materials, some lighter than others. Prices range from \$99.50 (for a small dog ramp) to well over \$200.

You may wish to build your own ramp out of plywood. A 3' x 6" length with carpeting or Astroturf tacked onto it would work in many situations. However, the weight of the device may not lend itself to portability. Secure the ramp carefully when in use so that there is no chance it will cause your dog to fall.

If you don't have a ramp or steps to assist your dog in getting into the car, try this method: Get her front paws established on the floor of the vehicle. Then lift from behind, cradling the rear end. This will take practice and cooperation from all parties but many dogs come to expect "a helping hand."

Carts and Strollers

Dogs To Go! is a small, family owned and operated company specializing in the design and manufacture of "wheelchair" carts for disabled pets of all shapes and sizes. The owner is a licensed Veterinary Technician working in a Veterinary Surgical practice. She has worked with disabled pets for over 20 years and she will be happy to talk to you about the special needs of your pet. There are many other well-made carts available on the internet. Google "dog cart" for more information.

Pet Strollers are made by a number of manufacturers. A folding variety, (www.discounttramps.com) shown at the right, can be handy. Hey, you did it for the kids, why not the dog? They learn to really enjoy their outings and it's great exercise for you!



As always, please call us with any questions or concerns,

Make-it-yourself Dog Steps for the Car & Bed

Use construction Styrofoam from a Lowe's or Home Depot.

Measure distance from ground to car or bed. Think about how big a step your dog can handle – the foam is 2 inches thick, so keep it in a multiple of two.

Cut to the dimensions with a utility knife.

Glue sections together with Liquid Nail for Foam Insulation.

Cover the outdoor one with indoor-outdoor carpeting or Astroturf for traction.

Don't make it too narrow as it's light enough to flip over if your dog steps to one side.

Help him up & down until he's used to the steps.

A Step for Dogs Who Have Trouble Getting into Vehicles

