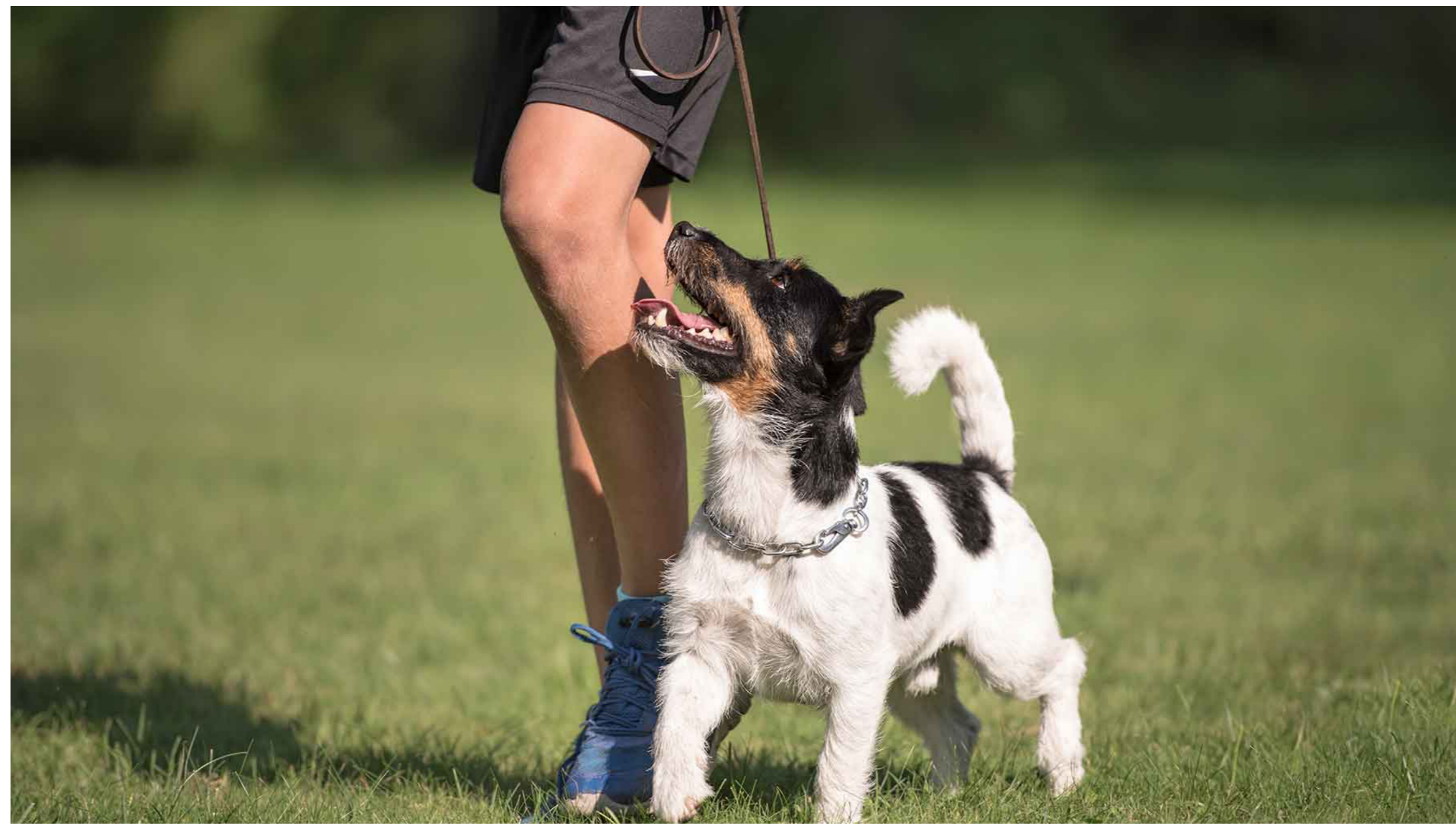


Running with your dog



Dogs can make the perfect running companions. They're enthusiastic, energetic and they never say no when we ask. However, all too often we see dogs behaving badly en-route – herding their owners, running off course, getting distracted by other dogs or simply laying down in protest. The fact is running isn't for every dog.

Knowing your dog's limits

Your pet must be medically fit to travel. If you are uncertain of your pet's health, then a veterinary examination is recommended. At this time you can discuss with your veterinarian any specific medical issues or threats that may exist in the area that you are travelling in. For example paralysis tick, cane toads, heartworm and so on. Vaccinations must also be current.

Pets that are very anxious or suffer from car sickness may require medication. This can only be supplied by your veterinarian after a complete physical examination.

Also, it is advisable to compile a list of veterinarians both en route and at your destination in the event of an emergency.

Age

As a general rule, young dogs and very old dogs don't have the physical characteristics to support high-impact exercise such as running. Puppies have bones and muscles that are still maturing, so it's important to wait until they are fully grown (at least one year old) before you start running with them, especially if it is for long-distance running. If you have a dog that is starting to feel their age, eg. short on puff, stiff after a run, it's best to consult your vet before beginning (or continuing) a running program. The age that this happens can vary widely between breeds and individuals.

Breed

Breed is probably the biggest predictor of whether your dog is a suitable running partner. Hunting and herding breeds like German Short-haired pointers, Jack Russells, Border Collies and Kelpies tend to suit long distances (over 10km), while Greyhounds, Pitbulls and Golden Retrievers suit middle distances (less than 10km). Dogs typically not suited to running include very large dogs (e.g. Great Danes), very small dogs (e.g. Chihuahuas) or dogs that have a tendency to overheat, such as pugs and bulldogs.

Health

Running is a high-impact activity that requires your dog to be in moderately good health. For dogs carrying extra kilos, it's a good idea to start a weight loss program before you introduce them to regular running. If your dog has a medical history of hip dysplasia or arthritis, running may actually worsen the condition, so it's best to seek advice from your veterinary team before you start.

Personality

There will be some dogs who, despite being the ideal breed, age and health, do not like running. They may have a curious temperament that makes them easily distracted by every bush and shrub or they may simply refuse to run after a certain distance. If after a few weeks of perseverance you're not making headway, you are probably best sticking to walking or alternative exercise options.

Starting a running program

The key to building a successful running program with your dog is to start slowly. Human runners are often advised to take a staged run/ walk approach to building running fitness. The same approach is recommended for your dog:

1. Start by taking long walks each day (2km or more). This will build your dog's fitness and get him/her used to the route
2. Gradually replace a couple of walks with slow runs. Monitor your dog to make sure he/she is coping with the changes. Signs your dog is not adjusting may include excessive fatigue, reluctance to continue.
3. Continue replacing the walks until you are only jogging.
4. Gradually increase the speed and distance.
5. Give your dog a day off a few days a week. This will allow his/her muscles and joints to recover.

What to Take

The great thing about running is you can do it any time, almost anywhere and it doesn't cost anything. But there are a few essentials you need to take with you.

Lead

Even if your dog is well-trained, it's a good idea to keep him/ her on a lead at all times. Retractable leads are not recommended as they have excess length which can easily tangle. Never use a choke collar as it can collapse your dog's trachea (windpipe) – this can be particularly dangerous if your dog is already panting and short of breath. The best type of lead is a relatively short (1-2 metre) lead attached to a standard collar.

Water Dish

It's important to keep your dog hydrated throughout a run. If possible, take a collapsible water dish or run a route where you know your dog will have access to clean water.

Health and Safety

Running with your dog can be a very rewarding activity for the both of you. Follow the safety tips below and you'll be well on the way to having the perfect running partner:

- Run a distance and speed that's appropriate for your dog's age and health.
- Run on soft surfaces. Avoid concrete, hot asphalt and debris (e.g. glass) as it can harm the paws. Some dogs benefit from doggy boots.
- Avoid running on excessively hot days. In summer, try to run early in the morning or late in the evening.
- Keep your dog hydrated with regular water stops during and after the run.
- After each run, check your dog's paws for stick injuries or abrasions (especially the pads) and check for grass seeds between the toes.
- If you notice any change in your dog's ability to keep up, foaming at the mouth, heavy panting or glazed eyes – **immediately contact your veterinary team.**

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