

## Swimming and Hydrotherapy

Swimming has been a prescribed exercise by doctors for a variety of issues such as arthritis, joint and muscle stiffness, chronic back pain, and post surgical rehabilitation for a long time. It's been known to be particularly helpful for seniors who are less flexible and may be suffering from any or all of these conditions. As an exercise for weight reduction, it engages the cardiovascular system while being kind to the skeletal structure, i.e. joints and spine. Muscles become stronger, flexibility is increased, and fat is burned. When compared to running, for instance, a 10 minute swim can



be equivalent to a 30 minute run without putting excessive pressure on the spine, back muscles and joints.

With that said, what's good for us is also good for our beloved dog. Veterinarians agree that swimming/hydrotherapy can be beneficial for senior dogs that are arthritic and suffer from stiffness in their joints, post-surgical dogs recovering from neurological or orthopedic injuries, soft tissue injuries, degenerative diseases such as hip dysplasia and muscle weakness. Overweight or obese dogs can shed pounds through regular swim sessions (in conjunction with diet). Healthy dogs, canine athletes will increase their endurance and maintain cardiovascular fitness while strengthening muscles and increasing flexibility and range of motion. Swimming/aqua-therapy is good for all dogs and people with one caveat – those with injuries or suffering pain, need to be cognizant of swim techniques – a therapist knowledgeable in aqua-therapy can provide the direction needed to manage the conditions that require attention.

## Swimming versus hydrotherapy for your dog?

Swimming takes place in a pool, lake or ocean. Usually there's a person monitoring the activity, which is usually the owner. Hydrotherapy is a rehabilitative modality in which a trained therapist guides the dog during the swim session and may perform massage, stretching and range of motion exercises. The therapist's hands are never too far from the dog's body and are always in control of the activity. The water temperature in the therapy pool is between 89 and 93 degrees which benefits the dog by increasing blood flow to the muscles, relaxing and warming the joints and muscles, alleviating pain, and allowing for increased flexibility and movement.

A pool designed to be used for both swimming and hydrotherapy can raise or lower its temperature depending on the intent of the exercise; and can increase or decrease the resistance of the water based on the dog's physical condition and the activity's objective.

### Why warm water hydrotherapy?



Warm water hydrotherapy benefits dogs suffering from a multitude of conditions. Owners of dogs affected by debilitating diseases such as arthritis and dysplasias, as well as post-operative recovery and non-surgical injuries notice a definite increase in mobility as well as reduced recovery time for surgical and non-surgical conditions.

Dogs who are overweight can get the exercise they need through swimming that they often can't get from land based exercise. Because swimming is a non-weight bearing exercise, the joints in overweight dogs aren't stressed the same way they are in land based exercise.

While in the water, the water pressure exerted on the limbs move blood and lymph away from the lower extremities preventing pooling and reducing the pain caused by inflammation. Also, the constant stimulation of sensory receptors of the dog's skin by the water pressure desensitizes the pain centers of the entire nervous system, reducing the pain the dog is feeling.

The buoyancy of the water takes the pressure and strain off the dog's joints and spine allowing the joints to go through a full range of motion without experiencing pain. During a post-operative period, exercising in the water allows early active motion and renews and/or maintains cardiovascular fitness.

Water has a calming affect whether immersed in it or not. The human body is made up of over 60% water and we all (dogs included) were held in a watery sac while in the womb – a true stress-free environment. Masaru Emoto studied the molecular structure of water and how it changes with emotions. He showed how water is alive and responsive to our every thought and emotion. Humans and animals feel the calming effects of water. the dog's owner can impart their emotion on the dog, it is important for the guardian to be present at the therapy session. When the dog is in a state of calm, the tension in muscles and joints are relieved. The strain is lifted, the dog's pain is reduced and healing can begin.

Since we've been in business, we've seen firsthand the healing effects of hydrotherapy. We've worked with dogs who couldn't walk, and depending on the dog, after four to eight weeks of twice a week hydrotherapy sessions, the dogs began to walk again. One dog in particular, Duncan, was horribly abused, and couldn't walk at all. As a three year old male Rottweiler, he only weighed 40 pounds, when he should have weighed over 100. He had to be carried everywhere because he couldn't walk. We began hydrotherapy sessions for him twice a week. He absolutely loved his sessions. We believe he felt so free, because for the first time, he could move on his own. He could swim for a solid hour without tiring! Within a couple of weeks, he was able to stand, and a couple more

weeks, he was walking and began lifting his leg to go potty. After 10 weeks, he was running, all the time with a big grin on his face. We gave him back his ability to walk, something no one else had been able to do. It was truly rewarding.



In Loving Memory of Duncan

In the time we've been in business, we've helped almost 300 dogs get into shape, rehabilitate from surgery and non-surgical injury, lose weight, recover from the loss of mobility and pain of arthritis and other degenerative diseases and other limiting conditions. We've helped dogs with behavior issues become more confident. We've even helped owners of high energy dogs calm their dogs, and have taught puppies to swim.

This is the healing power of water and the benefits of hydrotherapy. Given time, patience and a positive outlook, good things happen.