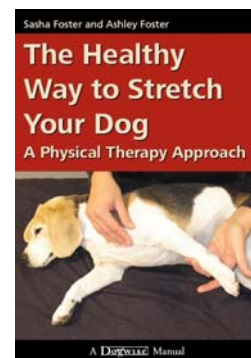


An excerpt from

The Healthy Way to Stretch Your Dog. A Physical Therapy Approach

by Sasha Foster & Ashley Foster, Dogwise Publishing.
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Introduction

While there has been a lot of research done recently on stretching for humans which has changed the way we stretch—it hasn't yet changed the way we stretch dogs. In the last thirty years, the research about muscle tissues and the importance of stretching has been applied to the human model so definitively that it has changed the way aerobic participants to elite athletes integrate stretching into their exercise routines. For example, the stretching texts from the 1970's emphasize stretching prior to exercises and they lack specific details about alignment and holding a stretch. The more updated research has shown that lengthening muscle fibers after an event when they are warm and supple improves the quality of the stretch. An improved quality of stretch can decrease the risk of injury to muscles and joints due to repetitive movements or muscle over-use. The research also shows that a stretch must be held for at least 30 seconds to actually lengthen the muscle and connective tissue fibers. Why has this updated information not been integrated into the canine model? Since stretching is truly a valid technique for maintaining joint integrity and muscle health in humans shouldn't we be sharing this with our best friends? The research indicates that human and canine muscle tissue is so similar that dogs should receive the same benefits from stretching that humans do.

The anatomical similarities between human and canine muscle tissues validate the importance of integrating stretching into a canine health model. Although canines are quadrupeds and some of the attachments of the muscles to the bones are different, in general the gross anatomical arrangement is very similar to humans. Of greater significance in confirming the importance of stretching dogs is muscle physiology. Interestingly, the inner workings of muscle cells are very similar in most mammals. When a muscle receives a nerve message and if the appropriate amount of energy is available, it will contract the muscle.

As long as the muscle is receiving the message from the nerves, it will continue to contract until it runs out of energy. When the energy is gone, the fibers remain in a contracted, or shortened, position. Muscle tissue that remains in a shortened position over time is prone to injury. This predisposition for injury in fatigued muscle is the reason why all muscle tissue needs to be stretched, human or canine. Stretching returns the muscle tissue to its natural elongated state which improves muscle health and joint integrity.

Our goal in developing this book is to bring the dog world up to date with the importance of stretching and to provide specific techniques for stretching based on the most recent research. By sharing this information with dog owners, we hope to add another preventative/restorative technique to the ever growing list of holistic techniques used to keep our dogs healthy and happy for the span of their lives.

We care for dogs, in part, because they bring us happiness. It is wonderful when we can do something for our dogs that they can't always do for themselves, in this case helping to keep an active dog agile and as pain-free as possible. This affords us an opportunity to bond with these four legged creatures whose mission on Earth sometimes seems to be nothing more than bring us joy—and maybe a sloppy wet tennis ball every once in a while!

Sasha Foster is a physical therapist, yoga instructor, and writer whose passion is geriatric advocacy (in any species). She and her dog, Quin, have provided Animal-Assisted Therapy to geriatric rehabilitation populations throughout Colorado. **Ashley Foster** is a Certified Pet Dog Trainer with 13 years of experience whose passion is reward based training and canine advocacy. She handles multiple breeds in conformation for AKC events throughout the United States while being an owner/handler for her own Doberman Pinschers in conformation, obedience, and rally.