

The Benefits of Swimming for Dogs

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Caitlin Ultimo / Pet360

The summer heat may seem like reason enough for your dog to take a dip, but swimming can serve as more than just a way for him to cool down.

“Swimming has similar benefits for dogs as it does for people,” explains Dr. Stephanie Liff, VMD, associate veterinarian at Brooklyn Cares Veterinary Clinic in New York. “It is a no-impact form of exercise that can help pets, especially debilitated ones, including those suffering from orthopedic or neurologic injury, to build muscle and burn calories without excessive stress of joints.”

Aside from it being a great way for your dog to stay active, while not overheating, swimming allows pets that are usually restricted to running or walking on a leash exercise without feeling restrained. “I think the biggest benefit is fun,” says Liff. “Most of these dogs that willingly swim love it, and they reap the benefits.” And while swimming alongside or watching him paddle may be just as much fun for you, it is important that you keep safety in mind.

Water Safety Tips

When taking your dog swimming in open water, be sure your pet wears a life jacket and that there are no harmful predators, like snakes or biting fish, lurking in the area. Some pets may swallow a lot of water - and if they are swimming in salt water, salt toxicity can be an issue. To prevent against this, Liff recommends restricting saltwater swimming and offering plenty of fresh water before and after your pup goes for a paddle.

If your pet will be going for a swim in a pool, keep a close eye out and train him where and how to exit. He may become too excited or overwhelmed and could potentially face exhaustion while circling to get out. Also, remember to rinse off your pooch once he's done swimming for the day. Chlorine can cause discoloration to his coat.

If your dog is a little less-than-enthused when it comes to taking a plunge, don't think throwing him in to sink or swim will leave him with the desire to start jumping in on his own. Liff explains that patience is key. Most pets will adjust and enjoy swimming if given the time to feel comfortable in the water. Let your dog acclimate to the idea at his pace and he can decide when and if he's comfortable enough to take a dive.

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