

Warming Up for Agility and Cooling Down Afterwards

Before you do agility with your dog, both you and your dog need to be physically ready. You need to warm yourself up, and you need to warm up your dog. If you have special needs for warmup (bad knees, bad back, bad anything...), you should consult a specialist (and disregard this advice completely).

Before you start stretching, you should get moving gradually. Don't leap out of your car and start running toward agility practice. Walk a bit, trot a bit, begin to feel warm and get your blood flowing BEFORE you start stretching.

Mild stretches to help you relax before you start training:

- bend your knees and reach gently toward your toes, let your shoulders hang and let your head hang
- straighten your spine slowly, one vertebra at a time; once your back is straight, slowly bring up your arms and stretch them high ("greeting the sun")
- lean gently from one side to the other
- do gentle lunges
- sit in a chair and stretch your legs out in front of you; point your toes away from you, then toward your forehead (to stretch your Achilles tendon)

Before you have your dog do any stretches, you should also warm up your dog's muscles and get her blood moving too. She can join you as you walk and trot.

Mild stretches for your dog:

- use a treat to lure your dog's head in a curve to their hip with the dog *standing* (both sides)
- use a treat to lure your dog's head in a curve to their hip with the dog *sitting* (both sides)
- do stretches in a curve with the dog free to move as well (turn in both directions)
- sit up (beg)
- jump up and put her front paws on your (legs/belly/chest/shoulders)
- bow (rear end up, front end down)

After agility, trot slowly, and then walk for a while until your breathing and your dog's breathing are both fairly normal. You may want to gently massage your dog's shoulders, hips, and back muscles. Use your dog's attitude as a guide. Keep your dog relaxed and comfortable as you massage him. If it's very cold or wet, you may want to put a light sweater on your dog to assure that his muscles don't get stiff and sore.

A few notes on fitness: to do agility, your dog needs to be physically fit. He should be lean, with very little body fat; you should be able to feel his ribs easily. His muscles must be up to the task of jumping, climbing, and weaving at top speed around an agility course. If your dog is overweight or under-muscled, keep jumps low in training and pay special attention to warmups and cooldowns while you continue your conditioning program.