

Benefits of Recreational Swimming

By Lori Buerle



Photo by Terri Cordes, 123rf.com

Whether it's the cold, dark depths of winter or the dog days of summer, a dip in the pool can buoy both bodies and spirits. We all know that recreational swimming is great exercise for dogs. It is also a fun and social activity for dogs and owners. Not only that, it allows for a controlled environment that is beneficial both physically and physiologically.

For anyone who has been to a local lake or pond in the late summer months, it is not a surprise that an indoor swimming pool is a cleaner environment. Lakes and ponds can spread bacteria, giardia and other undesirable illnesses to your dog. Plus there's no mud to track back to your car or house.

The health benefits of recreational swimming are undeniable. Swimming provides excellent cardiovascular conditioning and helps maintain muscle mass. Swimming is a great weight control exercise and alleviates stress on the joints so that overweight dogs can get back into the swing of things while reducing risk of injury.

Swimming is an energy outlet for sure. A tired dog is a happy dog and oftentimes a tired dog makes for a happy owner. As in humans, swimming gets those endorphins going which is great for overall well-being, but it can also be therapeutic for behavioral disorders or for dogs that are just plain bored or tired of being cooped up in the house.

Swimming provides social benefits as well. Aerobic exercise can reduce depression in dogs that have exercise restrictions. Of course, you'll need approval from your veterinarian before starting a swimming exercise program. Swimming can also boost confidence and it encourages dogs to learn from other dogs.

Perhaps most importantly, recreational swimming provides an opportunity to build the bond between dog and owner. It's a great way to spend time with your dog without distraction. It's a time to step away from the daily grind and spend one-on-one time with your pet and it serves as a reminder of why pets are so important in our lives. They give us so much and spending time with them is all they ask of us in return.

Now that we've covered the many benefits of swimming, there are times and conditions where swimming is not appropriate. If your dog has been diagnosed as having any of these health conditions, swimming may not be an appropriate form of exercise:

- Heart disease
- Respiratory disease
- Seizure disorders
- Endocrine diseases
- Open wounds or infections
- Fecal incontinence

If your dog has any of these conditions or if your dog is not otherwise in good health, a veterinary exam is in order to make sure swimming is a safe form of exercise.

Lori Buerle is a partner in Canine Rehabilitation and Conditioning Group (CRCG) which offers year-round indoor recreational swimming for dogs seven days a week at its Englewood and Broomfield locations. Both open and private swim times are available. For more information, please call 303-762-SWIM or visit www.dog-swim.com to find out how you and your canine companion can start making a splash!