

Home Adjustments by Bach Canine Rehab

(Canine Rebalance fully supports these simple home adjustments that will help your dogs' comfort and mobility around the home)

Here at Bach Canine Rehab, we often recommend some home adjustments or changes of management for our owners and canine patients. Some of these changes are specific to the patient and their circumstances however many of these suggestions are beneficial to the majority of our canine friends so we thought we would let you know about a few easy home adjustments that could help your dog to stay comfortable and mobile!

As veterinary physiotherapists, we look at the way dogs move, their posture and how they load their limbs. A correct loading pattern for most healthy dogs is to distribute 60% of their body weight over their forelimbs and 40% of their weight over their hindlimbs. Sometimes this balance of weight distribution gets disrupted either by injury or sometimes by repetition of particular activities that encourage overloading of particular structures. For example, feeding your dog from the floor requires your dog to increase the load on the forelimbs. If your dog has any stiffness or soreness in their neck or forelimb joints this may not be comfortable. Equally, if your dog has any stiffness or discomfort in the hindlimbs they may well already be overloading the forelimbs to compensate so a stressed structure is put under more strain. By raising food and water bowls off the floor so that your dog can keep their head and back level, you will encourage more even limb loading, reducing stress on the forelimbs and encouraging correct use of the muscles in the hindlimbs.

Another situation where we often see a change in limb loading is when dogs pull on the lead. When a dog is pulling, they tend to lower their heads and increase the load on the forelimbs to pull themselves along, towing you along behind them! This can make walk times particularly uncomfortable both for you and your dog. We will often suggest trying a technique called balance lead walking using a two-point control harness. This is a training technique, not an instant fix however it works by applying forces on key points of control on the dog's body to give the signal to slow down or stop. This means that you need much less force on the lead to give an effective signal so you and your dog can stop having a tug of war every time you go out! It also means that you can give your dog the signal to slow down without pulling them off balance, again encouraging more even limb loading. More information on balance lead walking can be found on our Collars vs Harnesses blog on our website and Facebook page, and at www.mekuti.co.uk. There are a few different 2-point control harness brands available but one of our favourites is called the Perfect Fit harness (www.dog-games-shop.co.uk).

Features of our homes can sometimes be challenging or pose an increased risk of injury to our dogs. For example, lots of dogs slip on hard floors, especially tiles or wood. This is a particular challenge for older dogs or dogs that are weak or recovering from an injury or surgery. However, it can also contribute to causing an injury in young dogs if they race around the house, slipping and sliding as they go! We often recommend using runner mats to provide a bit of a non-slip track around the house. Areas that we would prioritise with non-

slip solutions are where you have changes of surface and especially if that is combined with change of level i.e. coming down carpeted stairs or jumping off a sofa on to a hard floor. Another area we would recommend thinking about is where your dog eats and drinks to ensure they can stand comfortably and confidently at this time.

Going up and down the stairs can also be a risky business. If you are going to allow your dog free access to the stairs it is worth taking the time to train them to go slowly and avoid encouraging them to race up or down. If the sound of someone coming home through the front door is always going to set your pooch off tearing down the stairs and skidding across the hallway into the front door it's probably best that they don't get to go up the stairs in the first place. Doing stairs well requires a strong core and good range of motion in the joints. If your dog is a bit stiff, doing the stairs may well make them more uncomfortable. If your dog is a bit weak, they are more likely to struggle and potentially fall and hurt themselves. If your dog has to do the stairs because of the set up of your home, you can support them on the way up with your hands under their seat bones, found either side of their tail. On the way down, you could use a harness to help slow them down and keep the descent controlled. If they are small enough you may well just choose to carry them, but remember to brace your own core so you don't end up with an injury! If you have areas with a small number of stairs, such as getting in/out of the garden or up to doorways, you could consider a ramp with a non-slip surface.

So now your home is sorted, what about exercise? Going out for a walk together is one of the great joys of having a dog. However, in order to make sure this activity stays a joy, there are a couple of things to keep in mind. The length of your walk should be in line with what your dog is capable of. This can sometimes be a tricky thing to work out, particularly as many dogs will over-exercise quite happily at the time. Keep an eye out for a change of pace – does your dog slow down significantly towards the end of a walk? Do they stop and sit or lie down? Make a mental note of how long you have been out if you notice either of these changes and try keeping your next walk within that time frame. If the slowing down or resting doesn't happen anymore with these shorter walks this probably means that they actually had a lower exercise tolerance than you thought. Keeping the walks within their tolerance will reduce the risk of muscle fatigue and, in turn, reduce the risk of injury. We also have a blog on running with your dog, and how to do so safely – see our website or Facebook page!

Many people think that limiting your walks means limiting the time you can be out and about with your dog – but this is not the case! Being out meeting people and other dogs is very stimulating for your canine friend, so on a nice day, take a picnic and a blanket to the park, or sit in a café together. Scent and stimulation games (such as hiding treats for your dog to find, or a Snufflemat) are great for engaging your dog's brain and therefore tiring them out mentally without overloading their muscles and joints, so if you are restricted on how much walking you can do, try to think up other games and puzzles you and your dog can play together.

These are the main areas we find we discuss with our clients, to help improve your dog's quality of life and also ensure you can still enjoy your time together.