

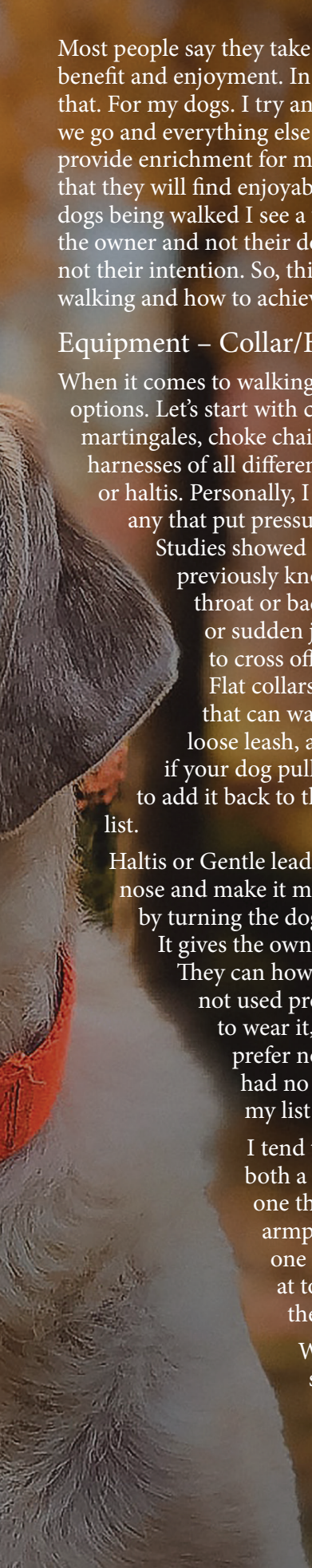
Every day at 7:20 in the morning my alarm goes off and my girl Dani jumps up with her two front paws to wish me good morning and let me know it is time to get up and take our walk. At the same time, I hear Archie's tail thumping on the ground in his bed beside me knowing the same. For dogs a walk can be a wonderful time of their day but that is not always the case. Sometimes a dog walk can be stressful or even painful.



a Walk in the Park



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Most people say they take their dogs for walks for the dogs' benefit and enjoyment. In my house a dog walk is precisely that. For my dogs. I try and make sure what we do, where we go and everything else about our walk is done to provide enrichment for my dogs. I try and provide things that they will find enjoyable. Some times when I watch dogs being walked I see a walk that seems more to benefit the owner and not their dog even though I know that was not their intention. So, this issues article is all about dog walking and how to achieve a great bond with your dog.

Equipment – Collar/Harness

When it comes to walking there are many equipment options. Let's start with collars. There are flat collars, martingales, choke chains and prong collars. There are harnesses of all different sorts. There are gentle leaders or haltis. Personally, I start by crossing off the list any that put pressure on my dogs neck or throat.

Studies showed that far more dogs then was previously known had some sort of neck, throat or back injury due to their equipment or sudden jerks on the leash. This leads me to cross off prongs, choker and martingales. Flat collars, for a dog that can walk on a loose leash, are safe but if your dog pulls we have to add it back to the naughty list.

Haltis or Gentle leaders generally go over the dogs nose and make it much easier to control a large dog by turning the dogs head when they try and pull.

It gives the owner great leverage over the dog. They can however cause neck problems when not used properly and while a dog can learn to wear it, most if asked would probably prefer not to. For this reason, unless I had no choice I would cross these off my list too.

I tend to favour using a harness that has both a front and back leash loop. I want one that does not sit under the dog's armpits where it can chafe them or one that sits across their front chest at too low an angle where it impedes their ability to walk normally.

What about leashes? We can use short leashes, long leashes or retractable leashes. I tend to rule out retractable leashes as I find they constantly put slight pressure on a dog's collar and can be hard to control if your

dog does pull. For me I prefer a longer leash and often use a 15ft leash that I can let out or bring in. It allows my dogs to move about and sniff without pulling me with them. It lets them feel more like they are off leash. When needed I can shorten it up, like when passing someone on a sidewalk. With practice you have a great deal of control. At a park I may even utilize a 50ft line to allow my dog ultimate freedom without losing control and it lets me practice my recalls safely. If I am going out where there's lots of action I use a short 6 foot leash.

Dog's Pace

Dogs generally like to walk at a much faster pace then we do. For them this pace is natural and walking slow is not easy. When my girl Dani first came to live with us at 3 years of age, I noticed she walked slow and would raise up her left front and left rear paw to take a step forward. In doing so I could see the incredible stress on her paws and back. A more natural balanced gait for your dog is where the opposite front and rear leg lift and step. It is like when a horse does a trot. It is generally a quicker pace but much more comfortable and easier on the back and leg joints.

I guessed that Dani walked this way as a result of being forced to walk beside the owner at a slow pace and a very short tightly held leash. At first I thought she had a problem with her front paws as they would wobble terribly as she walked lifting the same front and rear leg. To see what I mean give it a try. Get down on all fours and lift up your left hand and left leg and take a step forward with them. How does that feel? Are you in balance? How did your back feel and wrists? Now go the other way and lift up the left hand and right leg and take a step. Did this feel better. Less strain. If you are like most this will be the case. I like to try and walk at a quick pace and give my dogs enough leash that they can get into this opposite leg gait. With my girl Dani it took almost 6 months for her to switch gaits and now her legs no longer wobble and I don't see the back problems I was seeing before.

Loose Leash

Loose leash walking is probably the most requested behaviour by most dog owners. It's not fun to go for a walk when you are being pulled all over the place. Every DOG I run into complains about their OWNERS pulling on the leash. "What's up with them?" they say to me. They just walk so darn slow that every time I try and get somewhere, they are pulling on my leash. The truth here is that dogs tend to walk faster then we do and most of us could achieve a loose leash by just walking faster.

For a good walk we want our dogs to learn that pulling forward on their leash is not going to work or get them where they want to go. In order for this to happen it is up

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to us to teach them, because walking on leash is just not a natural thing for a dog. While many training videos may make this concept seem easy and quick to achieve, the truth is that it takes some time. I think the biggest problem people run into is they try and teach it during walks with their dogs. Doing so rarely turns into success. The reason is that during a walk there are just too many distractions that vie for your dog's attention. They really have a hard time paying attention. It is like bringing a child into a toy store and then getting them to sit down so you can teach a math lesson. Yup, that is just not going to happen.

In order to succeed in teaching this, you want to begin the lessons in a quiet place, like a room of your home. You want to put a leash on your dog and get a pocketful of great tasty treats. At that point all you have to do is wait. At first your dog may go this way and that way and while they do just quietly wait there holding the leash. Don't pull or jerk or even call your dog. Just wait... eventually they will get bored and come over to see what the problem is. As soon as they do, reach into your pocket and give them a treat. Once they finish chewing, drop another treat on the ground and while they are getting it take a step forward and again just wait. When your dog comes to you repeat what you just did. After a short while you will notice your dog no longer pulls but stays with you and your loose leash more interested in your rewards than a tight leash. When this happens try taking 2-3 steps and if your dog follows with the leash loose give them a treat. Begin walking again and repeat. Do this in short 2-4 minute sessions maximum.

Once you find your dog is staying with you take the lesson to another room in the house and repeat from the start. That's right from the start. When your dog is a pro, let's go outside into your backyard. You'll find this much different and your dog once again stops keeping the leash loose. Why? Distractions. There are smells and sounds that vie for their attention. So what do you do? Nothing! Just start over and wait till your dog decides to come check in on you where the leash is loose and begin just like in the house. As your dog learns, find places where the distractions are a bit more. When doing this don't be cheap. Reward them fast when they are keeping the leash loose and reward them often. I get a rate of a treat every 5-6 seconds to start. Once they get it down, I slow down this rate — but, not for a long time. People make a mistake of being cheap with the reward way too soon.

Now, while you are doing this training DO NOT expect your dog to walk loosely on walks. You may even want to hold off on walks for a week or two. Don't worry, you can throw a ball, or food, or play tug to exercise your dog. The next step is to head outside and walk a house or two one way with a loose leash and then back a house or two the other way. Back and forth we would go and perhaps our

walk was just that. Again, don't be cheap on the rewards. When you think you aren't I bet you still are. Once your dog could do that I would add distance. Perhaps they can walk 4 houses and then 5 and so on.

In truth this is one of the most effective ways to teach your dog to walk with a loose leash. Dani has been with me almost two years and to this day I still reward her on our walks for being beside me. Usually I just bring some of her breakfast kibble that she is going to eat anyways and use it as the reward. Training loose leash walking is very positive and builds a great relationship between you and your dog. It also allows them control to make the right choice, which is to keep the leash loose. They control getting rewards by choosing good behaviours like staying close which conveniently means a loose leash.

One other rule I have on walks is: WE NEVER WILL MOVE FORWARD WHEN THE LEASH IS NOT LOOSE. Please take a look and notice the word, NEVER, because I mean NEVER! When my dog tightens the leash I may move backwards or just stand still or go in circles but what

I won't do is jerk on the leash, nor will I allow the dog to get any closer to where he wants. Of course, the minute MY DOG (not me) makes the leash loose I will start moving towards where he wanted to go in the first place. This teaches them

that to get where they want, they can get there, but only on a loose leash. Loose leash walking is not a quick fix. It takes time and commitment. The results however will make it well worth your time and effort. Getting a dog who can walk on a loose leash will open the world up for you and your dog. Even if it takes a few months to learn this in the end you have a lifetime of good walking.

Smells

One of the best things you can do during a walk is allow your dog to smell to their heart's content. For a dog, this is like reading the daily newspaper. It tells them who is around, and how long it's been since they have been there. Whether they were big dogs or small dogs; all sorts of great information that dogs find enriching to learn about. A dog that smells is a calm dog. Did you know that many top trainers suggest Nose Work training for dogs that have behaviour problems? This is because dogs can find smelling very calming and it is such a natural behaviour for them. Watch a dog walk off leash. For the most part you will see a dog that zig-zags from here to there as they catch smells in the wind and see what they are all about. You will rarely see a dog just walk in a straight line like we do. I feel bad when I see dogs that are held at a close heel with their head up unable to smell the roses. For most people they want to take their dogs for enriching walks, but don't realize that being able to smell is what's great to a dog. Achieving some distance or duration is never the

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goal of our dogs. Given we walk for our dogs benefit and enrichment, let's help them out and let them smell as much as we can. It will pay off greatly with a more balanced and calmer dog. Try it for a few walks and see what happens.

Training

I take advantage of walk time during our daily walks to work on training. I am a positive reward training and find that food rewards on walks does the trick for my dogs, so I always have great treats at the ready. Some things I like to do are the following:

- Whenever my dog chooses to be at my side, I will reward them for being there.
- Every so often when my dog is beside me, I will stop. When my dog then figures out, I have stopped and also stops I will reward them. Eventually they stop beside me when I stop walking automatically and I reward them for making such a good choice. I never cue them to stop. I just stop and wait because eventually they will come back and stop.
- When my dog is in front of me, I will say their name. If they look at me, I will reward them with a treat at my side. After many walks when my dog hears their name they come to me, getting a recall by choice.
- When my dog is in front and checks back on me, I will reward them.

To keep my dog from getting heavy from all the rewards I just use part of their breakfast or dinner. In a bowl they will eat it in seconds. Using it this way spreads it out, allows learning and bonding to take place and generally is a fun thing to do. These are just a few of the things I do on our walks. How many can you think of?

Enrichment

I like to do things that my dog finds enriching on walks. I spoke before about letting them smell and of course the training I just talked about. Another fun thing I like to do is DOGGIEPARKOUR. In other words I find things for my dog to "Go over or Under." I find things for my dogs to jump up on. A kids playground can be fun where they interact with the equipment going over and under things. Jumping up on a picnic table bench or bleacher seats. Going up on a rock or going under a low branch. I may put a treat up on a branch for my dog to jump up to get. It is amazing how many objects your dog can interact with on your walks. Besides being fun for both of us it is great stretching and coordination stuff for my dogs to do. I may just take a handful of treats and throw them out into a big grass field and let them use their noses to find and eat. Doing enriching things on your walk will really make them more interesting for your dogs and help them interact more with their world.

Strange Dogs, Strange People, Strange Sounds

It is a common myth that our dogs want to meet every person and thing that it sees on it's walk and for some dogs this may be the case. For others, however, this is not the case. Can you imagine walking down the street with your wife when you come across another guy walking by. "Hey," he says, "what a great looking wife you have, do you mind if I touch her?" I know what my answer would be and to be truthful my answer is the same for my dogs. NO... but then I suggest we ask my dog their thoughts on this matter. In many cases, when asked my dogs choose not to say hello and want to just continue their walk. Some people may be insulted by this, but I am my dogs advocate and feel it is my dog's right to decide whether or not someone is allowed to get in their face and touch them.

My dog Dani is what many label 'reactive' on leash, where she will get very stressed seeing other dogs. She is unsure of what their intentions might be, so she begins to stare at them. If they stare back, she will want to charge and make them go away. She has learned over the last few years that she is safe and seeing dogs has never resulted in her being hurt, so now she is a bit calmer. That being said, she still would be unable to pass another dog on the same sidewalk. This is okay and we just give her the space she needs. She has a right to ask for that.

I know other dogs that are very stressed by cars going by or loud sounds out on the street. For these dogs a walk may not be a comforting thing and can be terribly stressful. Can you imagine if you were walking down an alley and you came across a group of teens that were staring at you and yelling things. It would probably make you very uncomfortable — a very different feeling than walking in a quiet park. Watch your dog to see whether you are walking in an environment that is stressful for them. If this is the case, perhaps it makes sense to end the walk and go home to play in the yard. I was working with a dog once that really wanted to kill any other dog she saw. Walks in my neighborhood were not fun for her and I. What I did was drive around and find a few spots where there were no dogs and few people, and because of this, we could have peaceful, unstressed walks. In the end, watch your dogs and see whether they are truly having fun on the walk and if not, then help them out.

A Walk in The Park

Walks are a great time for us to bond and build a relationship with our dogs. They don't have to be far; they don't have to be long. The best will be enriching and calm for both of you. Hopefully we have given you some ideas to achieve this. HAPPY WALKING!

Image from [pexels.com/Isaiah Stilwell](https://pexels.com/Isaiah-Stilwell)

~ Sheri Manuel:

Graphic Design and Layout,

Family to sweet Buddy & Aurora (also adopted from LRAS)