Puppy Program » Full Program

The Official CCC **Puppy Program** is appropriate for puppies as young as 8 weeks. The exercises in this program are age appropriate, safe for growing bodies, and focus on building body awareness and proprioception. Develop a square sit, rear end awareness, proper spinal alignment, proprioception, problem solving skills, confidence and stillness in this 7 circuit Program. These are the MOST important exercises on the whole site, as they lay the foundation for every other exercise. Dogs completing the Puppy Program will be well prepared to continue on to the **Strong Dog** or **Sport Dog Program.**

Table of Contents

This is a **dynamic** table of contents. When clicked, the listings below will take you directly to that Page, Circuit or Exercise. Pretty nifty! Also, this document is formatted to allow you to search for a word or phrase. Use the shortcut "command + F" on a Mac or "control + F" on a PC to open the search box.

MindMap » A visual representation

This MindMap is a visual representation of the path you'll be taking through the circuit.

In general, you will begin with Circuit 1 and move through all 7 Circuits completing one at a time.. If you have begun formal conditioning or introduced conditioning through trick training, some of these exercises may be familiar to you and your pup already. Feel free to backtrack a bit and refine form and understanding given this new level of guidance, or jump ahead and start where appropriate.

After your pup reaches fluency (specifically defined in the instructions in each exercise) you will then have a choice to continue on to the Strong Dog Program (not pursuing a sport path) or Sport Dog Program. Several of the mini-programs may also be appropriate depending on your individual pup's age and needs. It will likely take approximately 6 months to fully complete this program. Fast is slow, and smooth is fast. It's important to build a solid foundation.

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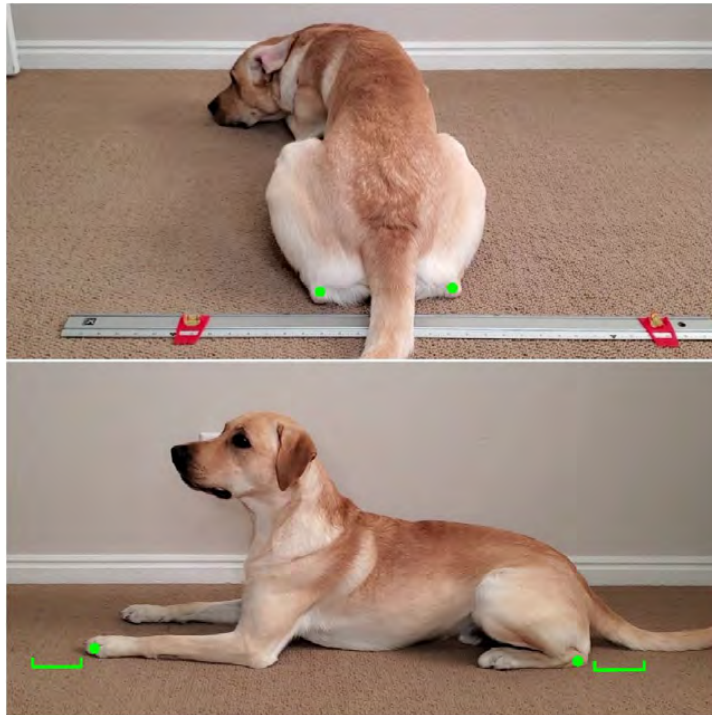
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Equipment needed for this program

➔ 2 Sitting Platforms

➔ 1 Standing Platform

➔ Plyo Box, Klimb or other raised platform

➔ 2-4 Rubber Feed Bowls or similar stable foot targets

➔ 4 PawPods (TotoFit is my preferred brand)

➔ 2 Balance Bars (must be affixed to the ground) or 2 sitting platforms can be substituted for safety

➔ Cato Board, Wobble Board or large square platform

➔ Manners Minder / Treat n Train (Optional)

➔ 6+ pole cavaletti set (Optional but recommended for future)

➔ 2 Large-ish traffic cones (Optional)

Note: More information regarding platform description, measuring, and construction can be found in a 3 part blog post on my blog page.

How to measure for Platforms

Here's a graphic to help you measure for your sitting and standing platforms if you don't already have those.

Sitting Platform: Width, is the measurement between the point of the hocks (shown in the top portion of the photo) + 1or 2 inches. Length is 1.5-2x the width.

Standing Platform: Width is the measurement between the point of the hocks + 1or 2 inches (the same as the Sitting Platform). Length is the measurement shown in the bottom portion of the attached photo, plus a little bit extra. For a medium-large size dog 3-4 inches extra in the front, and 3-4 inches extra in the rear is sufficient. Tiny dogs need less "extra space". Giant dogs need a bit more.

Foot Targets: Width is the measurement between the point of the hocks + 1or 2 inches (the same as the Sitting Platform). Length is about half the width measurement.

For more specific instructions, I wrote a 3 part blog series that covers the difference between the various types of platforms, how to measure for each, and how to build them yourself. You can see these on my website.

Progression Tips & Considerations

1. When implementing a formal conditioning program, we're implementing movements that impact the body in a few different ways.
    a. Increasing the **strength** of a muscle concentrically and eccentrically, defined by the ability to move to end range while loaded and maintain 85% accuracy.
    b. Improving the **endurance** of the muscle, defined by the amount of repetitions or duration an exercise can be performed while still maintaining 85% proper alignment.
    c. Increasing the **flexibility** of a muscle.
    d. Improving **body awareness** of the dog.

2. We progress an exercise in one of two ways...
    a. **Building strength & endurance:** Asking for more repetitions / longer duration before resting. (a through c above)
    b. **Challenging coordination:** Asking a dog for more precision movement, challenging posture, increasing balance demands and/or increasing the complexity of an exercise. (d above)

3. We measure the readiness of the dog to progress by assessing **fluency**, which is a measurement of how consistently the dog is able to correctly execute when meeting the challenge of maximum repetitions x sets (defined for each exercise).

    A dog is considered "fluent" and ready to progress within an exercise (adding repetitions or duration), or progress to the next exercise variation when...
    a. **Maximum repetitions** x sets has been reached
    b. **85% accuracy** is maintained throughout
    c. **Arousal level is maintained** (no significant increase or decrease in arousal)

4. Some dogs will need many sessions of a specific exercise to meet the required strength/flexibility or coordination benchmarks before progressing to the next level. In other exercises, only one or two sessions may be necessary before progressing. Recording, and assessing the video of your exercise protocol can reveal valuable information, and help you determine when it is appropriate to progress.

5. **How to build repetitions:** A typical conservative strength / endurance progression schedule would be...

> 5 reps x 3 sets
> 7 reps, 7 reps, 5 reps
> 10 reps, 7 reps, 7 reps
> 10 reps, 10 reps, 7 reps
> 10 reps x 3 sets

So when building reps this can be a helpful guide. There's no downside to progressing conservatively, aside from the fact that it takes more time. Conversely, progressing too quickly can lead to frustration, a loss of precision, and incorrect muscle recruitment.

NOTE: Change in arousal level, increase or decrease, is the first indicator of mental and/or physical fatigue. Taking a short break (30 seconds to 1 min) with a cookie scatter, or down-stay can help manage arousal levels.

6. **Moving from one circuit to the next**
Not all exercises within a circuit will be progressed at the same time. But as a general guide, I try not to straddle more than 2 circuits at the same time.
   a. **Example:** If my dog has reached fluency in 3 out of 4 exercises in Circuit 1, I would progress to Circuit 2, and also continue to implement the slow to develop exercise from Circuit 1. But I WOULD NOT progress to the exercises in Circuit 3 until the exercise from Circuit 1 was fluent.
   b. If we progress only the skills the dog is naturally good at, and neglect the skills they struggle with, we will end up running into a **"bottleneck"** as the circuits progress. This could be a skills bottleneck, strength/endurance bottleneck or a flexibility bottleneck. So the exercises the dog struggles with the most are actually the most important to focus on!
   c. **NOTE:** Puppies with growing bodies may need to return to previous progressions of an exercise when experiencing growth spurts. Past understanding of where their body parts are in space may not be applicable when the legs are suddenly several inches longer!! Patience pays off during these growing times!

7. Static **before** Dynamic
Isolated **before** Integrated
Stable **before** Unstable
Form **drives** Function

Puppy Specific Guidelines

1. **Managing Arousal**
   Increased arousal and overarousal can result as much from a mental challenge as from a physical challenge… So we want to be on the lookout for increasing or decreasing arousal levels when implementing conditioning exercises. Brains can't think or learn very well when overly taxed… either by complexity of an exercise (having to hold many thoughts in the mind at once) or physical challenge, fatigue and adrenaline. Both situations can result in an adrenalized state, where learning doesn't happen well. Some signs of overarousal are… Moving quickly, offering other behaviors, vocalization, taking the cookie hard, general feeling of frantic movement, etc. Conversely, underarousal can manifest as looking away, leaving, freezing/standing still, offering easier movements, etc. If we are seeing any of these things, taking a short break (30 sec to 1 min) can be helpful.

2. **Eccentric Phase for stability and functional mobility**
   The Eccentric phase of a movement or muscle contraction is when the dog is slowly resisting gravity, and working muscle is elongating. This phase produces functional mobility, as the dog is "forced" to use their muscles to control their movement vs relying on the elasticity of the fascia. Focusing on the eccentric phase happening slowly will be important for developing puppies. But this phase is biomechanically more difficult, and will likely take longer to develop proper form.

3. **Exit Props Carefully**
   When delivering a reward, we want to help your puppy exit the props gently. In some of the videos I might toss a cookie to reset. We don't want any slipping or sliding to an abrupt stop when following a thrown cookie. I will often toss the cookie closer to my older puppy to reduce speed, and then toss another to help them move into position to set up for the next repetition.

4. **Reward the attempt**
   It can be challenging to implement new movement mechanics. Like learning to use your non-dominant hand to perform a fine motor skill, the first attempt at a skill is very likely to be clumsy, and inaccurate. REWARD ANYWAY! Rewarding the attempt will communicate to your pup they are on the right track. It's a trap to hold out for perfection.

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Circuit 1
3-5 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Front Foot Target: Foundation

0:20 of this video

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: An enthusiastic front foot target. We are looking for the dog to demonstrate understanding more than executing a high level of repetitions.

Appropriate to progress: Stay with this exercise until the dog is able to execute happily 10/10 times over 2 sets..

Note: Skimping on this step will likely lead to difficulty in the future. Notice how placement of the reset cookie, placement of reward and handler position influence the dog and increase the likelihood of success.

Goal: Front feet on target. Alignment and posture adjustments will come later as the exercises progress.

2. Rear Foot Targeting: Foundation

A. Walking forward method 0:44 of this video (left column)

5 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is easily / consistently navigating the prop, and stopping with the front feet off the target and rear feet on.

B. Transitioning to walking backward method 1:22 of this video (right column)

1-2 steps backward
5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 3-4 steps backward. 5 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: when the dog is happily and consistently stepping back onto the target without deviating or bending the spine

Goal: Building value to automatically stepping backward/reaching backward with the rear feet.

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3. [Turning on a Plank: Foundation](#)

1:49 of this video

5 repetitions in each direction

Building to: 3 sets total

Note: Try and place the "new cookie" before the pup is done eating the first cookie. That makes for more of a reward and less of a lure, ensure the brain is driving the movement -vs- the stomach.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to keep all 4 feet on the plank, demonstrating coordination, and somewhat anticipating the cookie will appear at the other end, and moving in that direction.

Goal: Teaches body awareness, promotes flexibility, and strengthens the hip and shoulder stabilizers.

4. [Front Foot Target to Elevated Perch: Foundation](#)

2:18 of this video

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: An enthusiastic front foot target. We are looking for the dog to demonstrate understanding more than executing a high level of repetitions.

Appropriate to progress: Stay with this exercise until the dog is able to execute happily 10/10 times.

Front foot target should be slightly less than elbow height.

Note: Skimping on this step will likely lead to difficulty in the future. Notice how placement of the reset cookie, placement of reward and handler position influence the dog and increase the likelihood of success.

Goal: This exercise lays the foundation for many exercises to follow. Teaches body awareness and targeting skills. Shifts weight into rear by elevating the front feet.

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1. Pivot: Foundation

2:48 of this video

5 passes (Stepping to the right approx. 3 steps and back =1 pass)

→ Reward for each step ←

Building to: 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily moving in both directions and responding to minimal / not exaggerated handler motion.

Note: Front feet elevated about ½ elbow height

Goal: Teaches rear end awareness, and builds value for each individual step to prevent rushing. Strengthens the gluteals, hamstrings and quadriceps by raising the height of the front feet and shifting weight into the rear. Sidestepping also strengthens the outer hip and inner thigh muscles (abductors and adductors).

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2. Square Stand: Foundation

5 reps x 2 sets

Initial goal: 3 seconds before releasing

Ultimate goal: 5 seconds before releasing
Building to: 5 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily targeting the front and rear foot targets, and adjusting into position automatically, with minimal reluctance.

Note: Ideal alignment has the forelimbs and hocks vertically aligned, but this posture can be too challenging right in the beginning. It's ok to shorten the space between the front foot

target and rear foot target slightly in the very beginning during the learning phase. This should be adjusted relatively quickly in grown dogs.

Goal: Introduces the concept of front foot targeting plus rear foot targeting simultaneously. Begins to strengthen the postural muscles (stabilizers) and core in neutral alignment to promote proper alignment.
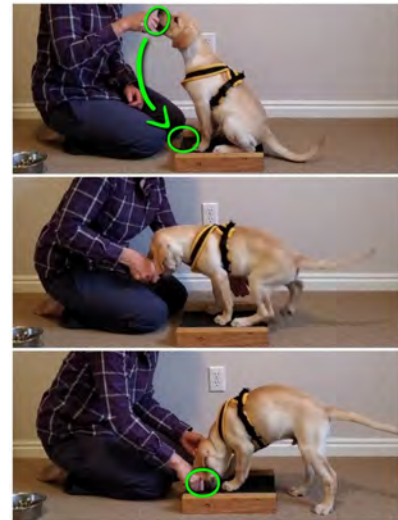
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3. Tuck Sit- Kick Back Stand: Foundation

5 reps x 3 sets

Note: Front feet stay still. Rear feet move forward and backward.

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the front feet stay still 85% of the time, and the dog is able to meet max reps.

Goal: Teaches the front feet to remain still. Improves strength through the back muscles, core and shoulders.

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4. Rear Foot to Hand Target (Part 1): Foundation

5 reps in one direction
5 reps in the other direction

Building to: 5 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog demonstrates fluency, defined by a clear understanding of offering the rear foot to leg/obstacle.

Note: In the beginning focus on the dog training component (having the dog understand the intent of the movement) -vs- pushing for a specific number of repetitions.

Goal: This is a body awareness exercise that lays the foundation for an entire progression of exercises. You can progress to Part 2 as soon as understanding is achieved.

Note: If your dog is significantly larger/ longer than your leg, you can substitute an angled or flat Standing Platform to act as a leg extension.

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Circuit 3
3-5 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Head Nods: Foundation

Head Nods UP/Down: 3
Head Nods Right/Left: 3

Release off props

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute all 3 sets while keeping feet still, and following the lure/hand target without losing balance or focus.

Note: Arousal level matters. If your pup is starting to become overaroused, exhibiting dancing feet, mugging your hand, offering other behaviors, etc, a brain break may be in order (30 seconds to 1 min).

Goal: Teaching the pup to maintain a foot position while also moving the head. Building value into stillness. Lays the foundation for more advanced variations later on.

2. Rear Foot to Hand Target (Part 2): Beginner

5 reps to the right
5 reps to the left
Repeat x 2

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog demonstrates fluency, and offers the rear foot to the smaller target of the hand vs the larger target of the leg or platform. And is able to execute to max reps with 85% accuracy.

Note: In the beginning focus on the dog training component -vs- pushing for a specific number of repetitions. It is very common for dogs to be "handed" the same way humans are handed. So it's expected that one side will be "better". We want to build value to the non-dominant side to make up for this coordination deficit.

Goal: This is a body awareness exercise that lays the foundation for an entire progression of exercises. We're looking for an enthusiastic hit with the rear foot.

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3. [Rock Back Sit-Push Forward Stand: Foundation](#)

5 reps x 2 Sets

Building to: 5 reps x 3 sets

Be quick to take a brain break and reward with a cookie scatter or toy play.

Note: We are just introducing this movement pattern, and are focused on the gross movement. This exercise will be refined in the progression variations.

Appropriate to progress:
1. Rear feet more still than moving
2. Stepping forward and backward with front feet
3. Appropriate arousal level
4. Interested in food reward but not "mugging" the hand
5. Generally staying on the platform.

Goal: Introduces the concept of "Sit" keeping the rear feet still, while moving the body into a stand. Improves body awareness, and lays the foundation for future variations.

4. Pivot + Step Up: Beginner

Front foot target about elbow height. Rear foot target ½ hock height.
5 passes (moving to one side and back = 1 pass)

Repeat x 1

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets with 85% accuracy, is able to precisely target, lift onto, and lower off the rear foot targets without stumbling, hopping or losing balance.

Note: Reward for every step.This exercise is not about rushing to get to the next target, but about building value to each individual step to improve coordination.

Goal: Strengthens hip abductors and adductors. Improves rear end awareness, by encouraging slow movement. Builds value to slow precise movement.

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Circuit 4
3-5 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Ipsilateral Foot Target/Side Step to Target: Foundation

5 reps on each side
Repeat x 3

Building to: 3-4 side steps moving into the ipsilateral foot target (demonstrated in the video)

5 reps on each side
Repeat for 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily, and independently offering ipsilateral feet simultaneously

Note: Any platform (or 2 platforms) propped against the wall can work for this. A wobble board doesn't have to be used.

In the beginning, don't worry about spinal alignment too much... that will come with the next progression. For now, we just want to build fluency and understanding to the ipsilateral foot target.

Goal: Improves coordination through the ipsilateral chains (connecting same side hip to same side shoulder). Strengthens the hip and shoulder abductor.

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2. Rear Foot to Hand Target (Part 3): Beginner

5 reps on the right
5 reps on the left

Repeat x 2

Building to: 4 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog demonstrates fluency, defined by a clear understanding of offering the rear foot to hand while maintaining position on the standing platform.

Note: Don't worry too much about the spine flexion that accompanies this exercise. We will correct for that in the progression. Also, if your dog is much larger than your arm's reach, feel free to use a target stick or kitchen spatula to "extend your arm".

Goal: Minimize / eliminate any side stepping that has been built into the rear foot to hand target in the previous variations.

3. Fold Back Down: Foundation

5 reps x 3 Sets

Note: Criteria should be loose during the learning phase, and tighten up as the dog demonstrates understanding. The concentric phase (transition from down to stand) will always develop before the eccentric phase (transition from stand to down).
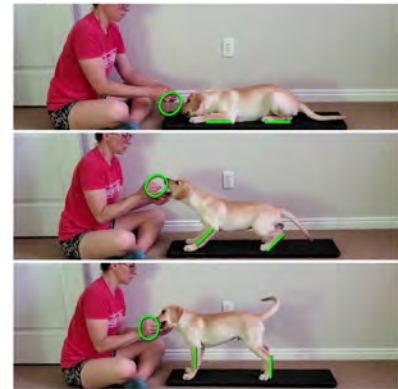
Building to:
1. All 4 limbs on the platform
2. Hocks parallel
3. Deep hip/knee flexion (no rear legs stretching forward / "overcooked turkey")
4. Pelvis level (not over on a hip)
5. Front limbs parallel and rib cage width
6. Elbows not leading excessively

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain criteria 85% of the time.

With a baby puppy, or dog new to an exercise, I always reward for an attempt, and jackpot brilliance. I find using verbal praise raises the value of the jackpot, especially for a baby puppy. Just be mindful not to trigger over-arousal.

Goal: Introduce the concept of lying down while maintaining some semblance of alignment.

4. Cone Wrap/ Intro to Cavaletti (Part 1): Foundation

Phase 1: Priming
Lure creates the movement.
3 repetitions in each direction.

Repeat 3x.

Appropriate to progress: Stay with phase 1 until the dog is reliably moving around the cone and not "backing out" (shown at 0:44)

Phase 2: Choosing
The option to choose is introduced.
3 repetitions in each direction.

Repeat 3x.

Appropriate to progress: Stay with phase 2 until the dog is reliably moving around the cone, and not cutting to the inside (an example of cutting to the inside is 2:34). This is supported by placement of reward. If the dog cuts to the inside of the cone consistently, this indicates a lack of understanding, and phase 1 should be revisited.

Phase 3: Distance
In this phase we add distance and switch from luring to rewarding.
3 repetitions in each direction.

Repeat 3x

Appropriate to progress: Stay with phase 3 until the dog is happily moving away from the handler.

This can be VERY hard for some dogs. Resist the urge to help by getting closer to the cone. Placement of reward + reward history should be enough. If the dog is struggling, more time at phase 2 is likely needed.

Phase 4: Proofing
In this phase we change the setup to more closely resemble what we need for the progression.

3 repetitions in each direction.

Repeat 3x

Appropriate to progress: Stay with phase 4 until the dog is happily moving away from the handler and confident enough in the dog's focus skills to move outside or to a large space

Note: The dog should always turn toward the handler to keep things consistent. Notice if your pup is reluctant to turn in one direction. This indicates an issue, and further diagnostics might be needed.

Goal: Independent execution, including focusing on the cone/not looking at the handler's hands, moving away from the handler and committing to the wrap before turning back or looking for the reward.

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1. Teaching Stillness: Beginner

5 reps x 3 sets

Literally begin with asking for a single second only.

Reward BEFORE the dog moves. It is critical to build reward history without overasking. If your dog does happen to move, that means you overasked. No biggie! Just toss a reset cookie and begin again

Building to: 5 seconds one second at a time. Stick with max 5 seconds for the first several sessions until fluency is achieved.

Increase the duration 1-2 seconds at a time

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain stillness for 20 seconds x 3 sets. Release from props between sets

Note: When progressing this exercise… Either ask for duration OR a new piece of equipment OR a new body position. And when making something harder, something else has to be made easier.

Goal: Building value to stillness, and teaching the dog that standing still is a rewarding behavior that PAYS! Prioritize stillness over duration.

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2. Rear Foot to Hand Target (Part 3): Beginner

(This is the same)

5 reps on the right
5 reps on the left
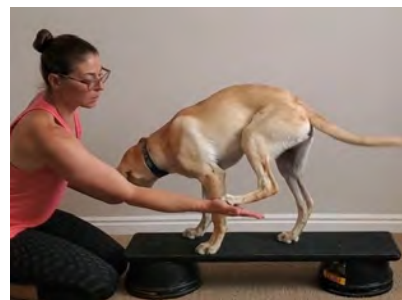
Repeat x 2
Building to: 4 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog demonstrates fluency, defined by a clear understanding of offering the rear foot to hand while maintaining position on the standing platform.

Note: Don't worry too much about the spine flexion that accompanies this exercise. We will correct for that in the progression. Also, if your dog is much larger than your arm's reach, feel free to use a target stick or kitchen spatula to "extend your arm".

Goal: Minimize / eliminate any side stepping that has been built into the rear foot to hand target in the previous variations.

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3. [Tuck Sit-Kick Back Stand: Beginner](#)

5 reps x 3 sets

Note: Front feet stay still. Rear feet move forward and backward.

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the front feet stay still 85% of the time, and the dog is able to meet max reps.

Goal: Teaches the front feet to remain still. Improves strength through the back muscles, core and shoulders.

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4. [Dig Dig: Beginner](#)

3-5 seconds x 5 reps

Building to: 30 seconds straight x 3 reps for mature dogs.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is digging until the terminal marker ("yes" or reward delivery), without needing much encouragement.

Note: Dogs who are more toy driven can take advantage of that and use a toy to build drive in this exercise.

Goal: Think of this as a sprint workout. The ultimate goal is high speed, high energy output, fast rhythm, and short duration (considering your pup's age of course). Strengthens the front end, specifically the musculature in the shoulder, elbow and carpus/pastern.

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Circuit 6
3-5 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. [Intro to Paw Pods: Beginner](#)

Front Feet: 3-5 repetitions

If successful transition to
Rear Feet: 3-5 repetitions

Building to: 5 reps x 3 sets of each

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog is intentionally placing one foot on each pod, feet remaining mostly still, and is able to execute on the front and rear with 85% accuracy.

Goal: This is a body awareness exercise that teaches the pup where their feet are in space, and begins to introduce the concept that each foot can move independently to find a target.

2. [Intro to Cavaletti (Part 2): Beginner](#)

4 passes x 3 sets

Note: This is an intermediary step implemented in an attempt to "split not lump". When your pup is executing 4 passes x 3 sets, you can begin to add poles. No need to build here.

Appropriate to progress: As soon as fluency is reached, defined by the dog focusing forward / away from the handler, choosing to wrap the cone toward the handler, and able to maintain an appropriate arousal level.

Goal: Acts as an intermediate step to proof focus forward, impulse control and begins to increase distance the dog has to travel away from the handler.

3. [Backing Up: Beginner](#)

5 reps x 3 sets at 1-3 body lengths

Building to: 3 reps 20-30 feet depending on the size of the dog. Small dogs have a goal closer to 20ft. Large dogs closer to 30ft.

Note: Start with 1-2 body lengths. If the dog is managing well, increase distance by 1-2 body lengths each session.

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog is backing up straight, keeping head up, and stepping/not hopping. Then it is appropriate to increase distance. When the dog is executing for 20-30ft x 3 with 85% accuracy, they can safely progress to the next exercise.

Goal: Definitely focus on not hopping or overreaching with the rear feet. Improves mechanics through the PL. Strengthens gluteals, hamstrings and hip flexors and helps to integrate proper mechanics back into the gait.

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4. [Rock Back Sit-Push Forward Stand: Beginner](#)

5 reps x 2 Sets

Building to: 5 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is offering the behavior easily, hitting max reps, and keeping rear feet staying still with 85% accuracy.

Note: The correct movement pattern during the transition from stand to sit is stifle flexing during the transition to sit, and fully flexed before the second front foot comes onto the sitting platform. Notice if your dog is bringing both front feet down and THEN moving into the sit position

Goal: Building value to keeping rear feet still, while transitioning to the stand

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Circuit 7
3-5 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Ipsilateral Step Up: Beginner

5 reps on each side x 2 sets

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: when the dog becomes fluent, as defined by stepping off the platform and onto the platform with ipsilateral legs synchronized, with 85% accuracy... so 4 out of 5x or better.

Note: This is the baseline movement that many exercises are built upon. Taking the time to ensure fluency/understanding will pay off in the long term.

Goal: Teaching synchronized movement through ipsilateral legs. Targets the muscles along the medial aspect of the shoulder and hip og the grounded legs, including the psoas. Keeping these muscles strong is an important component in avoiding MSI.

2. Manual Leg Lift: Intermediate

Lift each leg and hold for 5 seconds.

Building to: 3 continuous sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to stand still / no foot movement, with a neutral spine for maximum reps.

Note: Weight into the handler should be very light. Expect the limb diagonal the lifted limb to get "light" or offload. That's normal/correct. Notice if the dog is resistant to lifting one limb specifically, or if the alignment of the topline changes. This indicates an underlying imbalance, and this exercise should not yet be progressed.

Goal: Strengthens the hip and shoulder stabilizers, and tests for muscle imbalance.

3. Focus Forward: Intermediate

Note: This is a skill based exercise vs a muscle building exercise, so duration and progression will be dependent on how easily the individual assigns value to the reward.

Start with 2-5 seconds between rewards.

Building to: layering in the handler moving out of the picture.

Lastly layer in touch

Appropriate to progress: The skill is considered fluent when the dog is able to stay focused forward and maintain stillness, while all 4 paws are adjusted, and is no longer seeking to look toward the handler.

Goal: Ideally, the dog would demonstrate the behavior shown at the end of the video, and return to position automatically after being released off of the props.

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4. Sit- Walk Forward Down- Stand: Intermediate

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When a pup is through their big growth spurt, and can keep the rear feet staying still 85% accuracy. This is especially challenging in the transition from Stand to Rock Back Sit.

Note: If the spine is getting "squished" on the transition from Sit to Down, your reward placement may be too close to the dog. Conversely, if the rear feet are moving during that transition, your reward placement may be too far away.

Goal: Rear feet staying still throughout. Neutral spine alignment in the Stand, Sit and Down. Strengthens the large movers through the front and rear end and improves proprioception through the rear end.

5. [Intro to Cavaletti (Part 3): Intermediate](#)

Progression 1:
3 passes x 3 sets

Building to:
Progression 2:
5 passes x 3 sets

Building to:
Progression 3:
10 passes x 3 sets

(down and back=1 pass)

Appropriate to progress: ONLY add more passes when 85% fluency is achieved. This includes focus away from the handler / independent execution, no ticking / knocking the poles and entering the poles with an appropriate amount of speed control. Adding too many repetitions too quickly will result in degradation of form from mental and/or physical fatigue.

Goal: Consistent independent execution. Introduces the beginning of plyometric exercise in a controlled manner to reduce overtaxing the system.

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Congratulations! You made it through the Puppy Program, which means you have set your pup up with a massive amount of skills that will last them their entire life! If you are pursuing sports, or a high impact lifestyle, you will be well prepared to transition into the **Sport Dog Program**, otherwise, the **Strong Dog Program** is the best next step.

If you have any questions, or are unsure about how to progress, please don't hesitate to reach out. I always want you to feel supported.

annalee@canineconditioningcoach.com
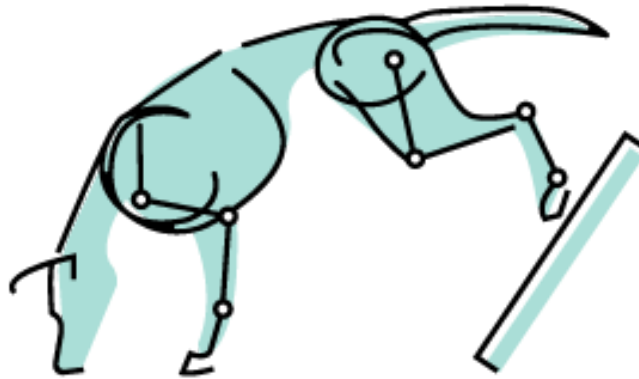
CANINE CONDITIONING COACH.COM

Other Programs Available

CCC Beginner Program
CCC Strong Dog Program
CCC Sport Dog Program
CCC Senior Dog Program
CCC Sloppy Sitters Mini-Program
CCC Post Spay Mini-Program
CCC Postnatal Mini-Program
CCC Post TPLO Mini Program

Beginner Program » Full Program

The **Beginner Program** is designed for older puppies 8+ months old and adult dogs just starting out on their canine conditioning adventure. This program has a focus on body awareness, developing fine motor control, and laiyining the foundation for more intensive strength and power building down the road. Dog/handler teams completing this 7 circuit program will be left with a 2 circuit maintenance program. If you and your pup are pursuing a sport path, or high impact lifestyle, you will be well prepared to move into the **Sport Dog Program**. For pups not competing in sports, the **Strong Dog Program** is the best path forward..

These are the most important exercises in the entire Canine Conditioning Coach program, as they lay the foundation for all the exercises to come. Slow, steady progress is the goal with these exercises.

Table of Contents

This is a **dynamic** table of contents. When clicked, the listings below will take you directly to that page, circuit or exercise. Pretty nifty! Also, this document is formatted to allow you to search for a word or phrase. Use the shortcut "command + F" on a Mac or "control + F" on a PC to open the search box.

MindMap » A visual representation

This MindMap is a visual representation of the path you'll be taking through the circuits.

In general, you will begin with Circuit 1 and work on those exercises to fluency before moving to Circuit 2 then progressing to Circuit 3 and so forth.

After working through the program and completing Circuit 7, you will have a choice to implement the Maintenance Circuits or continue on to the Strong Dog Program or Sport Dog Program. Alternatively, one of the mini-programs may also be appropriate depending on the individual pup's needs. It will likely take approximately 6 months to fully complete this program. Slow and steady.

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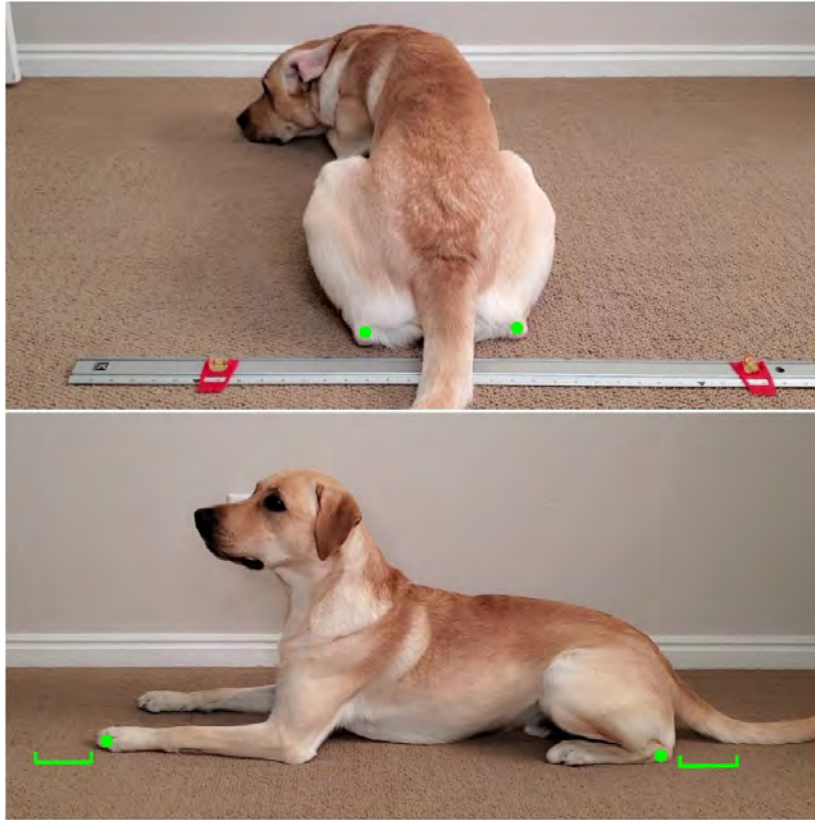
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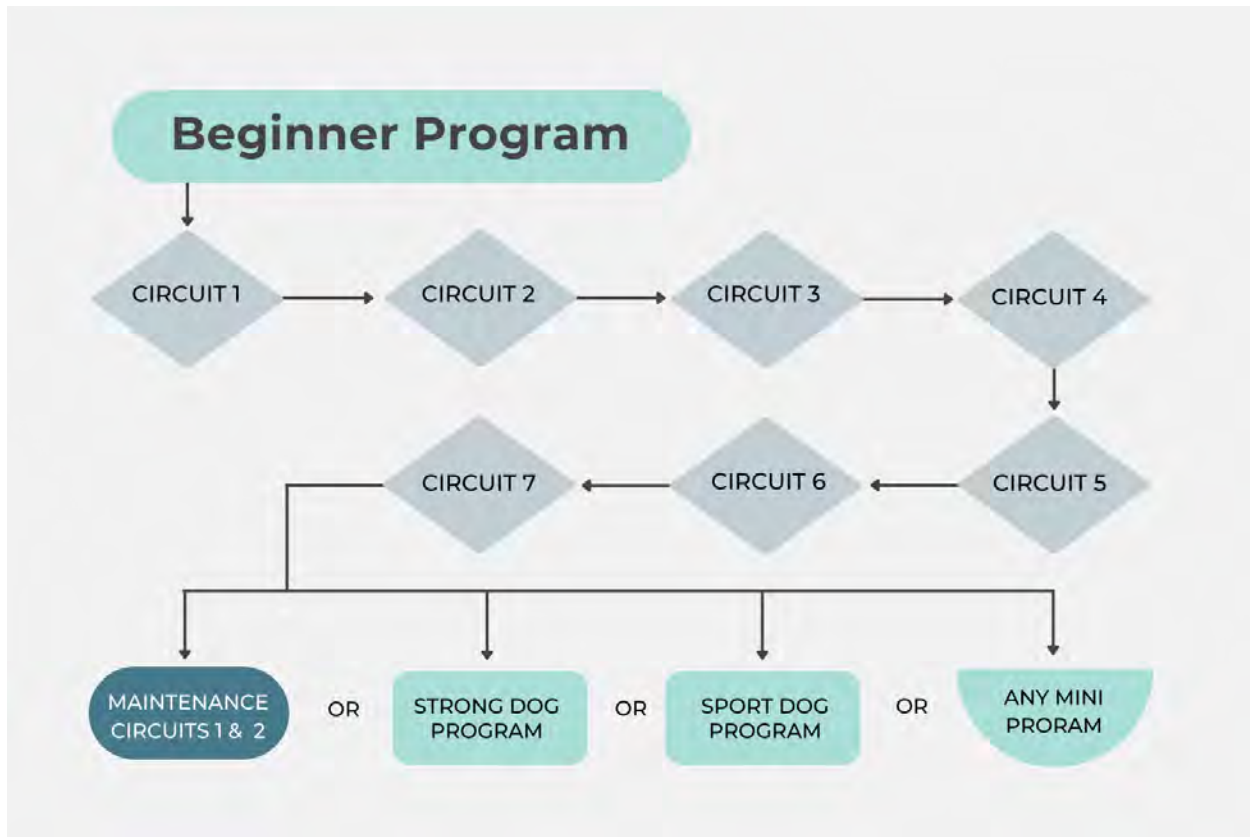
Equipment needed for this program

➔ 2-4 Sitting Platforms

➔ Elevated stable surface, Plyo Box or Klimb

➔ Standing Platform

➔ 2-4 Rubber feed bowls or similar stable foot targets

➔ 4 PawPods (TotoFit is my preferred brand)

➔ Large square of fleece material (1 meter²)

➔ Cato Board, wobble board or large square platform

➔ 6+ pole cavaletti set (Optional but recommended)

➔ 2 shoulder height traffic cones (Optional but recommended)

How to measure for Platforms

Here's a graphic to help you measure for your sitting and standing platforms if you don't already have those.

Sitting Platform: Width, is the measurement between the point of the hocks (shown in the top portion of the photo). Length is 1.5-2x the width.

Standing Platform: Width is the measurement between the point of the hocks (the same as the Sitting Platform). Length is the measurement shown in the bottom portion of the attached photo, plus a little bit extra. For a medium-large size dog 3-4 inches extra in the front, and 3-4 inches extra in the rear is sufficient. Tiny dogs need less "extra space". Giant dogs need a bit more.

Progression Tips & Considerations

1. When implementing a formal conditioning program, we're implementing movements that impact the body in a few different ways.
   a. Increasing the **strength** of a muscle concentrically and eccentrically, defined by the ability to move to end range while loaded and maintain 85% accuracy.
   b. Improving the **endurance** of the muscle, defined by the amount of repetitions or duration an exercise can be performed while still maintaining 85% proper alignment.
   c. Increasing the **flexibility** of a muscle.
   d. Improving **body awareness** of the dog.

2. We progress an exercise in one of two ways...
   a. **Building strength & endurance:** Asking for more repetitions / longer duration before resting. (a through c above)
   b. **Challenging coordination:** Asking a dog for more precision movement, challenging posture, increasing balance demands and/or increasing the complexity of an exercise. (d above)

3. We measure the readiness of the dog to progress by assessing **fluency**, which is a measurement of how consistently the dog is able to correctly execute when meeting the challenge of maximum repetitions x sets (defined for each exercise).

   A dog is considered "fluent" and ready to progress within an exercise (adding repetitions or duration), or progress to the next exercise variation when…
   a. **Maximum repetitions** x sets has been reached
   b. **85% accuracy** is maintained throughout
   c. **Arousal level is maintained** (no significant increase or decrease in arousal)

4. Some dogs will need many sessions of a specific exercise to meet the required strength/flexibility or coordination benchmarks before progressing to the next level. In other exercises, only one or two sessions may be necessary before progressing. Recording, and assessing the video of your exercise protocol can reveal valuable information, and help you determine when it is appropriate to progress.

5. **How to build repetitions:** A typical conservative strength / endurance progression schedule would be...

> 5 reps x 3 sets
> 7 reps, 7 reps, 5 reps
> 10 reps, 7 reps, 7 reps
> 10 reps, 10 reps, 7 reps
> 10 reps x 3 sets

So when building reps this can be a helpful guide. There's no downside to progressing conservatively, aside from the fact that it takes more time. Conversely, progressing too quickly can lead to frustration, a loss of precision, and incorrect muscle recruitment.

NOTE: Change in arousal level, increase or decrease, is the first indicator of mental and/or physical fatigue. Taking a short break (30 seconds to 1 min) with a cookie scatter, or down-stay can help manage arousal levels.

6. Not all exercises within a circuit will be progressed at the same time. But as a general guide, I try not to straddle more than 2 circuits at the same time.

   a. **Example:** If my dog has reached fluency in 3 out of 4 exercises in Circuit 1, I would progress to Circuit 2, and also continue to implement the slow to develop exercise from Circuit 1. But I WOULD NOT progress to the exercises in Circuit 3 until the exercise from Circuit 1 was fluent.

   b. If we progress only the skills the dog is naturally good at, and neglect the skills they struggle with, we will end up running into a **"bottleneck"** as the circuits progress. This could be a skills bottleneck, strength/endurance bottleneck or a flexibility bottleneck. So the exercises the dog struggles with the most are actually the most important to focus on!

      NOTE: Puppies with growing bodies may need to return to previous progressions of an exercise when experiencing growth spurts. Past understanding of where their body parts are in space may not be applicable when the legs are suddenly several inches longer!! Patience pays off during these growing times!

7. Static **before** Dynamic
   Isolated **before** Integrated
   Stable **before** Unstable
   Form **drives** Function

Beginner Specific Guidelines

1. **Managing Arousal**
   Increased arousal and overarousal can result as much from a mental challenge as from a physical challenge… So we want to be on the lookout for increasing or decreasing arousal levels when implementing conditioning exercises. Brains can't think or learn very well when overly taxed… either by complexity of an exercise (having to hold many thoughts in the mind at once) or physical challenge, fatigue and adrenaline. Both situations can result in an adrenalized state, where learning doesn't happen well. Some signs of overarousal are… Moving quickly, offering other behaviors, vocalization, taking the cookie hard, general feeling of frantic movement, etc. Conversely, underarousal can manifest as looking away, leaving, freezing/standing still, offering easier movements, etc. If we are seeing any of these things, taking a short break (30 sec to 1 min) can be helpful.

2. **Eccentric Phase for stability and functional mobility**
   The Eccentric phase of a movement or muscle contraction is when the dog is slowly resisting gravity, and working muscle is elongating. This phase produces functional mobility, as the dog is "forced" to use their muscles to control their movement vs relying on the elasticity of the fascia. Focusing on the eccentric phase happening slowly will be important for your pup's progression.

3. **Exit Props Carefully**
   When delivering a reward, we want to help our pups exit the props gently. In some of the videos I might toss a cookie to reset. We don't want any prop movement, slipping or sliding to an abrupt stop when following a thrown cookie. I will often toss the cookie closer to my dog to reduce speed, and then toss another to help them move into position to set up for the next repetition.

4. **Reward the attempt**
   It can be challenging to implement new movement mechanics, and target underutilized muscles. This is especially true when we are dealing with a chronic issue or injury. Like learning to use your non-dominant hand to perform a fine motor skill, the first attempt at a skill is very likely to be clumsy, and inaccurate. REWARD ANYWAY! Rewarding the attempt will communicate to your pup that they are on the right track. It's a trap to hold out for perfection.

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Circuit 1
3–5 x a week for 1–2 weeks or until Fluency

1. Front Foot Target: Foundation

0:20 of this video

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: An enthusiastic front foot target. We are looking for the dog to demonstrate understanding more than executing a high level of repetitions.

Appropriate to progress: Stay with this exercise until the dog is able to execute happily 10/10 times over 2 sets..

Note: Skimping on this step will likely lead to difficulty in the future. Notice how placement of the reset cookie, placement of reward and handler position influence the dog and increase the likelihood of success.

Goal: Front feet on target. Alignment and posture adjustments will come later as the exercises progress.

2. Rear Foot Targeting: Foundation

A. Walking forward method 0:44 of this video (left column)

5 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is easily / consistently navigating the prop, and stopping with the front feet off the target and rear feet on.

B. Transitioning to walking backward method 1:22 of this video (right column)

1-2 steps backward
5 reps x 3 sets
Building to: 3-4 steps backward 5 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: when the dog is happily and consistently stepping back onto the target without deviating or bending the spine

Goal: Building value to automatically stepping backward/reaching backward with the rear feet.

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3. [Turning on a Plank: Beginner](#)

A. Phase 1: 5 repetitions in one direction. Releasing off the platform between reps. Repeat going the other direction
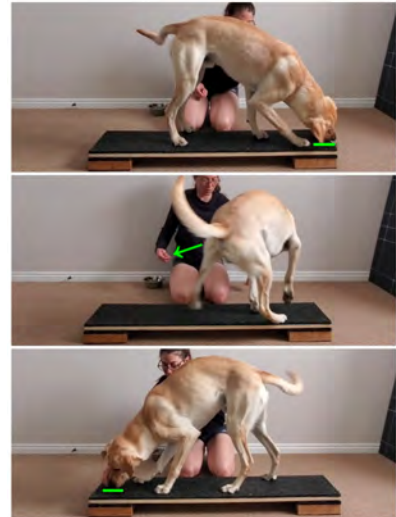
 Repeat x 3 sets

B. Phase 2: Link the turns together., 4 cycles through (1 cycle equals turning right & turning left)

Building to: 3 sets of the phase 2 variation.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily keeping all 4 feet on the plank, demonstrating coordination, and somewhat anticipating the cookie will appear at the other end, and moving in that direction. If a coordination deficit was detected, this exercise can be carried forward and added to the next circuit.

Note: Try and have the new cookie in position before the pup is done eating the first cookie. That makes for more of a reward and less of a lure, ensure the brain is driving the movement -vs- the stomach.

Goal: Teaches body awareness, promotes flexibility, and strengthens the hip and shoulder stabilizers.

4. <u>Front Foot Target to Elevated Perch: Foundation</u>

2:18 of this video

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: An enthusiastic front foot target. We are looking for the dog to demonstrate understanding more than executing a high level of repetitions.

Appropriate to progress: Stay with this exercise until the dog is able to execute happily 10/10 times.

Front foot target should be slightly less than elbow height.

Note: Skimping on this step will likely lead to difficulty in the future. Notice how placement of the reset cookie, placement of reward and handler position influence the dog and increase the likelihood of success.

Goal: This exercise lays the foundation for many exercises to follow. Teaches body awareness and targeting skills. Shifts weight into rear by elevating the front feet.

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Circuit 2
3-5 x a week for 1-2 weeks or until Fluency

1. Pivot: Foundation

2:48 of this video

5 passes (Stepping to the right approx. 3 steps and back =1 pass)

Reward for each step.

Building to: 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily moving in both directions and responding to minimal / not exaggerated handler motion.

Note: Front feet elevated about ½ elbow height

Goal: Teaches rear end awareness, and builds value for each individual step to prevent rushing. Strengthens the gluteals, hamstrings and quadriceps by raising the height of the front feet and shifting weight into the rear. Sidestepping also strengthens the outer hip and inner thigh muscles (abductors and adductors).

2. Square Stand: Foundation

5 reps x 2 sets

Initial goal: 3 seconds before releasing

Ultimate goal: 5 seconds before releasing
Building to: 5 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily targeting the front and rear foot targets, and adjusting into position automatically, with minimal reluctance.

Note: Ideal alignment has the forelimbs and hocks vertically aligned, but this posture can be too challenging right in the beginning. It's ok to shorten the space between the front foot

target and rear foot target slightly in the very beginning during the learning phase. This should be adjusted relatively quickly in grown dogs.

Goal: Introduces the concept of front foot targeting plus rear foot targeting simultaneously. Begins to strengthen the postural muscles (stabilizers) and core in neutral alignment to promote proper alignment.

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3. Tuck Sit-Kick Back Stand: Beginner

5 reps x 3 sets

Note: Front feet stay still. Rear feet move forward and backward.

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the front feet stay still 85% of the time, and the dog is able to meet max reps.

Goal: Teaches the front feet to remain still. Improves strength through the back muscles, core and shoulders.

---

4. Rear Foot to Hand Target (Part 1): Foundation

5 reps in one direction
5 reps in the other direction

Building to: 5 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog demonstrates fluency, defined by a clear understanding of offering the rear foot to leg/obstacle.

Note: In the beginning focus on the dog training component (having the dog understand the intent of the movement) -vs- pushing for a specific number of repetitions.

Goal: This is a body awareness exercise that lays the foundation for an entire progression of exercises. You can progress to Part 2 as soon as understanding is achieved.

Note: If your dog is significantly larger/ longer than your leg, you can substitute an angled or flat Standing Platform to act as a leg extension.

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5. [Teaching Stillness: Beginner](#)

5 reps x 3 sets

Literally begin with asking for a single second only.

Reward BEFORE the dog moves. It is critical to build reward history without overasking. If your dog does happen to move, that means you overasked. No biggie! Just toss a reset cookie and begin again

Building to: 5 seconds one second at a time. Stick with max 5 seconds for the first several sessions until fluency is achieved.

Increase the duration 1-2 seconds at a time

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain stillness for 20 seconds x 3 sets. Release from props between sets

Note: When progressing this exercise… Either ask for duration OR a new piece of equipment OR a new body position. And when making something harder, something else has to be made easier.

Goal: Building value to stillness, and teaching the dog that standing still is a rewarding behavior that PAYS! Prioritize stillness over duration.

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Circuit 3
3-5 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Head Nods: Beginner
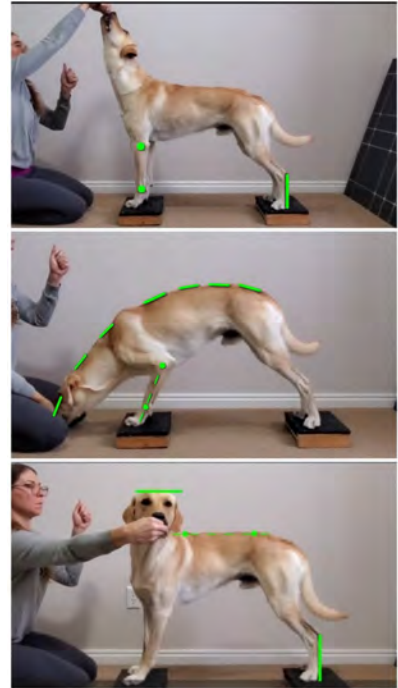
Up: 3
Down: 3
Right: 3
Left: 3

Repeat for 1 set only

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to keep all 4 feet still, and move to the end range, without repositioning or losing balance. And is able to achieve 85% precision for 3 sets total.

Note: Because we are asking for maximum range of motion, any change in behavior or arousal should be seen as fatigue not disobedience. Resting off the props for 30 seconds to 1 min is usually sufficient.

Lastly, not all dogs will have the available range demonstrated in the video, age, breed, confidence, etc will all play a part in how far the individual pup can move. Working within your pup's available range, and deepening slowly (if appropriate) is important.

Goal: Tests the dog's ability to keep feet still while moving the head / neck. Highlights coordination deficit between the sides. Strengthens the hip and shoulder stabilizers against micro movements, and improves mobility through the neck and shoulder.
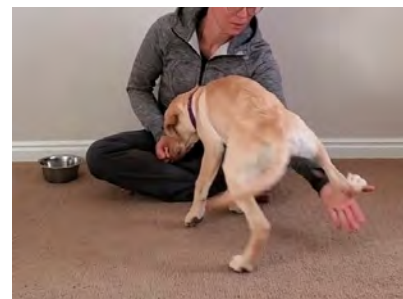
2. Rear Foot to Hand Target (Part 2): Beginner

5 reps to the right
5 reps to the left
Repeat x 2
Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog demonstrates fluency, and offers the rear foot to the smaller target of the hand vs the larger target of the leg or platform. And is able to execute to max reps with 85% accuracy.

Note: In the beginning focus on the dog training component -vs- pushing for a specific number of repetitions. It is very common for dogs to be "handed" the same way humans are handed. So it's expected that one side will be "better". We want to build value to the non-dominant side to make up for this coordination deficit.

Goal: This is a body awareness exercise that lays the foundation for an entire progression of exercises. We're looking for an enthusiastic hit with the rear foot.

3. Rock Back Sit-Push Forward Stand: Beginner

5 reps x 2 Sets

Building to: 5 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is offering the behavior easily, hitting max reps, and keeping rear feet staying still with 85% accuracy.

Note: The correct movement pattern during the transition from stand to sit is stifle flexing during the transition to sit, and fully flexed before the second front foot comes onto the sitting platform. Notice if your dog is bringing both front feet down and THEN moving into the sit position

Goal: Building value to keeping rear feet still, while transitioning to the stand

4. Pivot + Step Up: Beginner

Front foot target about elbow height. Rear foot target ½ hock height.
5 passes (moving to one side and back = 1 pass)

Repeat x 1

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets with 85% accuracy, is able to precisely target, lift onto, and lower off the rear foot targets without stumbling, hopping or losing balance.

Note: Reward for every step. This exercise is not about rushing to get to the next target, but about building value to each individual step to improve coordination.

Goal: Strengthens hip abductors and adductors. Improves rear end awareness, by encouraging slow movement. Builds value to slow precise movement.

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1. Ipsilateral Foot Target/Side Step to Target: Foundation

5 reps on each side
Repeat x 3

Building to: 3-4 side steps moving into the ipsilateral foot target (demonstrated in the video)

5 reps on each side
Repeat for 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily, and independently offering ipsilateral feet simultaneously

Note: Any platform (or 2 platforms) propped against the wall can work for this. A wobble board doesn't have to be used.

In the beginning, don't worry about spinal alignment too much… that will come with the next progression. For now, we just want to build fluency and understanding to the ipsilateral foot target.

Goal: Improves coordination through the ipsilateral chains (connecting same side hip to same side shoulder). Strengthens the hip and shoulder abductor.

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2. Rear Foot to Hand Target (Part 3): Beginner

5 reps on the right
5 reps on the left

Repeat x 2

Building to: 4 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog demonstrates fluency, defined by a clear understanding of offering the rear foot to hand while maintaining position on the standing platform.

Note: Don't worry too much about the spine flexion that accompanies this exercise. We will correct for that in the progression. Also, if your dog is much larger than your arm's reach, feel free to use a target stick or kitchen spatula to "extend your arm".

Goal: Minimize / eliminate any side stepping that has been built into the rear foot to hand target in the previous variations.

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3. Posture Sit: Beginner
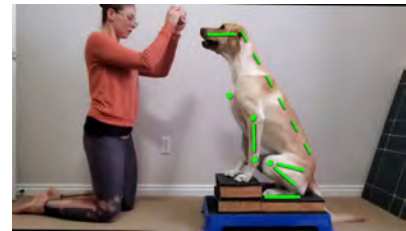
30 seconds - 1 min

Repeat x 3

Building to: 1 set for 3 min straight

Appropriate to progress: When your pup is able to maintain proper posture for 3 min

Goal: We're looking for proper posture through the spine, and proper alignment through the rear legs. If 30 seconds is too long for your pup to maintain proper alignment OR continue to adjust into correct alignment (as detailed in the video) you may need sets shorter than 30 seconds. Functional core challenge. Improves posture. Corrects a sloppy Sit. Fosters neuromuscular re-education. Appropriate for pups of all ages.

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4. Cone Wrap/ Intro to Cavaletti (Part 1): Foundation

Phase 1: Priming
Lure creates the movement.
3 repetitions in each direction.

Repeat 3x.

Appropriate to progress: Stay with phase 1 until the dog is reliably moving around the cone and not "backing out" (shown at 0:44)
Phase 2: Choosing
The option to choose is introduced.
3 repetitions in each direction.

Repeat 3x.

Appropriate to progress: Stay with phase 2 until the dog is reliably moving around the cone, and not cutting to the inside (an example of cutting to the inside is 2:34). This is supported by placement of reward. If the dog cuts to the inside of the cone consistently, this indicates a lack of understanding, and phase 1 should be revisited.

Phase 3: Distance
In this phase we add distance and switch from luring to rewarding.
3 repetitions in each direction.

Repeat 3x

Appropriate to progress: Stay with phase 3 until the dog is happily moving away from the handler.

This can be VERY hard for some dogs. Resist the urge to help by getting closer to the cone. Placement of reward + reward history should be enough. If the dog is struggling, more time at phase 2 is likely needed.

Phase 4: Proofing
In this phase we change the setup to more closely resemble what we need for the progression.

3 repetitions in each direction.

Repeat 3x

Appropriate to progress: Stay with phase 4 until the dog is happily moving away from the handler and confident enough in the dog's focus skills to move outside or to a large space

Note: The dog should always turn toward the handler to keep things consistent. Notice if your pup is reluctant to turn in one direction. This indicates an issue, and further diagnostics might be needed.

Goal: Independent execution, including focusing on the cone/not looking at the handler's hands, moving away from the handler and committing to the wrap before turning back or looking for the reward.

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Circuit 5
3-5 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. [Weight Shifting: Beginner](#)

3 presses x 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat on other side
Release from equipment.
Repeat x 2

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is consistently and happily leaning back into the handler pressure, maintaining foot position, demonstrating a neutral or mostly neutral top line, and can meet max repetition x set requirements.

Note: Pay extra attention to the amount of pressure you're able to apply, and if there's a difference between the sides. Try and note on a scale of 1-10. 1 being almost no pressure. 10 being pressing as hard as you can.

Goal: Building value to the dog leaning back into the handler. Challenges hip and shoulder adductors/abductors and core muscles (including the psoas) on the side opposite handler pressure.

2. [Intro to Paw Pods: Beginner](#)

Front Feet: 3-5 repetitions

If successful transition to
Rear Feet: 3-5 repetitions

Building to: 5 reps x 3 sets of each

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog is intentionally placing one foot on each pod, feet remaining mostly still, and is able to execute on the front and rear with 85% accuracy.

Goal: This is a body awareness exercise that teaches the pup where their feet are in space, and begins to introduce the concept that each foot can move independently to find a target.

3. [Sit- Walk Forward Down- Stand: Intermediate](#)

5 reps x 3 sets
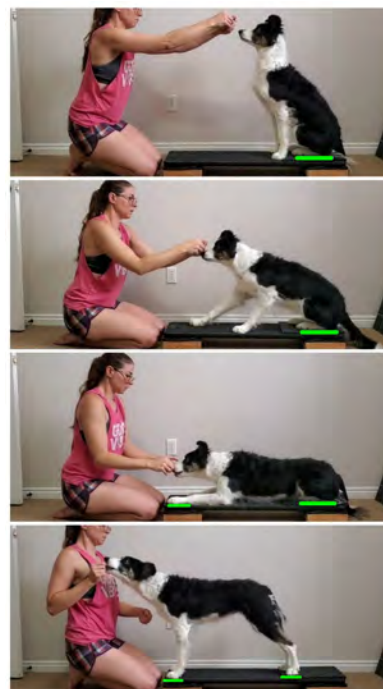
Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When a pup is through their big growth spurt, and can keep the rear feet staying still 85% accuracy. This is especially challenging in the transition from Stand to Rock Back Sit.

Note: If the spine is getting "squished" on the transition from Sit to Down, your reward placement may be too close to the dog. Conversely, if the rear feet are moving during that transition, your reward placement may be too far away.

Goal: Rear feet staying still throughout. Neutral spine alignment in the Stand, Sit and Down. Strengthens the large movers through the front and rear end and improves proprioception through the rear end.

4. [Dig Dig: Beginner](#)

3-5 seconds x 5 reps

Building to: 30 seconds straight x 3 reps for mature dogs.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is digging until the terminal marker ("yes" or reward delivery), without needing much encouragement.

Note: Dogs who are more toy driven can take advantage of that and use a toy to build drive in this exercise.

Goal: Think of this as a sprint workout. The ultimate goal is high speed, high energy output, fast rhythm, and short duration. Strengthens the front end, specifically the musculature in the shoulder, elbow and carpus/pastern.

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Circuit 6
3-5 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Ipsilateral Step Up: Beginner

5 reps on each side x 2 sets

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: when the dog becomes fluent, as defined by stepping off the platform and onto the platform with ipsilateral legs synchronized, with 85% accuracy… so 4 out of 5x or better.

Note: This is the baseline movement that many exercises are built upon. Taking the time to ensure fluency/understanding will pay off in the long term.

Goal: Teaching synchronized movement through ipsilateral legs. Targets the muscles along the medial aspect of the shoulder and hip og the grounded legs, including the psoas. Keeping these muscles strong is an important component in avoiding MSI.

2. Intro to Cavaletti (Part 2): Beginner

4 passes x 3 sets

Note: This is an intermediary step implemented in an attempt to "split not lump". When your pup is executing 4 passes x 3 sets, you can begin to add poles. No need to build here.

Appropriate to progress: As soon as fluency is reached, defined by the dog focusing forward / away from the handler, choosing to wrap the cone toward the handler, and able to maintain an appropriate arousal level.

Goal: Acts as an intermediate step to proof focus forward, impulse control and begins to increase distance the dog has to travel away from the handler.

3. [Backing Up: Beginner](#)

5 reps x 3 sets at 1-3 body lengths

Building to: 3 reps 20-30 feet depending on the size of the dog. Small dogs have a goal closer to 20ft. Large dogs closer to 30ft.

Note: Start with 1-2 body lengths. If the dog is managing well, increase distance by 1-2 body lengths each session.

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog is backing up straight, keeping head up, and stepping/not hopping. Then it is appropriate to increase distance. When the dog is executing for 20-30ft x 3 with 85% accuracy, they can safely progress to the next exercise.

Goal: Definitely focus on not hopping or overreaching with the rear feet. Improves mechanics through the PL. Strengthens gluteals, hamstrings and hip flexors and helps to integrate proper mechanics back into the gait.

4. [Rock Back Sit-Push Forward Stand: Intermediate](#)

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog reaches 85% accuracy at maximum reps, and is moving with both front feet simultaneously during the concentric phase (transition from sit to stand).

Note: Front foot target set at shoulder height (point of the shoulder, not the withers). The concentric phase (transition from sit to stand) will always "come together" and become more fluent first. It will take time for your pup to control the eccentric phase (slow resisting of gravity in the transition from stand to sit).

Goal: Transitioning from the front feet stepping up onto the front foot target to fully loading into the rear, with front feet moving simultaneously during the concentric phase (transition from sit

to stand). Increases strength through the large muscles in the pelvic limb (PL), including the quadriceps, hamstrings, and gluteals.

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Circuit 7
3-5 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. [Adducted Stand: Beginner](#)

Stillness: 10 sec
Release off props
Repeat x 3

Building to: Horizontal Head nods:
　　　　3 to the right
　　　　3 to the left

Repeat for 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets, and is able to maintain alignment and stillness with 85% accuracy.

Note: PawPod under rear feet ONLY. Front feet stable and separated shoulders width. If the dog is struggling initially, 2 pods pushed together can be substituted for the single pod.

Goal: Maintain adductor engagement and equal rear foot contact with the pod.

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2. [Manual Leg Lift: Intermediate](#)

Lift each leg and hold for 5 seconds.

Building to: 3 continuous sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to stand still / no foot movement, with a neutral spine for maximum reps.

Note: Weight into the handler should be very light. Expect the limb diagonal the lifted limb to get "light" or offload. That's normal/correct. Notice if the dog is resistant to lifting one limb specifically, or if the alignment of the topline changes. This indicates an underlying imbalance, and this exercise should not yet be progressed.

Goal: Strengthens the hip and shoulder stabilizers, and tests for muscle imbalance.

3. Pivot + Step Up: Intermediate

Front foot target about elbow height. Height of the rear foot target increased to ¾ hock height.

5 Passes
(Dog moving to the right and back to the left = 1 pass)
1 set only

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets, is able to precisely target, lift onto, and lower off the rear foot targets without stumbling, or losing balance.

Goal: Slow controlled movement. Precise targeting with the rear feet. When stepping onto and off of the rear foot target, we are looking for vertical movement more than horizontal movement.

4. Fold Back Down Tutorial: Beginner

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to fold back while keeping the forelimb and tarsus synchronized, resulting in the elbow and point of the hock touching down simultaneously. A dog who is touching down with elbows first is not yet strong enough to progress.

Note: Handler motion should be toward the dog's nose vs downward to differentiate between a "Bow" type movement and a Fold Back Down. I think about putting the cookie into the dog's eyeball. Dogs who are going through their big growth spurt may not physically be able to execute this movement pattern due to bone length discrepancy inherent in this time.

Goal: Forelimbs and hocks lowering and lifting in tandem / while staying parallel throughout. Teaches coordinated mechanics between the thoracic limb and pelvic limb.

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CONGRATULATIONS!!

You have completed the Beginner Program!!
You have a few options to move forward from here

1. You can implement **Maintenance Circuit 1 & 2** which are outlined below. This includes all the most challenging exercises in the Beginner Program split into 2 circuits that can be implemented on alternating days.

2. You can progress to the **Strong Dog Program**, for dogs not participating in high impact sports, or progress to the **Sport Dog Program**, for sport and working dogs (or dogs living a high impact lifestyle).

3. You can implement any **Mini-Program** like the Sloppy Sitters Mini-Program or Post Spay Mini-Program if you feel your pup needs more targeted conditioning.

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Maintenance Circuit 1
2-3 x a week, alternating days with Maintenance Circuit 2

1. Weight Shifting: Beginner

3 presses x 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat on other side
Release from equipment.
Repeat x 2

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is consistently and happily leaning back into the handler pressure, maintaining foot position, demonstrating a neutral or mostly neutral top line, and can meet max repetition x set requirements.

Note: Pay extra attention to the amount of pressure you're able to apply, and if there's a difference between the sides. Try and note on a scale of 1-10. 1 being almost no pressure. 10 being pressing as hard as you can.

Goal: Building value to the dog leaning back into the handler. Challenges hip and shoulder adductors/abductors and core muscles (including the psoas) on the side opposite handler pressure.

2. Manual Leg Lift: Intermediate

Lift each leg and hold for 5 seconds.

Building to: 3 continuous sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to stand still / no foot movement, with a neutral spine for maximum reps.

Note: Weight into the handler should be very light. Expect the limb diagonal the lifted limb to get "light" or offload. That's normal/correct. Notice if the dog is resistant to lifting one limb specifically, or if the alignment of the topline changes. This indicates an underlying imbalance, and this exercise should not yet be progressed.

Goal: Strengthens the hip and shoulder stabilizers, and tests for muscle imbalance.

3. Pivot + Step Up: Intermediate

Front foot target about elbow height. Height of the rear foot target increased to ¾ hock height.

5 Passes
(Dog moving to the right and back to the left = 1 pass)
1 set only

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets, is able to precisely target, lift onto, and lower off the rear foot targets without stumbling, or losing balance.

Goal: Slow controlled movement. Precise targeting with the rear feet. When stepping onto and off of the rear foot target, we are looking for vertical movement more than horizontal movement.

4. Tuck Sit-Kick Back Stand: Beginner

5 reps x 3 sets

Note: Front feet stay still. Rear feet move forward and backward.

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the front feet stay still 85% of the time, and the dog is able to meet max reps.

Goal: Teaches the front feet to remain still. Improves strength through the back muscles, core and shoulders.

5. [Intro to Cavaletti (Part 3): Intermediate](#)

Progression 1:
3 passes x 3 sets

Building to:
Progression 2:
5 passes x 3 sets

Building to:
Progression 3:
10 passes x 3 sets

(down and back=1 pass)

Appropriate to progress: ONLY add more passes when 85% fluency is achieved. This includes focus away from the handler / independent execution, no ticking / knocking the poles and entering the poles with an appropriate amount of speed control. Adding too many repetitions too quickly will result in degradation of form from mental and/or physical fatigue.

Goal: Consistent independent execution. Introduces the beginning of plyometric exercise in a controlled manner to reduce overtaxing the system.

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Maintenance Circuit 2
2-3 x a week, alternating days with Maintenance Circuit 1

1. Ipsilateral Step Up: Beginner

5 reps on each side x 2 sets

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: when the dog becomes fluent, as defined by stepping off the platform and onto the platform with ipsilateral legs synchronized, with 85% accuracy… so 4 out of 5x or better.

Note: This is the baseline movement that many exercises are built upon. Taking the time to ensure fluency/understanding will pay off in the long term.

Goal: Teaching synchronized movement through ipsilateral legs. Targets the muscles along the medial aspect of the shoulder and hip og the grounded legs, including the psoas. Keeping these muscles strong is an important component in avoiding MSI.

2. Adducted Stand: Beginner

Stillness: 10 sec
Release off props
Repeat x 3

Building to:
Horizontal Head nods:
3 to the right
3 to the left

Repeat for 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets, and is able to maintain alignment and stillness with 85% accuracy.

Note: PawPod under rear feet ONLY. Front feet stable and separated shoulders width. If the dog is struggling initially, 2 pods pushed together can be substituted for the single pod.

Goal: Maintain adductor engagement and equal rear foot contact with pod.

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3. Fold Back Down Tutorial: Beginner

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to fold back while keeping the forelimb and tarsus synchronized, resulting in the elbow and point of the hock touching down simultaneously. A dog who is touching down with elbows first is not yet strong enough to progress.

Note: Handler motion should be toward the dog's nose vs downward to differentiate between a "Bow" type movement and a Fold Back Down. I think about putting the cookie into the dog's eyeball. Dogs who are going through their big growth spurt may not physically be able to execute this movement pattern due to bone length discrepancy inherent in this time.

Goal: Forelimbs and hocks lowering and lifting in tandem / while staying parallel throughout. Teaches coordinated mechanics between the thoracic limb and pelvic limb.

4. [Rock Back Sit-Push Forward Stand: Intermediate](#)

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog reaches 85% accuracy at maximum reps, and is moving with both front feet simultaneously during the concentric phase (transition from sit to stand).

Note: Front foot target set at shoulder height (point of the shoulder, not the withers). The concentric phase (transition from sit to stand) will always "come together" and become more fluent first. It will take time for your pup to control the eccentric phase (slow resisting of gravity in the transition from stand to sit).

Goal: Transitioning from the front feet stepping up onto the front foot target to fully loading into the rear, with front feet moving simultaneously during the concentric phase (transition from sit to stand). Increases strength through the large muscles in the pelvic limb (PL), including the quadriceps, hamstrings, and gluteals.

5. [Head Nods: Beginner](#)

Up: 3
Down: 3
Right: 3
Left: 3

Repeat for 1 set only

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to keep all 4 feet still, and move to the end range, without repositioning or losing balance. And is able to achieve 85% precision for 3 sets total.

Note: Because we are asking for maximum range of motion, any change in behavior or arousal should be seen as fatigue not disobedience. Resting off the props for 30 seconds to 1 min is usually sufficient.

Lastly, not all dogs will have the available range demonstrated in the video, age, breed, confidence, etc will all play a part in how far the individual pup can move. Working within your pup's available range, and deepening slowly (if appropriate) is important.

Goal: Tests the dog's ability to keep feet still while moving the head / neck. Highlights coordination deficit between the sides. Strengthens the hip and shoulder stabilizers against micro movements, and improves mobility through the neck and shoulder.

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Other Programs Available

CCC Puppy Program
CCC Strong Dog Program
CCC Sport Dog Program
CCC Senior Dog Program
CCC Sloppy Sitters Mini-Program
CCC Post Spay Mini-Program
CCC Postnatal Mini-Program
CCC Post TPLO Mini Program

Strong Dog Program

Boredom Buster Track » All Circuits

The **Strong Dog Program** is intended to follow either the Puppy Program or Beginner Program, and has a focus on building strength, flexibility and endurance, as well as improving balance, coordination and stability, while minimizing impact. If you want a strong dog, but aren't participating in sports with a high level of physical demands, this is the program for you.

The **Boredom Buster Track** mixes things up, so you and your pup are exposed to a variety of exercises, without having to repeat things over and over again. This approach keeps canine conditioning interesting, enriching and fresh for both dog and handler. I've laid out this program to ensure your pup is having FUN while also gaining the strength, stability and UNDERSTANDING to progress SAFELY and without frustration.

Each workout is split into two mini-circuits to be executed on alternating days. When your pup reaches fluency in 2-4 weeks, the next circuit has brand new exercises to explore and master. Keep your pup engaged with the Boredom Buster Track.

Table of Contents

This is a **dynamic** table of contents. When clicked, the listings below will take you directly to that Page, Circuit or Exercise. Pretty nifty! Also, this document is formatted to allow you to search for a word or phrase. Use the shortcut "command + F" on a Mac or "control + F" on a PC to open the search box.

MindMap » A visual representation

This MindMap is a visual representation of the path you'll be taking through the circuit.

You'll begin with Circuit 1a & 1b. You'll be alternating between the exercises contained in the two circuits. Depending on your individual schedule, and how well your pup is handling the exercises physically and mentally, you could implement each circuit 1-3x a week, for up to 6 days a week maximum. For Example: Circuit 1a Mon/Wed/*maybe* Friday and Circuit 1b Tue/Thur/*maybe* Saturday.

The Boredom Buster Track includes enough material for approximately 6 months of conditioning, and will leave your pup stronger, more body aware, and loving this fun conditioning game!!

It is likely the beginning circuits (Circuit 1a & 1b) will take longer to work through than the following circuits, due to the inherent learning curve. These are the most important exercises in your program, and lay the foundation for all exercises to come. If these are taught to fluency, and mastered, the remaining circuits will progress much more quickly. Fast is slow and smooth is fast!

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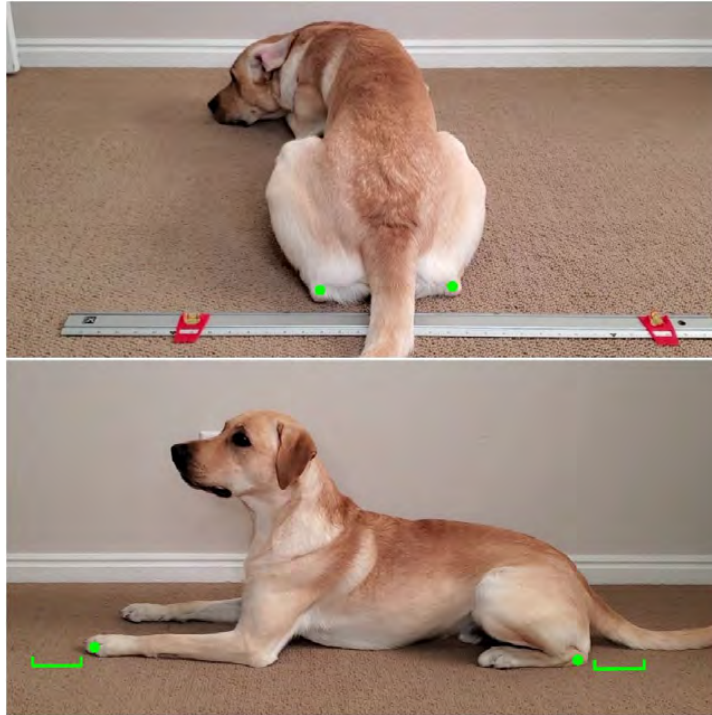
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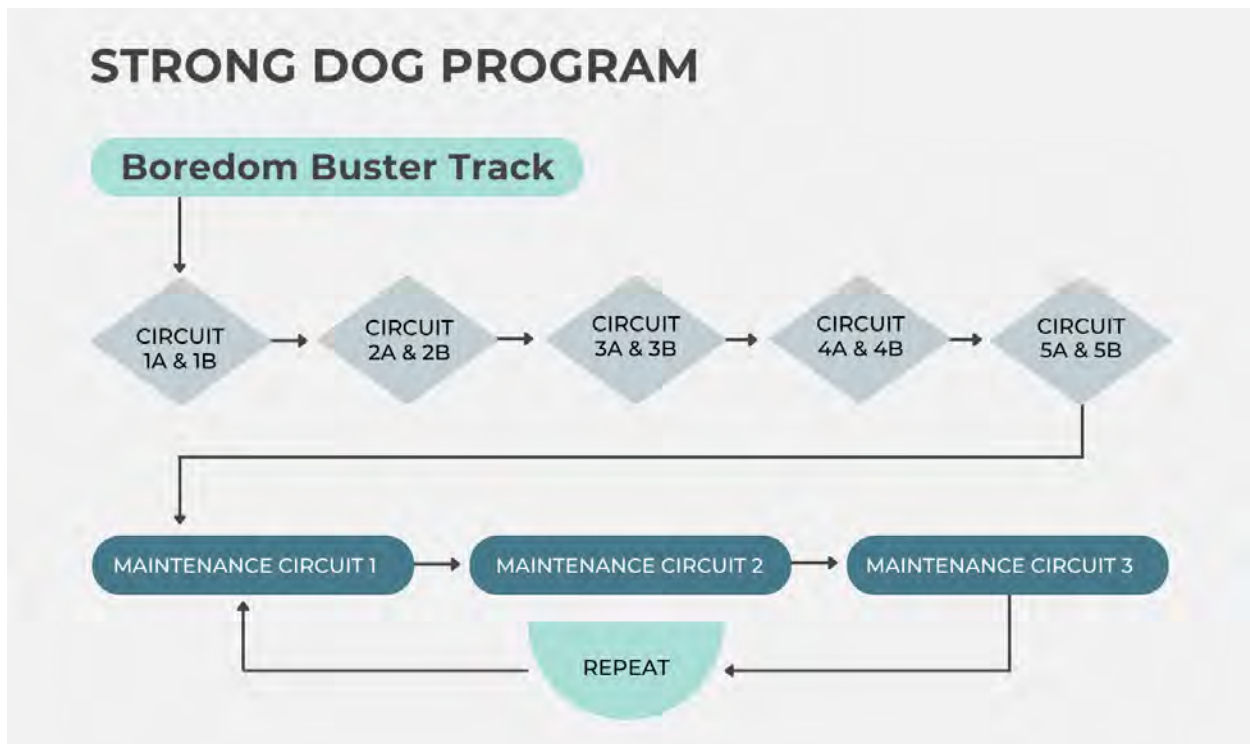
Equipment needed for this program

➔ 2 Sitting Platforms

➔ Plyo Box, Klimb, or other stable elevated prop

➔ 1 Standing Platform

➔ 2 thin non-slip foot targets, rubber mats, or textured mats

➔ 4 Rubber feed bowls or other stable foot targets

➔ Cato Board, wobble board or large square stable platform

➔ 1 low inflatable: Wedge, Disc, BOSU, foam pad, etc

➔ 2 Propel Air Platforms, 2 FitBones or 2 discs

➔ 4 PawPods (TotoFit, Flexiness and BOSU are my preferred brands)

➔ 6-10 pole cavaletti set (Optional but recommended)

➔ 2 traffic cones or other similar pylons (Optional)

➔ Peanut + Holder (Optional)

How to measure for Platforms

Here's a graphic to help you measure for your sitting and standing platforms if you don't already have those.

Sitting Platform: Width, is the measurement between the point of the hocks (shown in the top portion of the photo) + 1or 2 inches. Length is 1.5-2x the width.

Standing Platform: Width is the measurement between the point of the hocks + 1or 2 inches (the same as the Sitting Platform). Length is the measurement shown in the bottom portion of the attached photo, plus a little bit extra. For a medium-large size dog 3-4 inches extra in the front, and 3-4 inches extra in the rear is sufficient. Tiny dogs need less "extra space". Giant dogs need a bit more.

Foot Targets: Width is the measurement between the point of the hocks + 1or 2 inches (the same as the Sitting Platform). Length is about half the width measurement.

For more specific instructions, I wrote a 3 part blog series that covers the difference between the various types of platforms, how to measure for each, and how to build them yourself. You can see these on my website.

Progression Tips & Considerations

1. When implementing a formal conditioning program, we're implementing movements that impact the body in a few different ways.
   a. Increasing the **strength** of a muscle concentrically and eccentrically, defined by the ability to move to end range while loaded and maintain 85% accuracy.
   b. Improving the **endurance** of the muscle, defined by the amount of repetitions or duration an exercise can be performed while still maintaining 85% proper alignment.
   c. Increasing the **flexibility** of a muscle.
   d. Improving **body awareness** of the dog.

2. We progress an exercise in one of two ways...
   a. **Building strength & endurance:** Asking for more repetitions / longer duration before resting. (a through c above)
   b. **Challenging coordination:** Asking a dog for more precision movement, challenging posture, increasing balance demands and/or increasing the complexity of an exercise. (d above)

3. We measure the readiness of the dog to progress by assessing **fluency**, which is a measurement of how consistently the dog is able to correctly execute when meeting the challenge of maximum repetitions x sets (defined for each exercise).

   A dog is considered "fluent" and ready to progress within an exercise (adding repetitions or duration), or progress to the next exercise variation when...
   a. **Maximum repetitions** x sets has been reached
   b. **85% accuracy** is maintained throughout
   c. **Arousal level is maintained** (no significant increase or decrease in arousal)

4. Some dogs will need many sessions of a specific exercise to meet the required strength/flexibility or coordination benchmarks before progressing to the next level. In other exercises, only one or two sessions may be necessary before progressing. Recording, and assessing the video of your exercise protocol can reveal valuable information, and help you determine when it is appropriate to progress.

5. **How to build repetitions:** A typical conservative strength / endurance progression schedule would be...

>   5 reps x 3 sets
>   7 reps, 7 reps, 5 reps
>   10 reps, 7 reps, 7 reps
>   10 reps, 10 reps, 7 reps
>   10 reps x 3 sets

So when building reps this can be a helpful guide. There's no downside to progressing conservatively, aside from the fact that it takes more time. Conversely, progressing too quickly can lead to frustration, a loss of precision, and incorrect muscle recruitment.

NOTE: Change in arousal level, increase or decrease, is the first indicator of mental and/or physical fatigue. Taking a short break (30 seconds to 1 min) with a cookie scatter, or down-stay can help manage arousal levels.

6. **Moving from one circuit to the next**
   Not all exercises within a circuit will be progressed at the same time. But as a general guide, I try not to straddle more than 2 circuits at the same time.
   a. **Example:** If my dog has reached fluency in 3 out of 4 exercises in Circuit 1, I would progress to Circuit 2, and also continue to implement the slow to develop exercise from Circuit 1. But I WOULD NOT progress to the exercises in Circuit 3 until the exercise from Circuit 1 was fluent.
   b. If we progress only the skills the dog is naturally good at, and neglect the skills they struggle with, we will end up running into a **"bottleneck"** as the circuits progress. This could be a skills bottleneck, strength/endurance bottleneck or a flexibility bottleneck. So the exercises the dog struggles with the most are actually the most important to focus on!

      NOTE: Puppies with growing bodies may need to return to previous progressions of an exercise when experiencing growth spurts. Past understanding of where their body parts are in space may not be applicable when the legs are suddenly several inches longer!! Patience pays off during these growing times!

7. Static **before** Dynamic
   Isolated **before** Integrated
   Stable **before** Unstable
   Form **drives** Function

Strong Dog Specific Guidelines

1. **Managing Arousal**
   Increased arousal and overarousal can result as much from a mental challenge as from a physical challenge… So we want to be on the lookout for increasing or decreasing arousal levels when implementing conditioning exercises. Brains can't think or learn very well when overly taxed… either by complexity of an exercise (having to hold many thoughts in the mind at once) or physical challenge, fatigue and adrenaline. Both situations can result in an adrenalized state, where learning doesn't happen well. Some signs of overarousal are… Moving quickly, offering other behaviors, vocalization, taking the cookie hard, general feeling of frantic movement, etc. Conversely, underarousal can manifest as looking away, leaving, freezing/standing still, offering easier movements, etc. If we are seeing any of these things, taking a short break (30 sec to 1 min) can be helpful.

2. **Moving Slowly**
   Moving slowly requires significantly more effort in the joint stabilizers than moving quickly, and helps the dog to break their "habitual movement patterns" and implement correct movement patterns instead. Slow movement, particularly in the eccentric phase (where the dog is resisting gravity) helps to build strength and improve mobility without compromising stability.

3. **Focus on Form**
   To address muscle imbalances between the two sides or between two muscles in a pain (agonist / antagonist) we sometimes have to work against the dog's learned compensation strategy. Along with moving slowly we can help our dogs be correct by using props to "force" proper alignment. This gives us a chance to reinforce/build value to proper mechanics, and increases the likelihood these new mechanics will be implemented in the real world and in our sport. Muscles that fire together wire together… so this process of conditioning is just as much about training the brain as it is the body. Taking a step back and focusing on form will actually lead to better results long term.

4. **Spine Angle 45° or lower**
   If you and your pup are not competing in high impact sports due to a structural issue old injury, or are compromised in some other way, we will want to be mindful of loading into the rear end/raising the height of the front end. There may be some exercises that demonstrate a spine angle higher than 45°. In those instances, we will want to adjust the prop set up to keep the spine at 45° or lower.

5. **Exit Props Carefully**

    When delivering a reward, we want to help your pup exit the props gently. In some of the videos I might toss a cookie to reset. We don't want any slipping or sliding to an abrupt stop when following a thrown cookie. I will often toss the cookie closer to my dogs to reduce speed, and then toss another to help them move into position to set up for the next repetition. Always be mindful on the exit.

6. **What's Rewarded will be Repeated**

    To change default posture, or engrained habitual mechanics we need to reward new mechanics. In the beginning, that will likely mean trying to "exaggerate" these new mechanics through placement of reward, prop setup, etc. Over time, we should start to see these new mechanics be offered automatically, because they have become a consistent way to receive a reward. BUT this needs to be rewarded heavily to help create the lightbulb moment for the dog.

7. **Progress not Perfection**

    It can be challenging to implement new movement mechanics, and target underutilized muscles. This is especially true when we are dealing with a chronic issue or injury. Like learning to use your non-dominant hand to perform a fine motor skill, the first attempt at a skill is very likely to be clumsy, and inaccurate. REWARD ANYWAY! Rewarding the attempt will communicate to the dog that they are on the right track. It's a trap to hold out for perfection.

Boredom Buster » Circuit 1a
1-3 x a week, alternating with Circuit 1b, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Pivot + Step Up: Intermediate

Front foot target about elbow height. Height of the rear foot target increased to ¾ hock height.

5 Passes
(Dog moving to the right and back to the left = 1 pass)
1 set only

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets, is able to precisely target, lift onto, and lower off the rear foot targets without stumbling, or losing balance.

Goal: Slow controlled movement. Precise targeting with the rear feet. When stepping onto and off of the rear foot target, we are looking for vertical movement more than horizontal movement.

2. Fold Back Down Tutorial: Beginner

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to fold back while keeping the forelimb and tarsus synchronized, resulting in the elbow and point of the hock touching down simultaneously. A dog who is touching down with elbows first is not yet strong enough to progress.

Note: Handler motion should be toward the dog's nose vs downward to differentiate between a "Bow" type movement and a Fold Back Down. I think about putting the cookie into the dog's eyeball.

Dogs who are going through their big growth spurt may not physically be able to execute this movement pattern due to bone length discrepancy inherent in this time.

Goal: Forelimbs and hocks lowering and lifting in tandem / while staying parallel throughout. Teaches coordinated mechanics between the thoracic limb and pelvic limb.

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3. [Stepping Forward-Stepping Back: Intermediate](#)

5 reps

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is reliably backing up straight/not off the side of the platform, and stepping back off the platform in a controlled manner with 85% accuracy, while maintaining arousal level.

Note: Keep hands low when transitioning from the position shown here in the top photo to the position shown in the second photo to help your pup not sit.

Goal: Slow, intentional stepps, moving forward and back in a straight line. Minimal loss of balance.

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Boredom Buster » Circuit 1b
1-3 x a week, alternating with Circuit 1a, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Bow Tutorial: Beginner

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is not confusing the Bow motion with the Fold Back Down, and is keeping all 4 feet still with 85% accuracy.

Note: Dog MUST start in a slightly overstretched stand to allow space for the shoulder to extend and the scapula to rotate properly. So props should be placed such that they encourage this.

Goal: Improves scapular mobility, and shoulder extension. Mobilizes and strengthens (eccentrically) the musculature on the caudal aspect of the shoulder and improves flexibility through the hamstring (AROM).

2. Weight Shifting: Beginner

3 presses x 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat on other side
Release from equipment.
Repeat x 2

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is consistently and happily leaning back into the handler pressure, maintaining foot position, demonstrating a neutral or mostly neutral top line, and can meet max repetition x set requirements.

Note: Pay extra attention to the amount of pressure you're able to apply, and if there's a difference between the sides. Try and note on a scale of 1-10. 1 being almost no pressure. 10 being pressing as hard as you can.

Goal: Building value to the dog leaning back into the handler. Challenges hip and shoulder adductors/abductors and core muscles (including the psoas) on the side opposite handler pressure.

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3. Manual Leg Lift: Intermediate

Lift each leg and hold for 5 seconds.

Building to: 3 continuous sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to stand still / no foot movement, with a neutral spine for maximum reps.

Note: Weight into the handler should be very light. Expect the limb diagonal the lifted limb to get "light" or offload. That's normal/correct. Notice if the dog is resistant to lifting one limb specifically, or if the alignment of the topline changes. This indicates an underlying imbalance, and this exercise should not yet be progressed.

Goal: Strengthens the hip and shoulder stabilizers, and tests for muscle imbalance.

Notes:

Notes:

1. Rock Back Sit-Push Forward Stand: Intermediate

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog reaches 85% accuracy at maximum reps, and is moving with both front feet simultaneously during the concentric phase (transition from sit to stand).

Note: Front foot target set at shoulder height (point of the shoulder, not the withers). The concentric phase (transition from sit to stand) will always
"come together" and become more fluent first. It will take time for your pup to control the eccentric phase (slow resisting of gravity in the transition from stand to sit).

Goal: Transitioning from the front feet stepping up onto the front foot target to fully loading into the rear, with front feet moving simultaneously during the concentric phase (transition from sit to stand). Increases strength through the large muscles in the pelvic limb (PL), including the quadriceps, hamstrings, and gluteals.

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2. Plank Tutorial: Beginner

Rear feet elevated to carpus height only.

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is comfortable moving to 85% of full hip extension

Note: ALWAYS release from the counterpose position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Goal: Strengthens the core stabilizers including the iliopsoas. Rear feet should stay still throughout. Even weight bearing through the rear limbs is a priority over maximum range.

---

3. Bow-Stretch: Intermediate

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog is able to execute with proper form, while keeping all 4 feet still with 85% accuracy. This Includes shoulder behind the elbow and ischial tuberosity behind the rear foot during the bow phase and a neutral spine while extending the hip during the stretch phase.

Note: Dog MUST start in a slightly overstretched stand to allow space for the shoulder to extend and the scapula to rotate properly. This is detailed in the video

Goal: Improves scapular mobility, shoulder extension and hamstring mobility during the bow phase. Challenges the core and hip flexors (including the iliopsoas) during the stretch phase.

Notes:

Notes:

Boredom Buster » Circuit 2b
1-3 x a week, alternating with Circuit 2a, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Ipsilateral Foot Target + Weight Shifting: Beginner

Stillness 10 sec
Weight Shifting: 5 presses
Release from equipment
Repeat presses for 3 sets total
Repeat on the other side

Building to:
Stillness: 30 seconds
Weight Shifting: 15 presses
1 set only
Repeat on the other side

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain a neutral spine, is able to lean back into the handler pressure easily, and is meeting the maximum repetition requirement.

Note: Stable Surfaces Only. Foot targets positioned such that the standing and targeting legs are displaying a mild amount of abduction. Shoulders level. Pelvis level.

Goal: Neutral spine, with controlled abduction as the dog moves into position. The dog should be able to easily resist handler pressure.

2. Epaxial Strengthening Series: Beginner

Stillness: 10 sec
Vertical Head Nods: 5
Weight Shifting: 3 per side
Release off props

Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to:
Stillness: 30 sec
Vertical Head Nods: 10
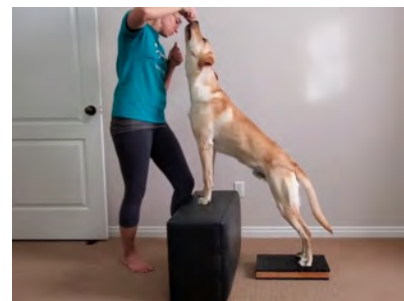
Weight Shifting: 10 per side
One set ONLY

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is executing all components in a single set, with 85% accuracy, and a consistent level of arousal.

Goal: Specifically targets the epaxial muscles, and improves spinal alignment.

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3. [Intro to Cavaletti (Part 3): Intermediate](#)

Progression 1:
3 passes x 3 sets

Building to:
Progression 2:
5 passes x 3 sets

Building to:
Progression 3:
10 passes x 3 sets

(down and back=1 pass)

Appropriate to progress: ONLY add more passes when 85% fluency is achieved. This includes focus away from the handler / independent execution, no ticking / knocking the poles and entering the poles with an appropriate amount of speed control. Adding too many repetitions too quickly will result in degradation of form from mental and/or physical fatigue.

Goal: Consistent independent execution. Introduces the beginning of plyometric exercise in a controlled manner to reduce overtaxing the system.

Notes:

Notes:

Boredom Buster » Circuit 3a
1-3 x a week, alternating with Circuit 3b, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Pivot/ Step to Target: Intermediate

Starts at 0:39 of this video.

Rear foot targets are close together.

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually. Any stable foot targets can be used. Feed buckets are not required or appropriate for all dogs.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

---

2. Fold Back Down Decline/Incline: Intermediate

Incline/ Facing Uphill:
5 reps x 3 sets

Decline/ Facing Downhill:
5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the forelimb and tarsus are moving in tandem with 85% accuracy, and the dog is maintaining a neutral spine.

Note: Facing uphill the rear end is more loaded, while facing downhill the front is more loaded. We can use this shift of weight to help regulate the challenge level. It's important to note which direction produces the smoother movement in the individual dog, and begin the exercise with that variation.

Goal: Focus is on the synchronized movement of the limbs, and maintaining a neutral spine throughout. Functional core strength that specifically targets the serratus ventralis, epaxials, obliques and iliopsoas, along with the latissimus.

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3. Shoulder Strength & Stability Series: Beginner

Stillness: 10 seconds
Head Nods Down: 5
Weight Shifting:
3 presses x 3 reps (all on one side)

Repeat presses on other side
Release from equipment

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is keeping all 4 feet still throughout, flexing the shoulder so the humerus is approx. horizontal, is demonstrating an even curve through the spine, and happily resisting the handler's pressure.

Note: NO head nods up here. Keep head low, so the neck and head follow the line of the spine.

Goal: 90° shoulder and elbow flexion (humerus approaching horizontal) during the head nods down. Easily resisting handler pressure during the weight shifting portion.

Notes:

Notes:

Boredom Buster » Circuit 3b
1-3 x a week, alternating with Circuit 3a, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Ipsilateral Foot Target + Weight Shifting: Intermediate

1:12 of this video

Stillness 10 sec
Weight Shifting: 5 presses
Release from equipment
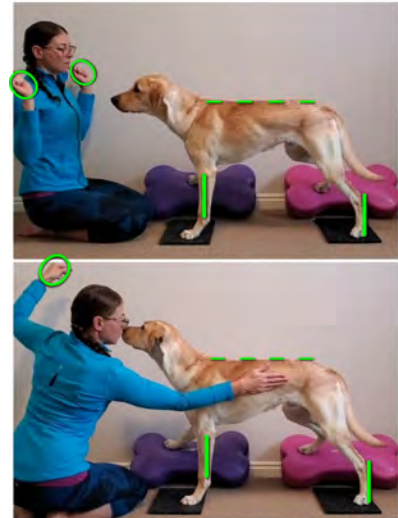Repeat presses for 3 sets total
Repeat on the other side

Building to:
Stillness: 30 seconds
Weight Shifting: 15 presses
1 set only
Repeat on the other side

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain a neutral spine, is able to lean back into the handler pressure easily, and is meeting the maximum repetition requirement.

Note: Unstable Surface under lifted legs. Foot targets positioned such that the standing and targeting legs are displaying a mild amount of abduction. Shoulders level. Pelvis level.

Goal: Neutral spine, with controlled abduction as the dog moves into position. The dog should be able to easily resist handler pressure.

2. Rear Leg Lift + Target Stick: Intermediate

Begin with a 1-2 second hold.
5 reps on one side
Release from props
Repeat for 3 sets total (same side)

Repeat on the other side

Building to:

5 second hold
3 reps on one side
Stay on props
Repeat for 3 sets total

Note: Front foot target set between elbow and shoulder height spine angle approximately 45°.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute confidently, without much flailing of the free limb, and meet the endurance challenge.

Goal: Holding the target position until the terminal marker, Increases the strength and endurance of the hip stabilizers on the grounded leg, particularly the middle glute and hamstring. Also strengthens the psoas isometrically / eccentrically.

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3. [Controlled Cone Wrap: Intermediate](#)

5 single reps to the right
5 single reps to the left
Rest
Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to: Multi wrap (2 and then 3 wraps per rep)
3 repetitions of the multi wrap
Repeat going the other direction
Rest
Repeat for 3 sets total

Note: This is to be executed SLOWLY. For dogs trained to wrap a cone quickly, a reward may have to be used/tossed on the ground every ¼ wrap for a time until understanding is achieved. Then the reward can be offered every ½ wrap, and finally for a full wrap.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog's unique compensation pattern is replaced by correct movement / muscle recruitment for a triple wrap at maximum repetitions.

Goal: The intent of this exercise is to notice any asymmetry in the movement pattern, or the **individual pup's unique compensations**, and start to use neuromuscular reeducation to refine/correct the movement dysfunction. Notice if the dog is skipping steps or hopping, or executing a "teardrop shape" -vs- a round shape, and use the mark and reward to help build value to proper mechanics.

Notes:

Notes:

1. Pivot/Step to Target: Advanced

Starts at 1:42 of this video

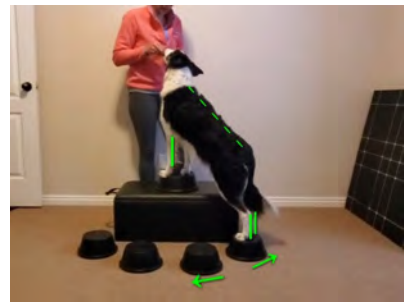Increase the distance between the rear foot targets by 25-50%

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually. Any stable foot targets can be used. Feed buckets are not required or appropriate for all dogs.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

2. Deep Bow: Advanced

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to move to the end range without repositioning the front feet or removing one foot from the front foot target with 85% accuracy.

Note: Placement of reward is BELOW the height of the carpus,
That's what makes this a Deep Bow. Nose facing downward, as shown in this photo. Dog MUST start in an overstretched stand to allow space for the shoulder to extend and the scapula to rotate properly.

Goal: Continues to improve mobility through the shoulder, hip flexor and hamstring.

3. [Shoulder Strength & Stability Series: Intermediate](#)

Increase the height of the rear foot target to elbow height or a 30° spine angle and add instability to front feet.
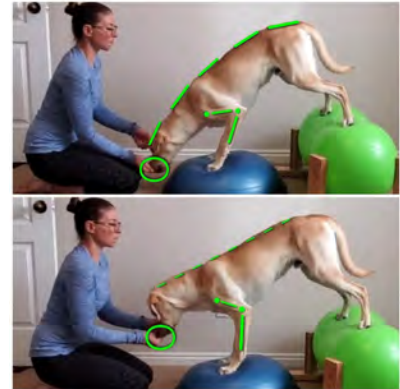
Stillness: 10 seconds
Head Nods Down: 5
Weight Shifting:
3 presses for 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat presses on other side
Release from equipment

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is keeping all 4 feet still throughout, flexing the shoulder so the humerus is approx. horizontal, is demonstrating an even curve through the spine, and happily resisting the handler's pressure.

Note: NO head nods up here. Keep head low, so the neck and head follow the line of the spine. Watch for carpal hyperflexion.

Goal: Humerus horizontal or slightly below during the head nods down. Easily resisting handler pressure during the weight shifting portion.

Notes:

Notes:

1. Ipsilateral Step Up: Beginner

5 reps on each side x 2 sets

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: when the dog becomes fluent, as defined by stepping off the platform and onto the platform with ipsilateral legs synchronized, with 85% accuracy... so 4 out of 5x or better.

Note: This is the baseline movement that many exercises are built upon. Taking the time to ensure fluency/understanding will pay off in the long term.

Goal: Teaching synchronized movement through ipsilateral legs. Targets the muscles along the medial aspect of the shoulder and hip on the grounded legs, including the psoas. Keeping these muscles strong is an important component in avoiding MSI.

2. Epaxial Strengthening Series: Intermediate

Vertical Head Nods: 5
Weight Shifting: 3
Single Rear Leg Lift: 3 per side
Release off props

Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to:
Vertical Head Nods: 10
Weight Shifting: 6 per side
Single Rear Leg Lift: 6 per side
Repeat x 2

Note: The lifted leg should track straight forward, stifle facing forward. Allowing the lifted leg to abduct away from the midline will create a change in pelvic alignment. This should be avoided as much as possible. Using a target stick can be helpful.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is executing all components with 85% accuracy, and a consistent level of arousal.

Goal: Increases the challenge by raising the height of the front foot target to the height of the withers, further loading the epaxials.

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3. Cavaletti Extension: Advanced

8-10 poles
5 passes (down and back=1 pass)

Building to: 10 continuous passes as proficiency is demonstrated

Note:
1. Keep poles low (1" or lower, usually set in the highest hole with the cone resting on the side)

2. Starting measurement between poles 2x elbow height + 20%, increase by 1" until the dog is driving with maximum shoulder/hip extension without adding a stride between poles (double stepping). Some ticking of the poles is acceptable as long as the cones are not displaced.

Appropriate to progress: ONLY add more passes when 85% fluency is achieved. This includes focus away from the handler / independent execution, no double stepping, and entering the poles with an appropriate amount of speed control.

Goal: Stretch the stride to increase shoulder/ hip mobility and power. AROM.

Notes:

Notes:

1. Power Up Prep: Advanced

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3

Appropriate to Progress: When both front feet are moving simultaneously during the transition from Sit to Stand (concentric phase), and the transition from Stand to Sit (eccentric phase) is slow and controlled in 50% of the repetitions. .

Note: Using placement of reward, vertically above the dog's head can help encourage the dog to lower slowly to the sit. (Peanut Butter spoon may be helpful)

Goal: Both front feet moving in tandem during the concentric phase. Starting to see some slow reps in the transition from stand to sit in the eccentric phase. Functional core challenge. Prepares for the plyometric progression.

2. Plank: Intermediate

Increases the height of the rear feet to elbow height

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute pose and counterpose with fluidity and understanding, keeping the rear feet still 85% of the time, to maximum repetitions.

Note: ALWAYS release from the counterpose position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Goal: Increases the load through the core muscles and the iliopsoas, and begins to introduce full range hip extension.

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3. Fold Back Down- Split Surface: Advanced

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with 85% accuracy, limbs moving in tandem, neutral spine, elbows moving to horizontal but not below.

Note: Spacing between the targets should be such that...
1. front feet are at the very *back* edge of the front foot target (no carpus on the platform)
2. Rear feet are at the very *front* edge of the rear foot target
3. Any stable foot targets can be used. Feed buckets are not required or appropriate for all dogs.

Goal: Strengthens the shoulder, core and hip stabilizers in a lengthened lever position. Promotes a high level of hip and shoulder stability. Functional core strength.

Notes:

Notes:

Boredom Buster » Circuit 5b
1-3 x a week, alternating with Circuit 5a, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. [Controlled Cone Wrap: Advanced](#)

Initially start with the progression detailed in the video working

5 single reps to the right
5 single reps to the left
Rest
Repeat x 3

Work each variation to fluency before progressing

1. Single Wrap
2. Double Wrap
3. Triple Wrap
4. Distance

Building to: Adding distance to the cone, one body length at a time, building to 25 ft.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is maintaining a tight turn at speed + maximum distance.

NOTE: Focus in on the planting of the outside TL. The placement of the limb/foot and neck should be close to the cone on all wraps, to create a round/circular dog path -vs- a teardrop shaped dog path. Marking the correct execution is critical.

Goal: Tight bend through the body, and intentional footwork.

This exercise is an accurate simulation of the kinds of forces that a dog is likely to meet "in real life". So testing the joint stabilizers and biomechanics here is a critical step in determining if these mechanics will hold up under real life conditions, or if more work is still needed.

This is also a sport specific progression intended to mimic the demands of an advanced weave pole entry, where the approach is from the pole 12 side, and the dog's path is parallel to the poles before having to wrap tightly into the poles, executing a 180° or 270° change in direction. This also simulates the beginning of a flyball box turn, and/or other quick changes of direction needed in many sports.

2. Adducted Stand -TL Focus: Advanced

Stillness: 10 sec
Horizontal Head Nods: 3 right and then 3 left
Vertical Head Nods: 3 up and then 3 down

Repeat 3x

Building to:
Stillness: 30 sec
Horizontal Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between right and left
Vertical Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between up and down

One set ONLY

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute all Head Nod variations without loss of balance, executing to maximum repetitions.

Note: 1 Pod under FRONT feet. 2 Pods under REAR feet

Goal: Specifically targets the medial shoulder and medial shoulder stabilizers at the end range. Indirectly targets the hip adductors, including the psoas, so can be a gentle reintroduction to hip adduction for dogs recovering from a psoas issue.

3. Cavaletti Collection: Advanced

8-10 poles
5 passes (down and back=1 pass)

Building to: 10 continuous passes as proficiency is demonstrated

Note:
1. Poles are set to ¾ hock height until fluency is reached. Then poles can be raised to hock height (never higher than hock height).

2. Starting measurement between poles 2x elbow height. This may need to be adjusted +/- 2" so the dog can center their footfalls.
3. With higher poles, the spacing between the poles **should not be stretched**.

Appropriate to progress: ONLY add more passes when 85% fluency is achieved. This includes focus away from the handler / independent execution, no ticking or knocking the poles, and entering the poles with an appropriate amount of speed control.

Goal: Increase vertical amplitude change, and strengthen the hip and shoulder stabilizers.

Notes:

1. Power-Up: Expert

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute 85% of the repetitions slowly during the eccentric phase

Note: Slow controlled return to the sit position is the main focus, and the dog's fluency in executing this slow movement is the main thing that differentiates this variation from the Power-Up Prep variation.

Goal: Slow controlled eccentric. Functional core strength. Specifically targets the quadriceps eccentrically, and fosters better balance, core control and body awareness.

2. Wheelbarrow: Advanced

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is reaching full hip extension and maintaining a neutral spine (NO SPINE EXTENSION), and able to maintain alignment to maximum repetitions.

NOTE: ALWAYS release from the sit position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Butt Up Stand may be needed as a prep for dogs who struggle with the sitting position.

Goal: Targets the alternating diagonal muscle chains in the core while moving from short to long lever position.

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3. [Adducted Stand PL Focus: Advanced](#)

Stillness: 10 sec
Horizontal Head Nods: 3 right and then 3 left
Vertical Head Nods: 3 up and then 3 down

Repeat 3x

Note: 2 Pods under FRONT feet. 1 Pod under REAR feet

Building to:
Stillness: 30 sec
Horizontal Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between right and left
Vertical Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between up and down

One set ONLY

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute all Head Nod variations without loss of balance, executing to maximum repetitions

Goal: Specifically targets the adductors, including the psoas at the end range. Indirectly targets the shoulder adductors/medial shoulder stabilizers adductors, so can be a gentle reintroduction to shoulder adduction for dogs recovering from a medial shoulder issue.

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4. [Controlled Cone Wrap: Advanced](#)

Initially start with the progression detailed in the video working

5 single reps to the right
5 single reps to the left
Rest
Repeat x 3

Work each variation to fluency before progressing

1. Single Wrap
2. Double Wrap
3. Triple Wrap
4. Distance

Building to: Adding distance to the cone, one body length at a time, building to 25 ft.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is maintaining a tight turn at speed + maximum distance.

NOTE: Focus in on the planting of the outside TL. The placement of the limb/foot and neck should be close to the cone on all wraps, to create a round/circular dog path -vs- a teardrop shaped dog path. Marking the correct execution is critical.

Goal: Tight bend through the body, and intentional footwork.

This exercise is an accurate simulation of the kinds of forces that a dog is likely to meet "in real life". So testing the joint stabilizers and biomechanics here is a critical step in determining if these mechanics will hold up under real life conditions, or if more work is still needed.

This is also a sport specific progression intended to mimic the demands of an advanced weave pole entry, where the approach is from the pole 12 side, and the dog's path is parallel to the poles before having to wrap tightly into the poles, executing a 180° or 270° change in direction.

This also simulates the beginning of a flyball box turn, and/or other quick changes of direction needed in many sports.

Notes:

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Boredom Buster » Maintenance Circuit 2
1-2 x a week, alternating with the other Maintenance Circuits

1. Ipsilateral Step Up: Intermediate

5 reps on each side x 3 reps

Note: There are two speeds shown in this video.

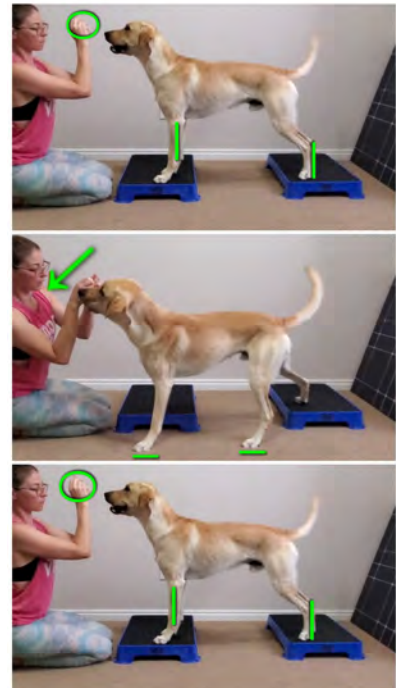**Learning Speed:** A reward is delivered while the free legs are on the ground, as well as on the Sitting Platforms.

Fluent Speed: Free legs touching down is marked, but the reward is delivered once all 4 feet return to the Sitting Platforms. This increase in speed transitions the exercise to a more plyometric exercise, where the working muscles stay engaged throughout.

Building to: Fluent Speed 10 reps on each side x 2 sets

This variation uses a separate front and rear foot target to help refine foot placement and improve top line alignment. Foot targets should be about carpus height, or slightly higher.

Appropriate to progress: When the free legs are mostly synchronized, and the dog is executing to max reps with 85% accuracy.

Goal: Mostly synchronized movement, and a neutral spine in the stand. Targets the muscles along the medial and lateral aspect of the shoulder and hip, including the psoas.

2. Fold Back Down- Split Surface: Advanced

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with 85% accuracy, limbs moving in tandem, neutral spine, elbows moving to horizontal but not below.

Note: Spacing between the targets should be such that...
1. front feet are at the very *back* edge of the front foot target (no carpus on the platform)
2. Rear feet are at the very *front* edge of the rear foot target
3. Any stable foot targets can be used. Feed buckets are not required or appropriate for all dogs.

Goal: Strengthens the shoulder, core and hip stabilizers in a lengthened lever position. Promotes a high level of hip and shoulder stability. Functional core strength.

3. Shoulder Strength & Stability Series: Intermediate

Increase the height of the rear foot target to elbow height or a 30° spine angle and add instability to front feet.

Stillness: 10 seconds
Head Nods Down: 5
Weight Shifting:
3 presses for 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat presses on other side
Release from equipment

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is keeping all 4 feet still throughout, flexing the shoulder so the humerus is approx. horizontal, is demonstrating an even curve through the spine, and happily resisting the handler's pressure.

Note: NO head nods up here. Keep head low, so the neck and head follow the line of the spine. Watch for carpal hyperflexion.

Goal: Humerus horizontal or slightly below during the head nods down. Easily resisting handler pressure during the weight shifting portion.

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4. Cavaletti Extension: Advanced

8-10 poles
5 passes (down and back=1 pass)

Building to: 10 continuous passes as proficiency is demonstrated

Note:
1. Keep poles low (1" or lower, usually set in the highest hole with the cone resting on the side)

2. Starting measurement between poles 2x elbow height + 20%, increase by 1" until the dog is driving with maximum shoulder/hip extension without adding a stride between poles (double stepping). Some ticking of the poles is acceptable as long as the cones are not displaced.

Appropriate to progress: ONLY add more passes when 85% fluency is achieved. This includes focus away from the handler / independent execution, no double stepping, and entering the poles with an appropriate amount of speed control.

Goal: Stretch the stride to increase shoulder/ hip mobility and power. AROM.

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Boredom Buster » Maintenance Circuit 3
1-2 x a week, alternating with the other Maintenance Circuits

1. [Pivot/Step to Target: Expert](#)

Starts at 2:08 of this video

Substituting unstable PawPods for the stable foot targets.

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

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2. [Deep Bow: Advanced](#)

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to move to the end range without repositioning the front feet or removing one foot from the front foot target with 85% accuracy.

Note: Placement of reward is BELOW the height of the carpus,
That's what makes this a Deep Bow. Nose facing downward, as shown in this photo. Dog MUST start in an overstretched stand to allow space for the shoulder to extend and the scapula to rotate properly.

Goal: Continues to improve mobility through the shoulder, hip flexor and hamstring.

3. Adducted Stand -TL Focus: Advanced

Stillness: 10 sec
Horizontal Head Nods: 3 right and then 3 left
Vertical Head Nods: 3 up and then 3 down

Repeat 3x

Building to:

Stillness: 30 sec
Horizontal Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between right and left
Vertical Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between up and down

One set ONLY

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute all Head Nod variations without loss of balance, executing to maximum repetitions.

Note: 1 Pod under FRONT feet. 2 Pods under REAR feet

Goal: Specifically targets the medial shoulder and medial shoulder stabilizers at the end range. Indirectly targets the hip adductors, including the psoas, so can be a gentle reintroduction to hip adduction for dogs recovering from a psoas issue.

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4. Cavaletti Collection: Advanced

8-10 poles
5 passes (down and back=1 pass)

Building to: 10 continuous passes as proficiency is demonstrated

Note:
1. Poles are set to ¾ hock height until fluency is reached. Then poles can be raised to hock height (never higher than hock height).

2. Starting measurement between poles 2x elbow height. This may need to be adjusted +/- 2" so the dog can center their footfalls.
3. With higher poles, the spacing between the poles **should not be stretched**.

Appropriate to progress: ONLY add more passes when 85% fluency is achieved. This includes focus away from the handler / independent execution, no ticking or knocking the poles, and entering the poles with an appropriate amount of speed control.

Goal: Increase vertical amplitude change, and strengthen the hip and shoulder stabilizers.

Notes:

Notes:

Other Programs Available

CCC Puppy Program
CCC Beginner Program
CCC Sport Dog Program
CCC Senior Dog Program
CCC Sloppy Sitters Mini-Program
CCC Post Spay Mini-Program
CCC Postnatal Mini-Program
CCC Post TPLO Mini Program

Sport Dog Program

Comprehensive Track » All Circuits

The **Sport Dog Program** has a focus on preparing the canine body for the demands inherent in high impact sports like Agility, Flyball, Disc, Bite Sports, Dock Diving, Man Trailing and various Coursing Sports, or a high impact lifestyle inherent in some breeds.

The **Comprehensive Track** takes into account the needs of the sporting dog. This balanced conditioning program focuses on creating power in the global movers while promoting endurance in the local stabilizers, with the goal of balancing power and stability to mitigate the risk of injury, and improve sport performance. These sport specific exercises prepare the dog for loading into the rear, front end for impact, and quick changes of direction.

Upon completion, the dog/handler team will be left with 3 exercise circuits to rotate through during the week, which include 2 functional strength circuits and 1 AROM circuit. Dog/handler teams experienced in conditioning *may* be able to begin with this program but remedial work may be required in some exercises in order to guarantee proper muscle recruitment and fluency.

Table of Contents

This is a **dynamic** table of contents. When clicked, the listings below will take you directly to that Circuit or Exercise. Pretty nifty! Also, this document is formatted to allow you to search for a word or phrase. Use the shortcut "command + F" on a Mac or "control + F" on a PC to open the search box.

MindMap » A visual representation

This MindMap is a visual representation of the path you'll be taking through the circuit.

In general, you will begin with **Circuit 1a**. When the progression requirements have been met for

START HERE
Circuits 1a-d contain the most critical exercises in the Sport Dog Program. These build directly on each other.

NOW YOU HAVE A CHOICE

Continue on to Circuits 3 & 4 for additional skill training

Take a training break and implement Intermediary Maintenance Circuits 1 & 2, which contain all the apex exercises you have learned so far

Circuit 1: Primary	Circuit 2: Secondary	Circuit 3: Plyometric	Circuit 4: Integrated
Circuit 1a	Circuit 2a	Circuit 3a	Circuit 4a
Circuit 1b	Circuit 2b	Circuit 3b	Circuit 4b
Circuit 1c	Circuit 2c	Circuit 3c	Circuit 4c
Circuit 1d	Circuit 2d	Circuit 3d	Circuit 4d

Circuits 2a-d introduce exercises that target the adductors and abductors

FINISH HERE
All the apex exercises learned in the entire Sport Dog Program are included in the Final Maintenance Circuits 1-3

Intermediary Maintenance Circuit 1 & 2

Final Maintenance Circuits 1-3

the exercises in that circuit, you will move to **Circuit 1b**. When the progression requirements have been met, you will move to **Circuit 1c**, and so on. The exercises are organized to build on each other progressing from Beginner to Expert.

After completing Circuit 1a-d & Circuit 2a-d you will have the option to continue to Circuits 3 & 4 or take a training break and implement the Intermediary Maintenance Circuits. After completing all 4 Circuit progressions, you will be left with 3 Final Maintenance Circuits to implement on an ongoing basis.

Circuits 1a-d contain the most important exercises in the Sport Dog Program. These exercises specifically target the muscle groups that are most commonly injured due to weakness, tightness or agonist/antagonist imbalance. Focusing on these exercises first, and working each progression to fluency will improve strength, help decrease the risk of sport related injury, promote faster recovery time and lay a solid foundation for the remaining exercises in the Sport Dog Program.

Circuits 2a-d target the shoulder and hip abductors / adductors and have a focus on stability. Building strength, stability, endurance and firing speed in the local muscles that lie close to the joint not only helps mitigate injury risk by directly preparing the muscle fibers to absorb forces, but it also trains the nervous system to be prepared to respond more quickly to unforeseen variables. The more quickly a dog can react to a change in surface traction, a late handler cue, an unforeseen obstacle on course, etc, the less likely they are to slip, trip, or collide with the variables in their environment.

So while the global power muscles create all the speed and explosion, the local stabilizers are responsible for controlling that power.

The **Intermediary Maintenance Circuits** are designed to give dog / handler teams a temporary break from the demands of the dog training component inherent in learning canine fitness exercises. These exercises include all the apex exercises you have learned up to now, and provide a balanced workout for the global movers and local stabilizers. After resting for a time, you will be well prepared to move into the Circuit 3a-d exercises which focus on plyometric power and increasing explosive speed.

Circuit 3a-d introduces plyometric principles which improve power and explosive speed. Plyometric exercises include fast changes of direction on loaded muscles, and most specifically simulate the demands imposed upon a dog's body in sports and work.

The S.A.I.D. principle states that in order to have a positive impact on performance, the exercises selected must simulate the demands the body will be exposed to. So I have chosen these exercises to specifically mimic the demands of explosion, fast changes of direction, core loading and impact that are present in the majority of sports.

Circuits 4a-d round out the Sport Dog Program and incorporate integrated, multi-part exercises that teach mental stamina, and include the delayed reinforcement necessary for sports and work. These integrated exercises blend multiple skills together to target the global movers, local stabilizers, and core muscles simultaneously, making this portion of the circuit progression very effective.

The three **Final Maintenance** circuits combine all the expert level exercises we have been working toward and create a comprehensive workout that can be used for the duration of the dog's career.

It will likely take approximately 12 months to fully complete this program. Slow and steady.

Equipment needed for this program

➔ 2-4 Sitting Platforms » some exercises will benefit from stacking multiple platforms to increase height/challenge

➔ Standing Platform

➔ Plyo Box, Klimb, aerobics step or other similar stable elevated surface

➔ 4 PawPods (TotoFit, Flexiness and BOSU are my preferred brands)

➔ 4 Rubber Feed Bowls or foot targets

➔ 2 Propel Air Platforms, 2 FitBones or 2 Discs

➔ 1 low inflatable Wedge, Disc or Foam Pad

➔ Set of 6-10 Cavaletti Poles

➔ 2 Traffic Cones or similar pylons

➔ Cato Board, Wobble Board or farge Square Platform

➔ Bosu Ball (Optional)

➔ Peanut + Holder (Optional)

How to measure for Platforms

Here's a graphic to help you measure for your sitting and standing platforms if you don't already have those.

Sitting Platform: Width, is the measurement between the point of the hocks (shown in the top portion of the photo). Length is 1.5-2x the width.

Standing Platform: Width is the measurement between the point of the hocks (the same as the Sitting Platform). Length is the measurement shown in the bottom portion of the attached photo, plus a little bit extra. For a medium-large size dog 3-4 inches extra in the front, and 3-4 inches extra in the rear is sufficient. Tiny dogs need less "extra space". Giant dogs need a bit more.

Foot Targets: Width is the measurement between the point of the hocks (the same as the Sitting Platform). Length is about half the width measurement.
For more specific instructions, I wrote a 3 part blog series that covers the difference between the various types of platforms, how to measure for each, and how to build them yourself. You can see these on my website.

Progression Tips & Considerations

1. When implementing a formal conditioning program, we're implementing movements that impact the body in a few different ways.
   a. Increasing the **strength** of a muscle concentrically and eccentrically, defined by the ability to move to end range while loaded and maintain 85% accuracy.
   b. Improving the **endurance** of the muscle, defined by the amount of repetitions or duration an exercise can be performed while still maintaining 85% proper alignment.
   c. Increasing the **flexibility** of a muscle.
   d. Improving **body awareness** of the dog.

2. We progress an exercise in one of two ways...
   a. **Building strength & endurance:** Asking for more repetitions / longer duration before resting. (a through c above)
   b. **Challenging coordination:** Asking a dog for more precision movement, challenging posture, increasing balance demands and/or increasing the complexity of an exercise. (d above)

3. We measure the readiness of the dog to progress by assessing **fluency**, which is a measurement of how consistently the dog is able to correctly execute when meeting the challenge of maximum repetitions x sets (defined for each exercise).

   A dog is considered "fluent" and ready to progress within an exercise (adding repetitions or duration), or progress to the next exercise variation when…
   a. **Maximum repetitions** x sets has been reached
   b. **85% accuracy** is maintained throughout
   c. **Arousal level is maintained** (no significant increase or decrease in arousal)

4. Some dogs will need many sessions of a specific exercise to meet the required strength/flexibility or coordination benchmarks before progressing to the next level. In other exercises, only one or two sessions may be necessary before progressing. Recording, and assessing the video of your exercise protocol can reveal valuable information, and help you determine when it is appropriate to progress.

5. **How to build repetitions:** A typical conservative strength / endurance progression schedule would be...

> 5 reps x 3 sets
> 7 reps, 7 reps, 5 reps
> 10 reps, 7 reps, 7 reps
> 10 reps, 10 reps, 7 reps
> 10 reps x 3 sets

So when building reps this can be a helpful guide. There's no downside to progressing conservatively, aside from the fact that it takes more time. Conversely, progressing too quickly can lead to frustration, a loss of precision, and incorrect muscle recruitment.

NOTE: Change in arousal level, increase or decrease, is the first indicator of mental and/or physical fatigue. Taking a short break (30 seconds to 1 min) with a cookie scatter, or down-stay can help manage arousal levels.

6. **Moving from one circuit to the next**
   Not all exercises within a circuit will be progressed at the same time. But as a general guide, I try not to straddle more than 2 circuits at the same time.
   a. **Example:** If my dog has reached fluency in 3 out of 4 exercises in Circuit 1, I would progress to Circuit 2, and also continue to implement the slow to develop exercise from Circuit 1. But I WOULD NOT progress to the exercises in Circuit 3 until the exercise from Circuit 1 was fluent.
   b. If we progress only the skills the dog is naturally good at, and neglect the skills they struggle with, we will end up running into a **"bottleneck"** as the circuits progress. This could be a skills bottleneck, strength/endurance bottleneck or a flexibility bottleneck. So the exercises the dog struggles with the most are actually the most important to focus on!

   NOTE: Puppies with growing bodies may need to return to previous progressions of an exercise when experiencing growth spurts. Past understanding of where their body parts are in space may not be applicable when the legs are suddenly several inches longer!! Patience pays off during these growing times!

7. Static **before** Dynamic
   Isolated **before** Integrated
   Stable **before** Unstable
   Form **drives** Function

Sport Specific Guidelines

1. **Managing Arousal**
   Increased arousal and overarousal can result as much from a mental challenge as from a physical challenge… So we want to be on the lookout for increasing or decreasing arousal levels when implementing conditioning exercises. Brains can't think or learn very well when overly taxed… either by complexity of an exercise (having to hold many thoughts in the mind at once) or physical challenge, fatigue and adrenaline. Both situations can result in an adrenalized state, where learning doesn't happen well. Some signs of overarousal are… Moving quickly, offering other behaviors, vocalization, taking the cookie hard, general feeling of frantic movement, etc. Conversely, underarousal can manifest as looking away, leaving, freezing/standing still, offering easier movements, etc. If we are seeing any of these things, taking a short break (30 sec to 1 min) can be helpful.

2. **Eccentric Phase for stability**
   The Eccentric phase of a movement or muscle contraction is when the dog is slowly resisting gravity, and working muscle is elongating. This phase produces functional stability, as the dog is "forced" to use their muscles to control their movement vs relying on the elasticity of the fascia. This is also the phase of the movement where power is gained in the global movers. So, focusing on the eccentric phase happening slowly will be important for all sport dogs.

3. **Focus on Form**
   To address muscle imbalances between the two sides or between two muscles in a pain (agonist / antagonist) we sometimes have to work against the dog's learned compensation strategy. Along with moving slowly we can help our dogs be correct by using props to "force" proper alignment. This gives us a chance to reinforce/build value to proper mechanics, and increases the likelihood these new mechanics will be implemented in the real world and in our sport. Muscles that fire together wire together… so this process of conditioning is just as much about training the brain as it is the body. Taking a step back and focusing on form will actually lead to better results long term.

4. **What's Rewarded will be Repeated**

   To change default posture, or engrained habitual mechanics, we need to reward new mechanics. In the beginning, that will likely mean trying to "exaggerate" these new mechanics through placement of reward, prop setup, etc. Over time, we should start to see these new mechanics be offered automatically, because they have become a consistent way to receive a reward. BUT this needs to be rewarded heavily to help create the lightbulb moment for the dog.

5. **Progress not Perfection**

   It can be challenging to implement new movement mechanics, and target underutilized muscles. This is especially true when we are dealing with a chronic issue or injury. Like learning to use your non-dominant hand to perform a fine motor skill, the first attempt at a skill is very likely to be clumsy, and inaccurate. REWARD ANYWAY! Rewarding the attempt will communicate to the dog that they are on the right track. It's a trap to hold out for perfection.

1. [Rock Back Sit-Push Forward Stand: Intermediate](#)

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog reaches 85% accuracy at maximum reps, and is moving with both front feet simultaneously during the concentric phase (transition from sit to stand).

Note: Front foot target set at shoulder height (point of the shoulder, not the withers). The concentric phase (transition from sit to stand) will always
"come together" and become more fluent first. It will take time for your pup to control the eccentric phase (slow resisting of gravity in the transition from stand to sit).

Goal: Transitioning from the front feet stepping up onto the front foot target to fully loading into the rear, with front feet moving simultaneously during the concentric phase (transition from sit to stand). Increases strength through the large muscles in the pelvic limb (PL), including the quadriceps, hamstrings, and gluteals.

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2. [Bow Tutorial: Beginner](#)

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is not confusing the Bow motion with the Fold Back Down, and is keeping all 4 feet still with 85% accuracy.

Note: Dog MUST start in a slightly overstretched stand to allow space for the shoulder to extend and the scapula to rotate properly. So props should be placed such that they encourage this.
Goal: Improves scapular mobility, and shoulder extension. Mobilizes and strengthens (eccentrically) the musculature on the caudal aspect of the shoulder and improves flexibility through the hamstring (AROM).

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3. Plank Tutorial: Beginner

Rear feet elevated to carpus height only.

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is comfortable moving to 85% of full hip extension

Note: ALWAYS release from the counterpose position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Goal: Strengthens the core stabilizers including the iliopsoas. Rear feet should stay still throughout. Even weight bearing through the rear limbs is a priority over maximum range.

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4. Pivot + Step Up: Beginner

Front foot target about elbow height. Rear foot target ½ hock height.
5 passes (moving to one side and back = 1 pass)

Repeat x 1

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets with 85% accuracy, is able to precisely target, lift onto, and lower off the rear foot targets without stumbling, hopping or losing balance.

Note: Reward for every step. This exercise is not about rushing to get to the next target, but about building value to each individual step to improve coordination.

Goal: Strengthens hip abductors and adductors. Improves rear end awareness, by encouraging slow movement. Builds value to slow precise movement.

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Circuit 1b
3-4 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency
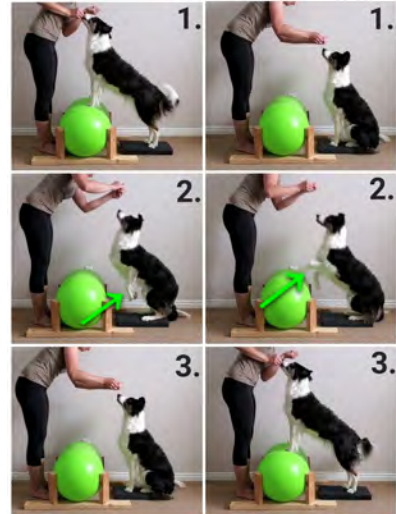
1. Power Up Prep: Advanced

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3

Appropriate to Progress: When both front feet are moving simultaneously during the transition from Sit to Stand (concentric phase), and the transition from Stand to Sit (eccentric phase) is slow and controlled in 50% of the repetitions. .

Note: Using placement of reward, vertically above the dog's head can help encourage the dog to lower slowly to the sit. (Peanut Butter spoon may be helpful)

Goal: Both front feet moving in tandem during the concentric phase. Starting to see some slow reps in the transition from stand to sit in the eccentric phase. Functional core challenge. Prepares for the plyometric progression.

2. Bow-Stretch: Intermediate

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog is able to execute with proper form, while keeping all 4 feet still with 85% accuracy. This Includes shoulder behind the elbow and ischial tuberosity behind the rear foot during the bow phase and a neutral spine while extending the hip during the stretch phase.

Note: Dog MUST start in a slightly overstretched stand to allow space for the shoulder to extend and the scapula to rotate properly. This is detailed in the video

Goal: Improves scapular mobility, shoulder extension and hamstring mobility during the bow phase. Challenges the core and hip flexors (including the iliopsoas) during the stretch phase.

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3. [Plank: Intermediate](#)

Increases the height of the rear feet to elbow height

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute pose and counterpose with fluidity and understanding, keeping the rear feet still 85% of the time, to maximum repetitions.

Note: ALWAYS release from the counterpose position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Goal: Increases the load through the core muscles and the iliopsoas, and begins to introduce full range hip extension.

4. [Pivot + Step Up: Intermediate](#)

Front foot target about elbow height. Height of the rear foot target increased to ¾ hock height.

5 Passes
(Dog moving to the right and back to the left = 1 pass)
1 set only

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets, is able to precisely target, lift onto, and lower off the rear foot targets without stumbling, or losing balance.

Goal: Slow controlled movement. Precise targeting with the rear feet. When stepping onto and off of the rear foot target, we are looking for vertical movement more than horizontal movement.

Notes:

Circuit 1c
3-4 x a week, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Power-Up: Expert

5 reps x 3 sets

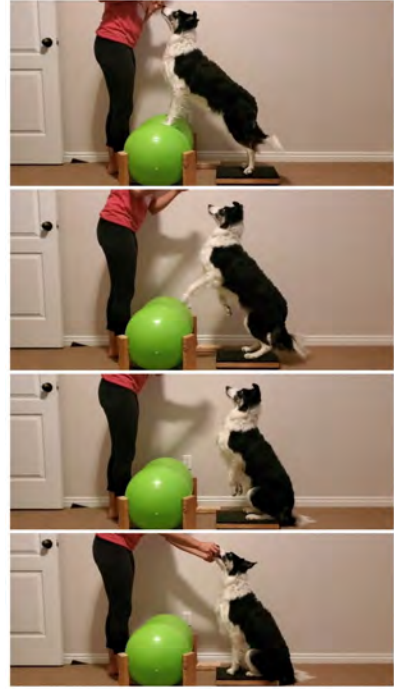**Building to:** 10 reps x 3

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute 85% of the repetitions slowly during the eccentric phase

Note: Slow controlled return to the sit position is the main focus, and the dog's fluency in executing this slow movement is the main thing that differentiates this variation from the Power-Up Prep variation.

Goal: Slow controlled eccentric. Functional core strength. Specifically targets the quadriceps eccentrically, and fosters better balance, core control and body awareness.

2. Deep Bow: Advanced

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to move to the end range without repositioning the front feet or removing one foot from the front foot target with 85% accuracy.

Note: Placement of reward is **BELOW** the height of the carpus,
That's what makes this a Deep Bow. Nose facing downward, as shown in this photo. Dog MUST start in an overstretched stand to allow space for the shoulder to extend and the scapula to rotate properly.

Goal: Continues to improve mobility through the shoulder, hip flexor and hamstring.

3. Wheelbarrow: Advanced

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is reaching full hip extension and maintaining a neutral spine (NO SPINE EXTENSION), and able to maintain alignment to maximum repetitions.

NOTE: ALWAYS release from the sit position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Butt Up Stand may be needed as a prep for dogs who struggle with the sitting position.

Goal: Targets the alternating diagonal muscle chains in the core while moving from short to long lever position.

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4. Pistol Squats: Advanced

5 reps to the right
5 reps to the left
Release from equipment
Repeat x 3

Building to:
10 reps to the right
10 reps to the left
Release from equipment
Repeat x 3

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog is slowly lowering down with a mainly vertical movement vs stepping to the side with a lot of abduction. Free leg should land close to the rear foot target

Note: Spine angle about 45°. Rear foot target about ¾ hock height. Front foot target does not have to be unstable. Use whatever prop achieves the 45° spine angle. A lower front foot target can be used initially if needed to reduce the challenge.

Goal: Slow / controlled movement during the lowering phase is the goal. Strengthens the gluteals, psoas and core stabilizers in a more neutral hip alignment (which is muscularly more challenging than abduction/adduction).

Notes:

Circuit 1d
3-4 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency
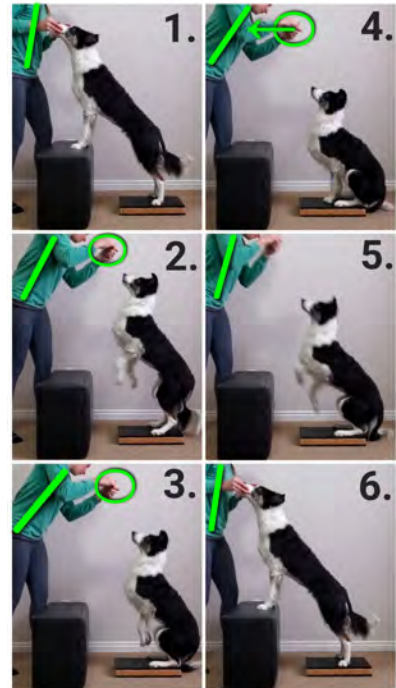
1. Double-Ups: Expert +

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute to maximum repetitions while maintaining 85% accuracy.

Note: This is very challenging. Be quick to assume change of behavior is FATIGUE not DISOBEDIENCE. By this time a dog is at this level, they have understanding of the Power-UP movement pattern, and reward history built in. Form degradation means a short or long rest is necessary.

Goal: SLOW eccentric phase. Immediate direction change out of the sit position. FAST concentric phase. Handler motions should be used to cue direction change.

2a. Bow Split Unstable Surface: Expert

Unstable surface under **FRONT FEET** only.

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with proper form, while keeping all 4 feet still with 85% accuracy. Prop stability should be confidently maintained.

Note: Rear feet equally elevated as the front feet, on a stable surface.
Dog MUST start in an overstretched stand. With the addition of instability also comes a 10-15% loss in range. This is to be expected.

Goal: Specifically targets the shoulder stabilizers against the rolling motion of the props at the eccentric end range where muscles are the weakest.

2b. <u>Bow Split Unstable Surface: Expert</u>

Unstable surface under **REAR FEET** only.

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with proper form, while keeping all 4 feet still with 85% accuracy. Prop stability should be confidently maintained.

Note: Front feet equally elevated as the rear feet, on a stable surface.
Dog MUST start in an overstretched stand. With the addition of instability also comes a 10-15% loss in range. This is to be expected.

Goal: Specifically targets the hip stabilizers (iliopsoas) against the rolling motion of the props at the concentric end range where muscles are the weakest.

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3. <u>Plank + Single Leg Lift -Compression/Extension: Expert</u>
Rear feet elbow height.

Plank Compression Leg Lift
1. 3 leg lifts.
2. Return to sit.
3. Repeat x3
4. Other side

Plank Extension Leg Lift
1. Walk out to plank
2. 3 leg lifts.
3. Walk back in
4. Return to sit
5. Repeat x3
6. Other side

1 cycle through to begin.

Building to: 3 cycles through.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute pose and counterpose with fluidity and understanding, keeping the rear feet still 85% of the time, to maximum repetitions.

Note: ALWAYS release from the sit position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Goal: Maximum core challenge, and maximum loading through the iliopsoas, especially in the extended phase.

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4. [Pistol Squats: Advanced](#) » This is the same

10 reps to the right
10 reps to the left
Release from equipment
Repeat x 3

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog is slowly lowering down with a mainly vertical movement vs stepping to the side with a lot of abduction. Free leg should land close to the rear foot target

Note: Spine angle about 45°. Rear foot target about ¾ hock height. Front foot target does not have to be unstable. Use whatever prop achieves the 45° spine angle. A lower front foot target can be used initially if needed to reduce the challenge.

Goal: Slow / controlled movement during the lowering phase is the goal. Strengthens the gluteals, psoas and core stabilizers in a more neutral hip alignment (which is muscularly more challenging than abduction/adduction).

Notes:

Circuit 2a
3-4 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Hop Back Stand Tutorial: Intermediate
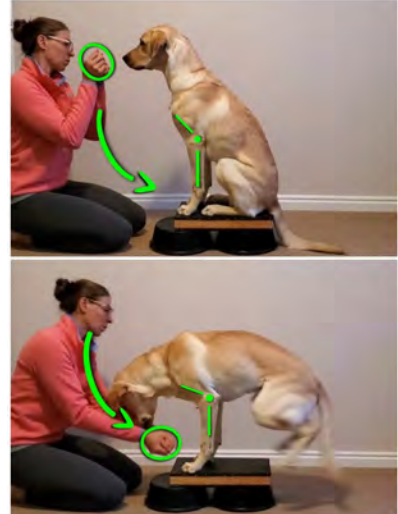
5 reps x 3 sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the front feet stay still with 85% accuracy, vertical alignment of the forelimb, and the rear feet are not getting "caught" on the sitting platform

Note: Once the dog is able to execute 7-10 reps hopping back vs stepping back, it's fair to combine with the Hop Sit motion. But the reward criteria is for the Hop Stand ONLY

Goal: Forward loading into the shoulder for shoulder strengthening that mimics impact (landing phase of a jump, or impact phase of a box turn).

2. Hop Sit-Tutorial: Intermediate

5 reps x 3 sets of the Hop Sit only

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Note: Once the dog is able to execute 7-10 reps of the Hop Sit, it's fair to incorporate the Hop Stand, assuming the hop Stand is fluent. This is shown at 3:23 in the video.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain balance with 85% consistency, and no longer "going over the handlebars".

Goal: Keeping front feet still throughout. This exercise also specifically targets the shoulder extensors eccentrically as they work hard to decelerate, and stop the dog from "going over the handlebars". Functional core strength.

3. Shoulder Strength & Stability Series: Beginner

Stillness: 10 seconds
Head Nods Down: 5
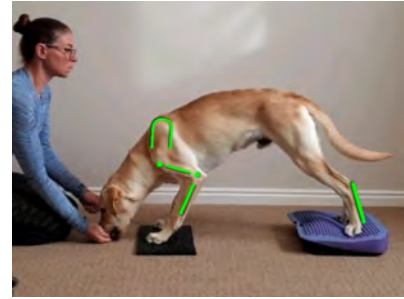Weight Shifting:
3 presses x 3 reps (all on one side)

Repeat presses on other side
Release from equipment

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is keeping all 4 feet still throughout, flexing the shoulder so the humerus is approx. horizontal, is demonstrating an even curve through the spine, and happily resisting the handler's pressure.

Note: NO head nods up here. Keep head low, so the neck and head follow the line of the spine.

Goal: 90° shoulder and elbow flexion (humerus approaching horizontal) during the head nods down. Easily resisting handler pressure during the weight shifting portion.

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4. Adducted Stand: Beginner

Stillness: 10 sec
Release off props
Repeat x 3

Building to: Horizontal Head nods:
3 to the right
3 to the left
Repeat for 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets, and is able to maintain alignment and stillness with 85% accuracy.

Note: PawPod under rear feet ONLY. Front feet stable and separated shoulders width. If the dog is struggling initially, 2 pods pushed together can be substituted for the single pod.

Goal: Maintain adductor engagement and equal rear foot contact with pod.

5. [Pivot/ Step to Target: Intermediate](#)

Starts at 0:39 of this video.

Rear foot targets are close together.

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually. Any stable foot targets can be used. Feed buckets are not required or appropriate for all dogs.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

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Circuit 2b
3-4 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Hop Sit Sprints: Expert

5 reps in each variation
Repeat for 1 cycle through

A. Even tempo/Pause in the Sit and Stand: Even tempo works the TL and PL and the associated stabilizers evenly.

B. Shoulder focus/Pause in the Stand phase: Omitting the pause in the Sit phase

C. Hip and stifle focus/Pause in the sit: Omitting the pause in the Stand

Building to: 10 reps in each variation
Repeat for 1 cycle through

Building to: Ultimately building to 2 cycles through.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is executing at maximum repetitions with 85% accuracy.

Note: This is likely an anaerobic exercise. So change of behavior should be assumed to be fatigue, not disobedience. Be quick to rest when form degrades.

Goal: Plyometric challenge. Increases power and proprioceptive speed through the large muscles in the hip and shoulder. Improves core strength, and muscular endurance throughout.

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2. Shoulder Strength & Stability Series: Intermediate

Increase the height of the rear foot target to elbow height or a 30° spine angle and add instability to front feet.

Stillness: 10 seconds
Head Nods Down: 5
Weight Shifting:
3 presses for 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat presses on other side

Release from equipment

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is keeping all 4 feet still throughout, flexing the shoulder so the humerus is approx. horizontal, is demonstrating an even curve through the spine, and happily resisting the handler's pressure.

Note: NO head nods up here. Keep head low, so the neck and head follow the line of the spine. Watch for carpal hyperflexion.

Goal: Humerus horizontal or slightly below during the head nods down. Easily resisting handler pressure during the weight shifting portion.

---

3. Adducted Stand: Intermediate

Stillness: 10 sec
Release off props
Repeat x 3

Building to: Horizontal Head nods:
3 to the right
3 to the left

Repeat x 3

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets, and is able to maintain alignment and stillness.

Note: PawPod under FRONT and REAR feet. Head Nods should be VERY SLOW in the beginning. Slower than you think

Goal: Maintain shoulder and hip adductor engagement, and balance with the addition of the second pod.

4. [Pivot/Step to Target: Advanced](#)

Starts at 1:42 of this video

Increase the distance between the rear foot targets by 25-50%

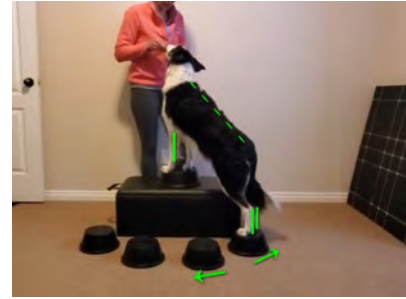4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually. Any stable foot targets can be used. Feed buckets are not required or appropriate for all dogs.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

Notes:

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Circuit 2c
3-4 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Hop Sit Sprints: Expert

5 reps in each variation
Repeat for 1 cycle through

A. Even tempo/Pause in the Sit and Stand: Even tempo works the TL and PL and the associated stabilizers evenly.

B. Shoulder focus/Pause in the Stand phase: Omitting the pause in the Sit phase

C. Hip and stifle focus/Pause in the sit: Omitting the pause in the Stand

Building to: 10 reps in each variation
Repeat for 1 cycle through

Building to: Ultimately building to 2 cycles through.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is executing at maximum repetitions with 85% accuracy.

Note: This is likely an anaerobic exercise. So change of behavior should be assumed to be fatigue, not disobedience. Be quick to rest when form degrades.

Goal: Plyometric challenge. Increases power and proprioceptive speed through the large muscles in the hip and shoulder. Improves core strength, and muscular endurance throughout.

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2. Shoulder Strength & Stability Series: Advanced

Increase the height of the rear feet, to a 45° spine angle.

Stillness: 10 seconds
Head Nods Down: 5
Weight Shifting:
3 presses for 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat presses on other side

Release from equipment

Repeat x3

Building to:

Stillness: 30 seconds
Head Nods Down: 15
Weight Shifting:
3 presses for 10 reps (all on one side)

One set ONLY

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to easily execute to maximum repetitions with 85% accuracy

Note: This exercise is a prerequisite for the Kick Up Stand: Advanced.

Goal: Humerus horizontal or slightly below during the head nods down. Easily resisting handler pressure during the weight shifting portion.

3a. Adducted Stand PL Focus: Advanced

Stillness: 10 sec
Horizontal Head Nods: 3 right and then 3 left
Vertical Head Nods: 3 up and then 3 down

Repeat 3x

Note: 2 Pods under FRONT feet. 1 Pod under REAR feet

Building to:
Stillness: 30 sec
Horizontal Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between right and left
Vertical Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between up and down

One set ONLY

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute all Head Nod variations without loss of balance, executing to maximum repetitions

Goal: Specifically targets the adductors, including the psoas at the end range. Indirectly targets the shoulder adductors/medial shoulder stabilizers adductors, so can be a gentle reintroduction to shoulder adduction for dogs recovering from a medial shoulder issue.

3b. [Adducted Stand -TL Focus: Advanced](#)

Stillness: 10 sec
Horizontal Head Nods: 3 right and then 3 left
Vertical Head Nods: 3 up and then 3 down

Repeat 3x

Building to:

Stillness: 30 sec
Horizontal Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between right and left
Vertical Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between up and down

One set ONLY

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute all Head Nod variations without loss of balance, executing to maximum repetitions.

Note: 1 Pod under FRONT feet. 2 Pods under REAR feet

Goal: Specifically targets the medial shoulder and medial shoulder stabilizers at the end range. Indirectly targets the hip adductors, including the psoas, so can be a gentle reintroduction to hip adduction for dogs recovering from a psoas issue.

4. [Pivot/Step to Target: Expert](#)

Starts at 2:08 of this video

Substituting unstable PawPods for the stable foot targets.

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

Notes:

Notes:

Circuit 2d
3-4 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Hop Sit Sprints: Expert

5 reps in each variation
Repeat for 1 cycle through

~~A. Even tempo/Pause in the Sit and Stand: Even tempo works the TL and PL and the associated stabilizers evenly.~~

~~B. Shoulder focus/Pause in the Stand phase: Omitting the pause in the Sit phase~~

C. Hip and stifle focus/Pause in the sit: Omitting the pause in the Stand

Building to: 10 reps in each variation
Repeat for 1 cycle through

Building to: Ultimately building to 2 cycles through.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is executing at maximum repetitions with 85% accuracy.

Note: This is likely an anaerobic exercise. So change of behavior should be assumed to be fatigue, not disobedience. Be quick to rest when form degrades.

Goal: Plyometric challenge. Increases power and proprioceptive speed through the large muscles in the hip and shoulder. Improves core strength, and muscular endurance throughout.
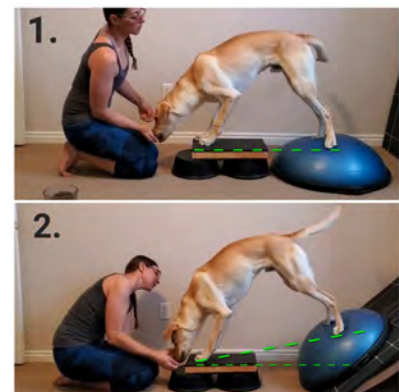
2. Kick Up Stand: Advanced

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: Increase the angle of the rear foot target as the dog demonstrates proficiency. Beginning with horizontal and working toward 30°. Once your dog is able to execute at 30° with 85% accuracy to maximum repetitions, it's fair to add on.

Note: Be mindful of how close the front and rear foot targets are to each other. If the two targets are too close together, the dog may not "fit", and the rear feet will run into the rear foot target before the exercise has a chance to fully "unfurl". If your dog is executing a "double hop" on the way up, this is likely the issue.

Goal: In this phase we are introducing this movement pattern and shaping the gross movement pattern that we will refine in the Expert level variation.

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3. [Adducted Stand: Expert](#)

Vertical Head Nods: 5 up, then 5 down. Release off pods.

Horizontal Head Nods: 5 right, then 5 left. Release off pods.

Head Nod Circles:
3 Clockwise
3 Counter Clockwise
Release off pods.

Repeat 3x

Building to:
Horizontal Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between right and left.

Vertical Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between up and down.

Head Nod Circles: 6 circles, alternating between Clockwise and Counter Clockwise.

Remaining on pods for the duration

One set ONLY

Goal: Targets the musculature through the medial shoulder, medial hip and core. Challenges endurance of the above mentioned muscles as well as the stabilizers through the feet, carpus, tarsus and stifle. This is VERY DIFFICULT please make sure to move the lure very slowly to avoid loss of balance.

4. [Pivot/Step to Target: Expert](#) » This is the same

Starts at 2:08 of this video

Substituting unstable PawPods for the stable foot targets.

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

Notes:

These **Intermediary Maintenance Circuits** are intended to provide a temporary break from the dog training required when learning new exercises. These circuits are designed to be implemented on alternating days 1-2x a week each for 4 workouts per week max.

Intermediary Maintenance Circuit 1
1-2 x a week, alternating with Intermediary Maintenance Circuit 2 until Fluency

1. Double-Ups: Expert +

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute to maximum repetitions while maintaining 85% accuracy.

Note: This is very challenging. Be quick to assume change of behavior is FATIGUE not DISOBEDIENCE. By this time a dog is at this level, they have understanding of the Power-UP movement pattern, and reward history built in. Form degradation means a short or long rest is necessary.

Goal: SLOW eccentric phase. Immediate direction change out of the sit position. FAST concentric phase. Handler motions should be used to cue direction change.
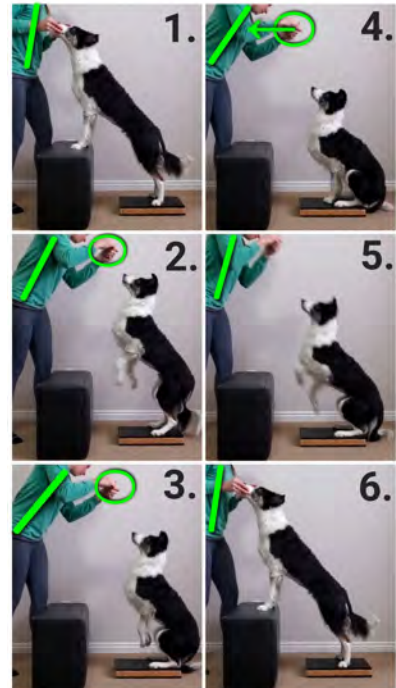
2. Bow Split Unstable Surface: Expert

Unstable surface under front AND rear feet

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Note: Please be careful upon exiting the props. I ask for a rock back sit, and then cue the dog to step off.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is executing max reps, with 85% accuracy.

Goal: Directly targets the hip, core and shoulder stabilizers at the end range.

3. Plank + Single Leg Lift -Compression/Extension: Expert

Rear feet elbow height.

Plank Compression Leg Lift
1. 3 leg lifts.
2. Return to sit.
3. Repeat x3
4. Other side

Plank Extension Leg Lift
1. Walk out to plank
2. 3 leg lifts.
3. Walk back in
4. Return to sit
5. Repeat x3
6. Other side

1 cycle through to begin.

Building to: 3 cycles through.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute pose and counterpose with fluidity and understanding, keeping the rear feet still 85% of the time, to maximum repetitions.

Note: ALWAYS release from the sit position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Goal: Maximum core challenge, and maximum loading through the iliopsoas, especially in the extended phase.

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4. Pistol Squats: Advanced

5 reps to the right
5 reps to the left
Release from equipment
Repeat x 3

Building to:
10 reps to the right
10 reps to the left
Release from equipment
Repeat x 3

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog is slowly lowering down with a mainly vertical movement vs stepping to the side with a lot of abduction. Free leg should land close to the rear foot target

Note: Spine angle about 45°. Rear foot target about ¾ hock height. Front foot target does not have to be unstable. Use whatever prop achieves the 45° spine angle. A lower front foot target can be used initially if needed to reduce the challenge.

Goal: Slow / controlled movement during the lowering phase is the goal. Strengthens the gluteals, psoas and core stabilizers in a more neutral hip alignment (which is muscularly more challenging than abduction/adduction).

Notes:

Intermediary Maintenance Circuit 2
1-2 x a week, alternating with Intermediary maintenance Circuit 1 until Fluency

1. Hop Sit Sprints: Expert

5 reps in each variation
Repeat for 1 cycle through

A. Even tempo/Pause in the Sit and Stand: Even tempo works the TL and PL and the associated stabilizers evenly.

B. Shoulder focus/Pause in the Stand phase: Omitting the pause in the Sit phase

C. Hip and stifle focus/Pause in the sit: Omitting the pause in the Stand

Building to: 10 reps in each variation
Repeat for 1 cycle through

Building to: Ultimately building to 2 cycles through.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is executing at maximum repetitions with 85% accuracy.

Note: This is likely an anaerobic exercise. So change of behavior should be assumed to be fatigue, not disobedience. Be quick to rest when form degrades.

Goal: Plyometric challenge. Increases power and proprioceptive speed through the large muscles in the hip and shoulder. Improves core strength, and muscular endurance throughout.

2. Adducted Stand: Expert

Vertical Head Nods: 5 up, then 5 down. Release off pods.

Horizontal Head Nods: 5 right, then 5 left. Release off pods.

Head Nod Circles:
3 Clockwise
3 Counter Clockwise
Release off pods.
Repeat 3x

Building to:

Horizontal Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between right and left.

Vertical Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between up and down.

Head Nod Circles: 6 circles, alternating between Clockwise and Counter Clockwise.

Remaining on pods for the duration

One set ONLY

Goal: Targets the musculature through the medial shoulder, medial hip and core. Challenges endurance of the above mentioned muscles as well as the stabilizers through the feet, carpus, tarsus and stifle. This is VERY DIFFICULT please make sure to move the lure very slowly to avoid loss of balance.

---

3. Kick Up Stand: Expert

Increase the spine angle to 45° or slightly higher

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is executing with a feeling of lightness (this is demonstrated in the video) to max repetitions and 85% accuracy.

Note: Be mindful of how close the front and rear foot targets are to each other. If the two targets are too close together, the dog may not "fit", and the rear feet will run into the rear foot target before the exercise has a chance to fully "unfurl". If your dog is executing a "double hop" on the way up, this is likely the issue.

Goal: This is a sport-specific movement that simulates the forces needed during a jump landing. Targets shoulder strength and stability, as well as specifically targets the lumbar epaxials.

4. Pivot/Step to Target: Expert

Starts at 2:08 of this video

Substituting unstable PawPods for the stable foot targets.

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

Notes:

Circuit 3a
3-4 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Ipsilateral Foot Target + Weight Shifting: Beginner

Stillness 10 sec
Weight Shifting: 5 presses
Release from equipment
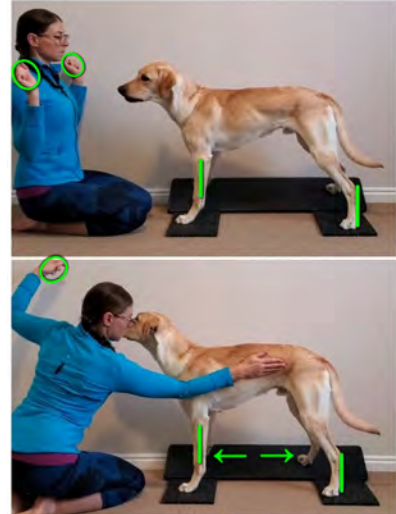Repeat presses for 3 sets total
Repeat on the other side

Building to:
Stillness: 30 seconds
Weight Shifting: 15 presses
1 set only
Repeat on the other side

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain a neutral spine, is able to lean back into the handler pressure easily, and is meeting the maximum repetition requirement.

Note: Stable Surfaces Only. Foot targets positioned such that the standing and targeting legs are displaying a mild amount of abduction. Shoulders level. Pelvis level.

Goal: Neutral spine, with controlled abduction as the dog moves into position. The dog should be able to easily resist handler pressure.

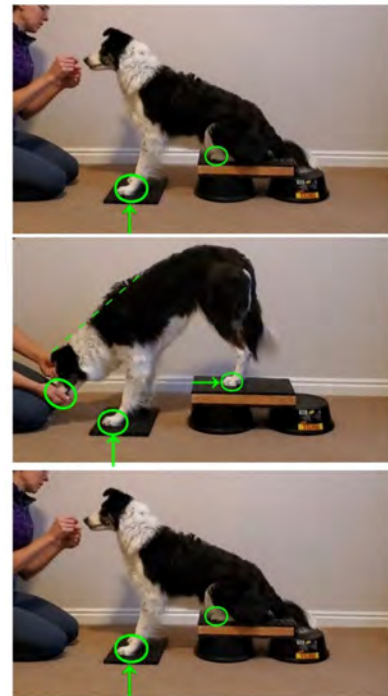## 2. Hiccup: Intermediate

Variation 1: Butt Up Stand → Sit ONLY

(Shown in the first portion of this video)

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog demonstrates fluency as defined by a neutral spine, front feet staying still, and the rear feet stepping backward and forward with control (no flinging)

Goal: Improves hamstring mobility, endurance through the shoulder, and teaches an important movement pattern the progressions will build upon.
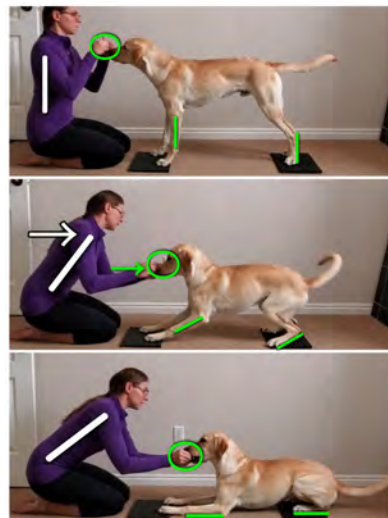
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3. Fold Back Down Tutorial: Beginner

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to fold back while keeping the forelimb and tarsus synchronized, resulting in the elbow and point of the hock touching down simultaneously. A dog who is touching down with elbows first is not yet strong enough to progress.

Note: Handler motion should be toward the dog's nose vs downward to differentiate between a "Bow" type movement and a Fold Back Down. I think about putting the cookie into the dog's eyeball. Dogs who are going through their big growth spurt may not physically be able to execute this movement pattern due to bone length discrepancy inherent in this time.

Goal: Forelimbs and hocks lowering and lifting in tandem / while staying parallel throughout. Teaches coordinated mechanics between the thoracic limb and pelvic limb.

4. Manual Leg Lift: Intermediate

Lift each leg and hold for 5 seconds.

Building to: 3 continuous sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to stand still / no foot movement, with a neutral spine for maximum reps.

Note: Weight into the handler should be very light. Expect the limb diagonal the lifted limb to get "light" or offload. That's normal/correct. Notice if the dog is resistant to lifting one limb specifically, or if the alignment of the topline changes. This indicates an underlying imbalance, and this exercise should not yet be progressed.

Goal: Strengthens the hip and shoulder stabilizers, and tests for muscle imbalance.

Notes:

Circuit 3b
3-4 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

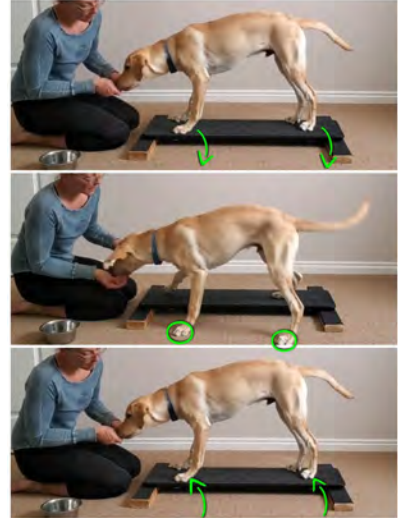1. [Ipsilateral Step Up: Beginner](#)

5 reps on each side x 2 sets

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: when the dog becomes fluent, as defined by stepping off the platform and onto the platform with ipsilateral legs synchronized, with 85% accuracy… so 4 out of 5x or better.

Note: This is the baseline movement that many exercises are built upon. Taking the time to ensure fluency/understanding will pay off in the long term.

Goal: Teaching synchronized movement through ipsilateral legs. Targets the muscles along the medial aspect of the shoulder and hip on the grounded legs, including the psoas. Keeping these muscles strong is an important component in avoiding MSI.

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2. [Hiccup: Advanced](#)

Variation 2: Butt Up Stand→ Sit→Hiccup

(Shown in the second portion of this video)

3 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 8 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is "hopping" both front feet up onto the sitting platform simultaneously, and is able to hold [Posture Sit](#) principles with 85% accuracy.

Note: This is a very challenging core exercise and reps should be increased very slowly to avoid a grade 1 strain.
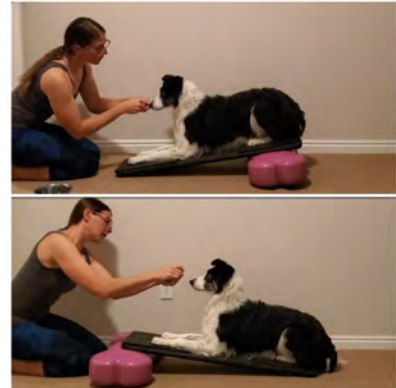
Goal: Smooth transition of the front feet up onto the sitting platform, while keeping the rear legs in alignment. Functional core strength.

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3. Fold Back Down Decline/Incline: Intermediate

Incline/ Facing Uphill:
5 reps x 3 sets

Decline/ Facing Downhill:
5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the forelimb and tarsus are moving in tandem with 85% accuracy, and the dog is maintaining a neutral spine.

Note: Facing uphill the rear end is more loaded, while facing downhill the front is more loaded. We can use this shift of weight to help regulate the challenge level. It's important to note which direction produces the smoother movement in the individual dog, and begin the exercise with that variation.

Goal: Focus is on the synchronized movement of the limbs, and maintaining a neutral spine throughout. Functional core strength that specifically targets the serratus ventralis, epaxials, obliques and iliopsoas, along with the latissimus.
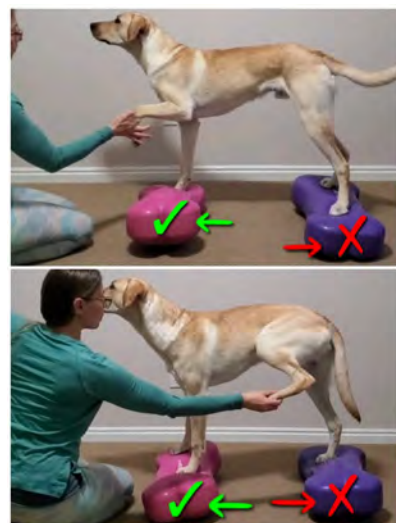
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4. Manual Leg Lift: Expert

Unstable surface under **FRONT FEET ONLY.** Rear feet elevated on a stable surface of equal height.

Lift each leg and hold for 5 seconds.
Release from the props

Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to: 30 sec for each leg lift
1 set only

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to meet the endurance challenge, with little to no reliance on the handler

Note: Weight into the handler should be very light. Expect the limb diagonal the lifted limb to get "light" or offload. That's normal/correct. Notice if the dog is resistant to lifting one limb specifically.

Goal: Targets the shoulder stabilizers and activates the core. Begins to expose the psoas to a stabilizing challenge. Indirectly challenges the hip and lumbar spine stabilizers.

Notes:

1. Ipsilateral Step Up: Intermediate

5 reps on each side x 3 reps

Note: There are two speeds shown in this video.

> **Learning Speed:** A reward is delivered while the free legs are on the ground, as well as on the Sitting Platforms.
>
> **Fluent Speed:** Free legs touching down is marked, but the reward is delivered once all 4 feet return to the Sitting Platforms. This increase in speed transitions the exercise to a more plyometric exercise, where the working muscles stay engaged throughout.

Building to: Fluent Speed 10 reps on each side x 2 sets

This variation uses a separate front and rear foot target to help refine foot placement and improve top line alignment. Foot targets should be about carpus height, or slightly higher.

Appropriate to progress: When the free legs are mostly synchronized, and the dog is executing to max reps with 85% accuracy.

Goal: Mostly synchronized movement, and a neutral spine in the stand. Targets the muscles along the medial and lateral aspect of the shoulder and hip, including the psoas.
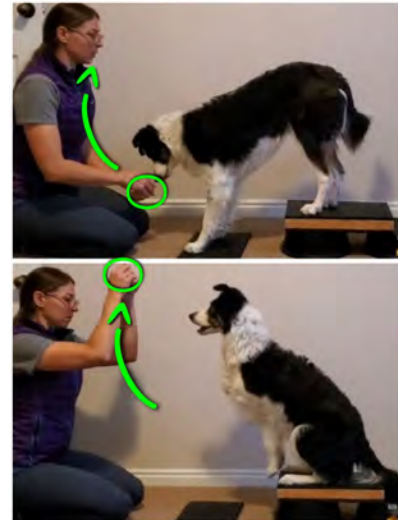
2. <u>Hiccup: Expert</u>

Variation 3: Stand→Hiccup
Variation 1 can be used as a warm up.
(Shown in the third portion of this video)

3 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 8 reps x 3 sets

Note: This is a very challenging exercise due to the complex/integrated nature of the movement pattern. Deviation from the dog's standard execution should be seen as fatigue, not disobedience or lack of understanding

Goal: Apex core strengthening exercise. Controlled fluid movement is the goal.

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3. <u>Fold Back Down- Split Surface: Advanced</u>

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with 85% accuracy, limbs moving in tandem, neutral spine, elbows moving to horizontal but not below.

Note: Spacing between the targets should be such that...
1. front feet are at the very *back* edge of the front foot target (no carpus on the platform)
2. Rear feet are at the very *front* edge of the rear foot target
3. Any stable foot targets can be used. Feed buckets are not required or appropriate for all dogs.
4.

Goal: Strengthens the shoulder, core and hip stabilizers in a lengthened lever position. Promotes a high level of hip and shoulder stability. Functional core strength.

4. Manual Leg Lift: Expert

Unstable surface under **REAR FEET ONLY.** Front feet elevated on a stable surface of equal height.

Lift each leg and hold for 5 seconds.
Release from the props

Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to: 30 sec for each leg lift
1 set only

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to meet the endurance challenge, with little to no reliance on the handler

Note: Weight into the handler should be very light. Expect the limb diagonal the lifted limb to get "light" or offload. That's normal/correct. Notice if the dog is resistant to lifting one limb specifically.

Goal: Targets the hip stabilizers and core directly, especially if the chosen inflatable has rotational instability around the long axis as is the case with the FitBone or Propel Air. Indirectly challenges the shoulder stabilizers.

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Circuit 3d
3-4 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. [Ipsilateral Step Up: Advanced](#)

Foot targets should be about ½ elbow height, not any higher.
5 reps on each side x 3 reps

Note: There are two speeds shown in this video.

> **A. Learning Speed:** A reward is delivered while the free legs are on the ground, as well as on the Sitting Platforms.

> **B. Fluent Speed:** Free legs touching down is marked, but the reward is delivered once all 4 feet return to the Sitting Platforms. This increase in speed transitions the exercise to a more plyometric exercise, where the working muscles stay engaged throughout.

Building to: Fluent Speed 10 reps on each side x 2 sets

This variation uses a separate front and rear foot target to help refine foot placement and improve top line alignment. Foot targets should be about carpus height, or slightly higher.

Appropriate to progress: When the free legs are mostly synchronized, and the dog is executing to max reps with 85% accuracy.

Goal: Mostly synchronized movement, and a neutral spine in the stand. Targets the muscles along the medial and lateral aspect of the shoulder and hip, including the psoas.
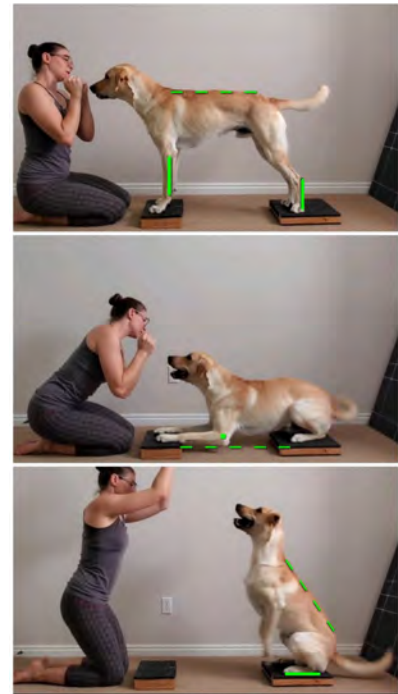
2. Burpees: Expert

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is executing max reps, with 85% accuracy.

Note: This is a very challenging exercise and care should be taken when increasing repetitions. Proper form needs to be maintained through the PL in its entirety.
Changes in alignment should be considered signs of fatigue not disobedience.

Goal: Significant functional core challenge, specifically targeting the epaxials, hypaxials and abdominals. The hip and shoulder stabilizers are also under a significant amount of load as they must stabilize against significant force as the dog transitions from a long lever to a short lever challenge.

3. Fold Back Down-Split Unstable Surface: Expert

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

This variation represents a SIGNIFICANT jump in difficulty level, by including an unstable surface under the front and rear feet.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with 85% accuracy, limbs moving in tandem, neutral spine, elbows moving to horizontal but not below, while stabilizing the props.

Note: Initially, this exercise may need to be split into pieces with the unstable surface under the front feet only, then the rear feet only, and finally combining the two.

Goal: Expert level challenge to the core, and limb stabilizers.

4. [Manual Leg Lift: Expert](#)

Unstable surface under front AND rear feet.

Lift each leg and hold for 5 seconds.
Release from the props

Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to: 30 sec for each leg lift
1 set only

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to meet the endurance challenge, with little to no reliance on the handler

Note: Weight into the handler should be very light. Expect the limb diagonal the lifted limb to get "light" or offload. That's normal/correct. Notice if the dog is resistant to lifting one limb specifically.

Goal: Maximum stability challenge through the core, hips and shoulders.
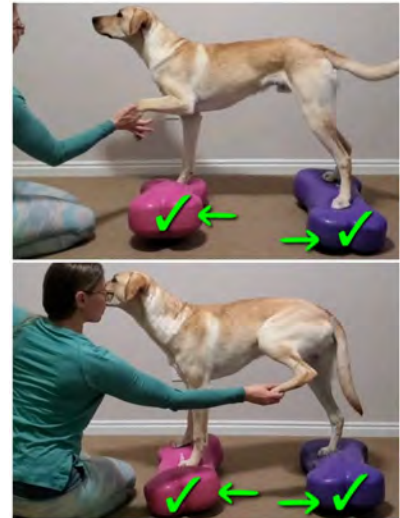
Notes:

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Circuit 4a
3-4 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. [Independent Rear Leg Lift-Tutorial: Intermediate](#)

Initial Goal: 5 second independent hold
5 reps x 3 sets

Start with literally 1 second of duration initially to "capture" the independent hold.

Building to: 10 second independent hold x 3 sets

Note: In the beginning, it's important to prioritize the dog training aspect over the "conditioning" aspect of the training process. Fluency and understanding come first. Duration and reps come second.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog holds the limb lifted in space until they hear the terminal marker, and the endurance goal is met.

Goal: Transition from a manual leg lift to an independent lift.

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2. [Tuck Sit-Kick Back Stand + Elevation: Advanced](#)

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Front feet stay still. Rear feet move forward and backward.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute to maximum reps with fluency, and 85% accuracy.

Note: This is a challenging strength building exercise as the front feet are staying elevated throughout. Handler mechanics are the same as a traditional Tuck Sit-Kick Back Stand.

Goal: Slow controlled movement targets the large muscles in the rear legs, while the front legs work to provide a balance assist. Functional core strength.
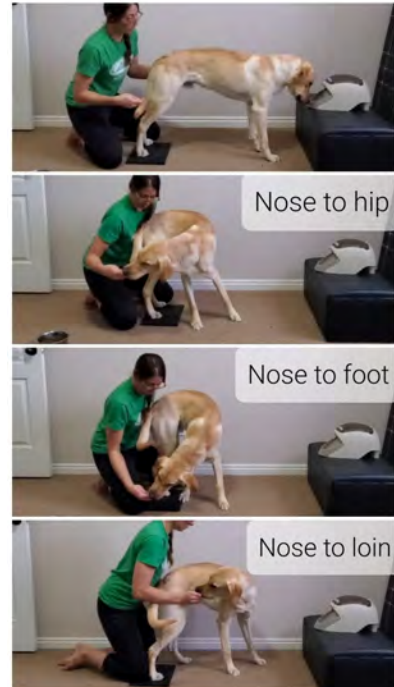
3. Standing Side Bend: Advanced

Nose to Hip: 5 reps
Nose to Rear Foot: 5 reps
Nose to Loin: 5 reps
Repeat on the second side.

Building to: 2 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When symmetry is displayed on both sides, in all 3 variations, and the dog is able to maintain rear end position without much assistance from the handler.

NOTE: Initially, the handler should assist in providing pelvic stability. The dog should assume responsibility for pelvic stability over time. Also, a nose to hand target can be substituted for the cookie at the hip, rear foot and loin if this becomes too calorically expensive. Notice and note the difference between the sides.

Goal: Improves spinal mobility and stability through the whole length of the spine, and addresses right to left muscle imbalance (strength and / or flexibility).

4. Intro to Cavaletti (Part 3): Intermediate

Progression 1:
3 passes x 3 sets

Building to:
Progression 2:
5 passes x 3 sets

Building to:
Progression 3:
10 passes x 3 sets

(down and back=1 pass)

Appropriate to progress: ONLY add more passes when 85% fluency is achieved. This includes focus away from the handler / independent execution, no ticking / knocking the poles and entering the poles with an appropriate amount of speed control. Adding too many repetitions too quickly will result in degradation of form from mental and/or physical fatigue.

Goal: Consistent independent execution. Introduces the beginning of plyometric exercise in a controlled manner to reduce overtaxing the system.

Notes:

1. [Independent Front Leg Lift-Tutorial: Intermediate](#)

5 reps x 3 sets

Start with literally 1 second of duration Initially to "capture" the independent hold.

Initial Goal: 5 second independent hold

Building to: 10 second independent hold x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is demonstrating a clean behavior loop (cue, hold until terminal marker, reward) for maximum duration x reps, with 85% accuracy.

Note: This exercise is a transition exercise that teaches the dog to move from a manual leg lift to an independent leg lift, while maintaining the alignment of the cervical and thoracic spine, ribcage, and grounded leg shoulder.

Goal: This exercise is intended to target the medial and lateral shoulder stabilizers on the grounded thoracic limb. Remember that if your pup is struggling with duration, you may need to be more clear with your terminal marker.
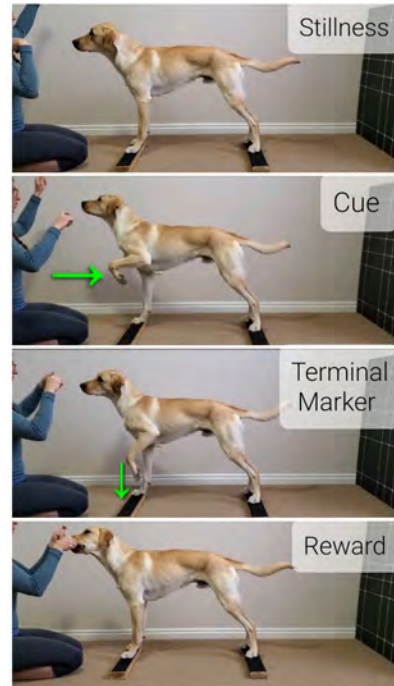
2. ½ Tuck Sit-Kick Back Stand: Advanced

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 Sets

Note: Front feet stay still. Rear feet move forward and back slightly. Forelimbs should be approximately parallel to the ground in the "Sit" phase. Posture Sit principles should be incorporated. Posture Sit: Beginner

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is executing to maximum repetitions, maintaining a neutral spine, and demonstrating an understanding of a quick reversal of direction.

Goal: Limiting range and adding speed implements plyometric principles. Maintaining parallel alignment through the rear legs is important.
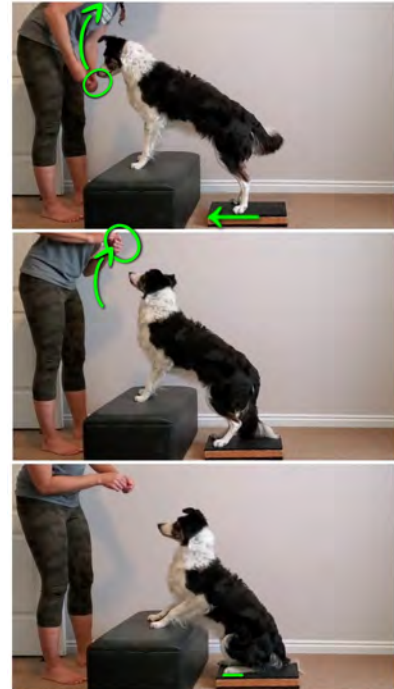
3. Standing Side Bend: Advanced » This is the same

Nose to Hip: 5 reps
Nose to Rear Foot: 5 reps
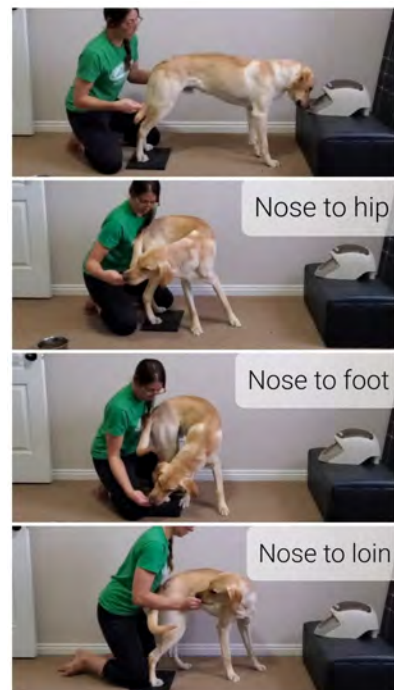Nose to Loin: 5 reps
Repeat on the second side.

Building to: 2 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When symmetry is displayed on both sides, in all 3 variations, and the dog is able to maintain rear end position without much assistance from the handler.

NOTE: Initially, the handler should assist in providing pelvic stability. The dog should assume responsibility for pelvic stability over time. Also, a nose to hand target can be substituted for the cookie at the hip, rear foot and loin if this

becomes too calorically expensive. Notice and note the difference between the sides.

Goal: Improves spinal mobility and stability through the whole length of the spine, and addresses right to left muscle imbalance (strength and / or flexibility).

4. [Weight Shifting: Beginner](#)

3 presses x 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat on other side
Release from equipment.
Repeat x 2

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is consistently and happily leaning back into the handler pressure, maintaining foot position, demonstrating a neutral or mostly neutral top line, and can meet max repetition x set requirements.

Note: Pay extra attention to the amount of pressure you're able to apply, and if there's a difference between the sides. Try and note on a scale of 1-10. 1 being almost no pressure. 10 being pressing as hard as you can.

Goal: Building value to the dog leaning back into the handler. Challenges hip and shoulder adductors/abductors and core muscles (including the psoas) on the side opposite handler pressure.

5. [Cavaletti Extension: Advanced](#)

8-10 poles
5 passes (down and back=1 pass)

Building to: 10 continuous passes as proficiency is demonstrated

Note:

1. Keep poles low (1" or lower, usually set in the highest hole with the cone resting on the side)

2. Starting measurement between poles 2x elbow height + 20%, increase by 1" until the dog is driving with maximum shoulder/hip extension without adding a stride between poles (double stepping)

Appropriate to progress: ONLY add more passes when 85% fluency is achieved. This includes focus away from the handler / independent execution, no double stepping, and entering the poles with an appropriate amount of speed control. Some ticking of the poles is acceptable as long as the cones are not displaced.

Goal: Stretch the stride to increase shoulder/ hip mobility and power. AROM.

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Notes:

Circuit 4c
3-4 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. [Mountain Climber Prep- Tutorial : Advanced](#)

5 reps on the right
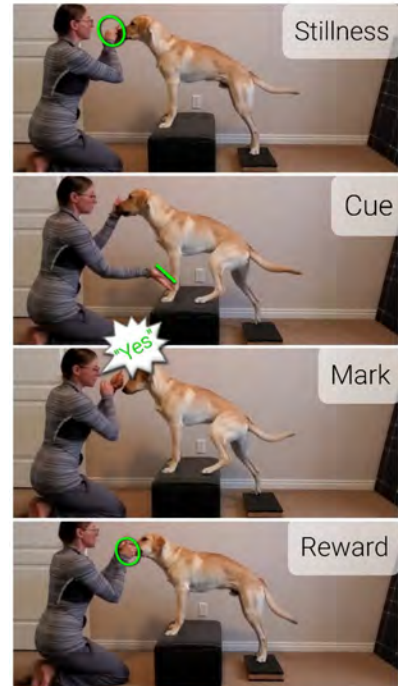Release from props
5 reps on the left

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain a vertical grounded leg hock, a level pelvis, and is easily targeting the front foot target with minimal handler assistance.

Spine angle should be between 30° and 45°.

Note: This exercise provides a surprising challenge to the middle glute on the standing leg. Be on the lookout for hip hiking or side bending/ lateral spine flexion. Be quick to rest if this compensation appears, as it changes the muscle recruitment pattern.

Goal: Introduces the rear foot to prop movement pattern, which targets the hip and core stabilizers mentioned above, and prepares the dog physically and mentally for the progression exercise.

2. [Tuck Sit- Kick Back Stand + MAX elevation: Expert](#)

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Note: Front foot target is tall enough that the forelimbs are approximately horizontal when in the Stand position. Front feet stay still. Rear feet move forward and backward, but since we have built understanding in the previous variations, it is not necessary for the dog to step off of the sitting platform.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute to maximum reps with fluency, and 85% accuracy.

Goal: Slow controlled movement targets the large muscles in the rear legs, while the front legs work to provide a balance assist. Functional core strength.

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3. Weight Shifting: Intermediate

Variation 1: Unstable surface under the **front** feet

a. 5 presses x 3 reps
(all on one side)
b. Repeat pressing on the other shoulder.
c. Release from equipment.
d. Repeat x 2 total

Variation 2: Unstable surface under the **rear** feet

a. 5 presses x 3 reps
(all on one side)
b. Repeat pressing on the other shoulder.
c. Release from equipment.
d. Repeat x 2 total

Building to:
15 presses on one side
15 presses on the other side
Stay on props
Repeat x 3

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is maintaining a neutral spine (no side bending), and resisting with an 8/10 pressure on both sides for max reps.

Note: Pay extra attention to the amount of pressure you're able to apply, and if there's a difference between the sides. Try and note on a scale of 1-10. 1 being almost no pressure. 10 being pressing as hard as you can.

Goal: Challenges hip and shoulder adductors/abductors (including the psoas). Functional core strength. Particularly good for rebalancing the iliopsoas.

4. Controlled Cone Wrap: Intermediate

5 single reps to the right
5 single reps to the left
Rest
Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to: Multi wrap (2 and then 3 wraps per rep)
3 repetitions of the multi wrap
Repeat going the other direction
Rest
Repeat for 3 sets total

Note: This is to be executed SLOWLY. For dogs trained to wrap a cone quickly, a reward may have to be used/tossed on the ground every ¼ wrap for a time until understanding is achieved. Then the reward can be offered every ½ wrap, and finally for a full wrap.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog's unique compensation pattern is replaced by correct movement / muscle recruitment for a triple wrap at maximum repetitions.

Goal: The intent of this exercise is to notice any asymmetry in the movement pattern, or the **individual pup's unique compensations**, and start to use neuromuscular reeducation to refine/correct the movement dysfunction. Notice if the dog is skipping steps or hopping, or executing a "teardrop shape" -vs- a round shape, and use the mark and reward to help build value to proper mechanics.

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5. Cavaletti Circles: Advanced

5 passes x 3 sets

Building to: 10 passes x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: ONLY add more passes when 85% fluency is achieved. This includes focus away from the handler / independent execution, no knocking poles or double stepping, and entering the poles with an appropriate amount of speed control.

Note:

     1. Spacing between the cones on the *inside* of the curve should be slightly less than the height of the withers (or 2x elbow height), and fan out evenly.

     2. The dog can then adjust their proximity to the cones, in order to find their striding/ideal spacing.

     3. Poles are 1inch or less off the ground as is typical with extension cavaletti.

Goal: Applies lateral/centrifugal forces in motion to build strength and endurance through the medial and lateral limb stabilizers through the PL and TL.

Notes:

Notes:

1. [Mountain Climber- Tutorial: Expert](#)

3 reps leading with the right leg
3 reps leading with the left leg
Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to: 5 reps on each side. Repeat for 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: when the dog is able to move through the whole sequence with control and smooth mechanics to maximum repetitions.

Note: This is a highly complex exercise that requires a lot of control on the dog's part. Review video frequently to ensure both rear feet are impacting the ground simultaneously during the hop back.

Goal: Total body strengthening. Targets the gluteals during the stepping up phase, the quadriceps and core during the Rock Back Sit phase, and the hamstrings in particular during the Kick Back Stand phase.

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2. [Tuck Sit- Kick Back Stand + MAX elevation: Expert](#) » This is the same

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Note: Front foot target is tall enough that the forelimbs are approximately horizontal when in the Stand position. Front feet stay still. Rear feet move forward and backward, but since we have built understanding in the previous variations, it is not necessary for the dog to step off of the sitting platform.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute to maximum reps with fluency, and 85% accuracy.

Goal: Slow controlled movement targets the large muscles in the rear legs, while the front legs work to provide a balance assist. Functional core strength.

---

3. Weight Shifting: Advanced

3 presses for 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat on other side
Release from equipment.
Repeat x3

Building to:
15 presses on one side
15 presses on the other side
Stay on props
Repeat x 3

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is maintaining a neutral spine (no side bending), and resisting with an 8/10 pressure on both sides for max reps.

Note: Be very mindful during the release of pressure. Because we are integrating 2 unstable surfaces, the dog is at an increased risk of falling upon release of handler pressure.

Goal: Significant stability challenge for the core, shoulder and hip, targeting both the diagonal and ipsilateral chains.

---

4. Controlled Cone Wrap: Advanced

Initially start with the progression detailed in the video working

5 single reps to the right
5 single reps to the left
Rest
Repeat x 3

Work each variation to fluency before progressing
1.   Single Wrap
2.   Double Wrap
3.   Triple Wrap
4.   Distance

Building to: Adding distance to the cone, one body length at a time, building to 25 ft.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is maintaining a tight turn at speed + maximum distance.

NOTE: Focus in on the planting of the outside TL. The placement of the limb/foot and neck should be close to the cone on all wraps, to create a round/circular dog path -vs- a teardrop shaped dog path. Marking the correct execution is critical.

Goal: Tight bend through the body, and intentional footwork.

This exercise is an accurate simulation of the kinds of forces that a dog is likely to meet "in real life". So testing the joint stabilizers and biomechanics here is a critical step in determining if these mechanics will hold up under real life conditions, or if more work is still needed.

This is also a sport specific progression intended to mimic the demands of an advanced weave pole entry, where the approach is from the pole 12 side, and the dog's path is parallel to the poles before having to wrap tightly into the poles, executing a 180° or 270° change in direction.

This also simulates the beginning of a flyball box turn, and/or other quick changes of direction needed in many sports.

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5. [Cavaletti Circles: Expert](#)

5 passes x 3 sets

Building to: 10 passes x 3 sets

Note: Tighten the turning radius, but always leave a place at least 2 body lengths to allow for delivery of reward.

Appropriate to progress: ONLY add more passes when 85% fluency is achieved. This includes focus away from the handler / independent execution, no knocking poles or double stepping, and entering the poles with an appropriate amount of speed control.

Goal: Applies lateral/centrifugal forces in motion to build strength and endurance through the medial and lateral limb stabilizers through the PL and TL.

Notes:

Final Maintenance ~ Shoulder + Core: Circuit 1
1-2 x a week, alternating with the other Intermediary maintenance Circuits

1a. Shoulder Strength & Stability Series: Advanced » OR «

Stillness: 10 seconds
Head Nods Down: 5
Weight Shifting:
3 presses for 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat presses on other side
Release from equipment

Repeat x3

Building to:

Stillness: 30 seconds
Head Nods Down: 15
Weight Shifting:
3 presses for 10 reps (all on one side)

One set ONLY

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to easily execute to maximum repetitions with 85% accuracy

Goal: Humerus horizontal or slightly below during the head nods down. Easily resisting handler pressure during the weight shifting portion.

» OR «

1b. [Kick Up Stand: Expert](#)

Increase the spine angle to 45° or slightly higher

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is executing with a feeling of lightness (this is demonstrated in the video) to max repetitions and 85% accuracy.

Note: Be mindful of how close the front and rear foot targets are to each other. If the two targets are too close together, the dog may not "fit", and the rear feet will run into the rear foot target before the exercise has a chance to fully "unfurl". If your dog is executing a "double hop" on the way up, this is likely the issue.

Goal: This is a sport-specific movement that simulates the forces needed during a jump landing. Targets shoulder strength and stability, as well as specifically targets the lumbar epaxials.

2. Fold Back Down-Split Unstable Surface: Expert

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

This variation represents a SIGNIFICANT jump in difficulty level, by including an unstable surface under the front and rear feet.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with 85% accuracy, limbs moving in tandem, neutral spine, elbows moving to horizontal but not below, while stabilizing the props.

Note: Initially, this exercise may need to be split into pieces with the unstable surface under the front feet only, then the rear feet only, and finally combining the two.

Goal: Expert level challenge to the core, and limb stabilizers.

3. Adducted Stand: Expert

Vertical Head Nods: 5 up, then 5 down. Release off pods.

Horizontal Head Nods: 5 right, then 5 left. Release off pods.

Head Nod Circles:
3 Clockwise
3 Counter Clockwise
Release off pods.

Repeat 3x

Building to:
Horizontal Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between right and left.

Vertical Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between up and down.

Head Nod Circles: 6 circles, alternating between Clockwise and Counter Clockwise.

Remaining on pods for the duration

One set ONLY

Goal: Targets the musculature through the medial shoulder, medial hip and core. Challenges endurance of the above mentioned muscles as well as the stabilizers through the feet, carpus, tarsus and stifle. This is VERY DIFFICULT please make sure to move the lure very slowly to avoid loss of balance.

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4. Ipsilateral Step Up: Advanced

Foot targets should be about ½ elbow height, not any higher.
5 reps on each side x 3 reps

Note: There are two speeds shown in this video.

> **Learning Speed:** A reward is delivered while the free legs are on the ground, as well as on the Sitting Platforms.
> **Fluent Speed:** Free legs touching down is marked, but the reward is delivered once all 4 feet return to the Sitting Platforms. This increase in speed transitions the exercise to a more plyometric exercise, where the working muscles stay engaged throughout.

Building to: Fluent Speed 10 reps on each side x 2 sets

This variation uses a separate front and rear foot target to help refine foot placement and improve top line alignment. Foot targets should be about carpus height, or slightly higher.

Appropriate to progress: When the free legs are mostly synchronized, and the dog is executing to max reps with 85% accuracy.

Goal: Mostly synchronized movement, and a neutral spine in the stand. Targets the muscles along the medial and lateral aspect of the shoulder and hip, including the psoas.

5. [Hop Sit Sprints: Expert](#)

5 reps in each variation
Repeat for 1 cycle through

A. Even tempo/Pause in the Sit and Stand: Even tempo works the TL and PL and the associated stabilizers evenly.

B. Shoulder focus/Pause in the Stand phase: Omitting the pause in the Sit phase

C. Hip and stifle focus/Pause in the sit: Omitting the pause in the Stand

Building to: 10 reps in each variation
Repeat for 1 cycle through

Building to: Ultimately building to 2 cycles through.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is executing at maximum repetitions with 85% accuracy.

Note: This is likely an anaerobic exercise. So change of behavior should be assumed to be fatigue, not disobedience. Be quick to rest when form degrades.

Goal: Plyometric challenge. Increases power and proprioceptive speed through the large muscles in the hip and shoulder. Improves core strength, and muscular endurance throughout.

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Final Maintenance ~ Hip + Core: Circuit 2
1-2 x a week, alternating with the other Intermediary maintenance Circuits

1. [Burpees: Expert](#)

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is executing max reps, with 85% accuracy.

Note: This is a very challenging exercise and care should be taken when increasing repetitions. Proper form needs to be maintained through the PL in its entirety.
Changes in alignment should be considered signs of fatigue not disobedience.

Goal: Significant functional core challenge, specifically targeting the epaxials, hypaxials and abdominals. The hip and shoulder stabilizers are also under a significant amount of load as they must stabilize against significant force as the dog transitions from a long lever to a short lever challenge.

2. Double-Ups: Expert +

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute to maximum repetitions while maintaining 85% accuracy.

Note: This is very challenging. Be quick to assume change of behavior is FATIGUE not DISOBEDIENCE. By this time a dog is at this level, they have understanding of the Power-UP movement pattern, and reward history built in. Form degradation means a short or long rest is necessary.

Goal: SLOW eccentric phase. Immediate direction change out of the sit position. FAST concentric phase. Handler motions should be used to cue direction change.

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3. Plank + Single Leg Lift -Compression/Extension: Expert
Rear feet elbow height.

Plank Compression Leg Lift
1. 3 leg lifts.
2. Return to sit.
3. Repeat x3
4. Other side

Plank Extension Leg Lift
1. Walk out to plank
2. 3 leg lifts.
3. Walk back in
4. Return to sit
5. Repeat x3
6. Other side

1 cycle through to begin.

Building to: 3 cycles through.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute pose and counterpose with fluidity and understanding, keeping the rear feet still 85% of the time, to maximum repetitions.

Note: ALWAYS release from the sit position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Goal: Maximum core challenge, and maximum loading through the iliopsoas, especially in the extended phase.

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4. Pivot/Step to Target: Expert

Starts at 2:08 of this video

Substituting unstable PawPods for the stable foot targets.

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

5. [Mountain Climber- Tutorial: Expert](#)

3 reps leading with the right leg
3 reps leading with the left leg

Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to: 5 reps on each side. Repeat for 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: when the dog is able to move through the whole sequence with control and smooth mechanics to maximum repetitions.

Note: This is a highly complex exercise that requires a lot of control on the dog's part. Review video frequently to ensure both rear feet are impacting the ground simultaneously during the hop back.

Goal: Total body strengthening. Targets the gluteals during the stepping up phase, the quadriceps and core during the Rock Back Sit phase, and the hamstrings in particular during the Kick Back Stand phase.

Notes:

Notes:

1. Cavaletti Circles: Expert

5 passes x 3 sets

Building to: 10 passes x 3 sets

Note: Tighten the turning radius, but always leave a place at least 2 body lengths to allow for delivery of reward.

Appropriate to progress: ONLY add more passes when 85% fluency is achieved. This includes focus away from the handler / independent execution, no knocking poles or double stepping, and entering the poles with an appropriate amount of speed control.

Goal: Applies lateral/centrifugal forces in motion to build strength and endurance through the medial and lateral limb stabilizers through the PL and TL.

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2. Deep Bow: Advanced

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to move to the end range without repositioning the front feet or removing one foot from the front foot target with 85% accuracy.

Note: Placement of reward is BELOW the height of the carpus,
That's what makes this a Deep Bow. Nose facing downward, as shown in this photo. Dog MUST start in an overstretched stand to allow space for the shoulder to extend and the scapula to rotate properly.

Goal: Continues to improve mobility through the shoulder, hip flexor and hamstring.

3. Standing Side Bend: Advanced

Nose to Hip: 5 reps
Nose to Rear Foot: 5 reps
Nose to Loin: 5 reps
Repeat on the second side.

Building to: 2 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When symmetry is displayed on both sides, in all 3 variations, and the dog is able to maintain rear end position without much assistance from the handler.

NOTE: Initially, the handler should assist in providing pelvic stability. The dog should assume responsibility for pelvic stability over time. Also, a nose to hand target can be substituted for the cookie at the hip, rear foot and loin if this becomes too calorically expensive. Notice and note the difference between the sides.

Goal: Improves spinal mobility and stability through the whole length of the spine, and addresses right to left muscle imbalance (strength and / or flexibility).

4. Wheelbarrow: Advanced

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is reaching full hip extension and maintaining a neutral spine (NO SPINE EXTENSION), and able to maintain alignment to maximum repetitions.

NOTE: ALWAYS release from the sit position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Goal: Targets the alternating diagonal muscle chains in the core while moving from short to long lever position.

Notes:

CANINE CONDITIONING COACH.COM

Other Programs Available

CCC Puppy Program
CCC Beginner Program
CCC Strong Dog Program
CCC Senior Dog Program
CCC Sloppy Sitters Mini-Program
CCC Post Spay Mini-Program
CCC Postnatal Mini-Program
CCC Post TPLO Mini Program

Senior Dog Program

Pre-Program Circuit

The **Senior Dog Program** is designed specifically to meet the needs of senior dogs, and accommodate their limitations, while building strength and stability. Often, changes in senior dogs are attributed to AGE, when the actual problem is DISUSE in some muscles and OVERUSE in others. The Senior Dog Program selects exercises to rebalance the senior body and improve biomechanics, making getting around easier, and improving quality of life.

The **Pre-Program Circuit** includes all the foundation level exercises the remaining Senior Dog Program builds upon. Depending on your pup's existing skill set and experience level, it may be wise to start here before moving into Circuit 1 of the Comprehensive Track.

Table of Contents

This is a **dynamic** table of contents. When clicked, the listings below will take you directly to that Page, Circuit or Exercise. Pretty nifty! Also, this document is formatted to allow you to search for a word or phrase. Use the shortcut "command + F" on a Mac or "control + F" on a PC to open the search box.

MindMap » A visual representation

This MindMap is a visual representation of the path you'll be taking through the circuit.

You have chosen to start your journey in the Senior Dog Program with the Pre-Program Circuit. This foundational circuit contains all the most important exercises the remaining Senior Dog Program builds upon. This initial circuit may take a bit longer to move through due to the inherent dog training component. But if we build a strong foundation, the remaining circuits will progress much more smoothly.
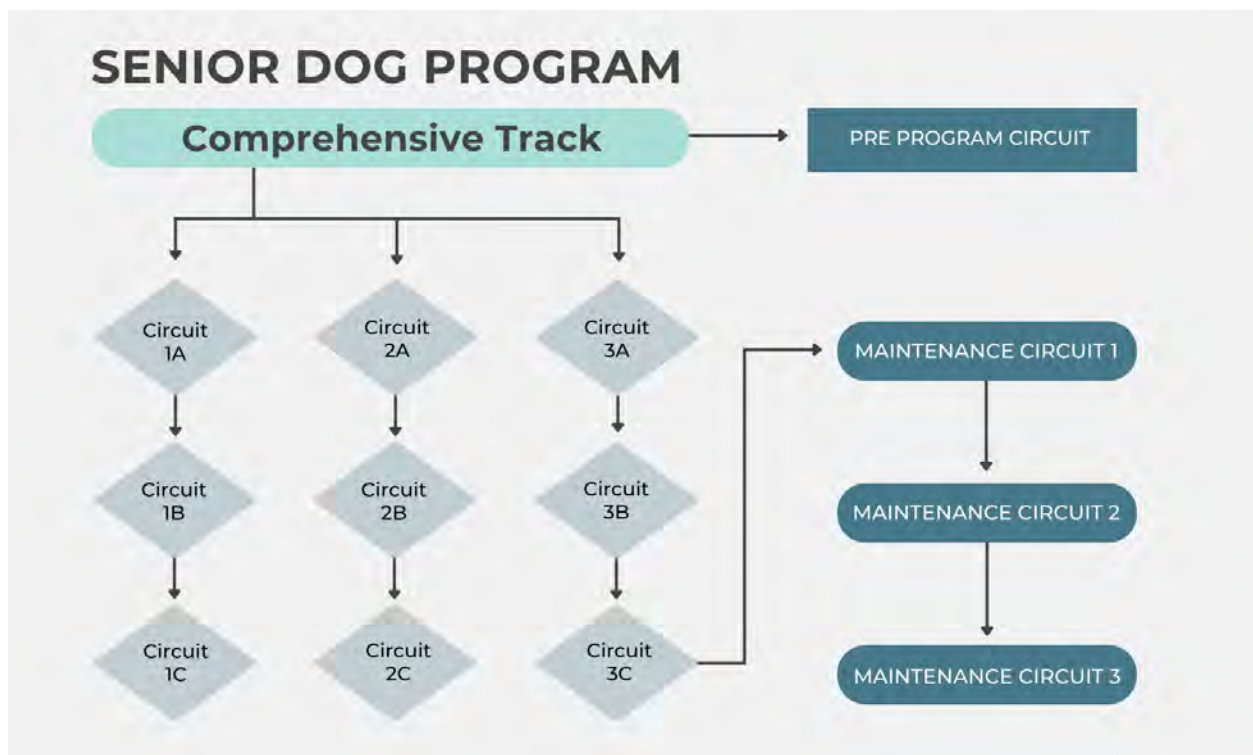
After completing the exercises in the Pre-Program Circuit, you and your pup will be well prepared to start on Circuit 1 of the Comprehensive Track.

Equipment needed for this program

➔ 2 Sitting Platforms

➔ Standing Platform

➔ 2 Rubber Feed Bowls or similarly sized stable targets

How to measure for Platforms

Here's a graphic to help you measure for your sitting and standing platforms if you don't already have those.

Sitting Platform: Width, is the measurement between the point of the hocks (shown in the top portion of the photo) + 1or 2 inches. Length is 1.5-2x the width.

Standing Platform: Width is the measurement between the point of the hocks + 1or 2 inches (the same as the Sitting Platform). Length is the measurement shown in the bottom portion of the attached photo, plus a little bit extra. For a medium-large size dog 3-4 inches extra in the front, and 3-4 inches extra in the rear is sufficient. Tiny dogs need less "extra space". Giant dogs need a bit more.

Foot Targets: Width is the measurement between the point of the hocks + 1or 2 inches (the same as the Sitting Platform). Length is about half the width measurement.

For more specific instructions, I wrote a 3 part blog series that covers the difference between the various types of platforms, how to measure for each, and how to build them yourself. You can see these on my website.

Progression Tips & Considerations

1. **CONDITIONING VARIABLES**
   When implementing a formal conditioning program, we're implementing movements that impact the body in a few different ways.
   a. Increasing the **strength** of a muscle concentrically and eccentrically, defined by the ability to move to end range while loaded and maintain 85% accuracy.
   b. Improving the **endurance** of the muscle, defined by the amount of repetitions or duration an exercise can be performed while still maintaining 85% proper alignment.
   c. Increasing the **flexibility** of a muscle.
   d. Improving **body awareness** of the dog.

2. **PROGRESSION**
   We progress an exercise in one of two ways...
   a. **Building strength & endurance:** Asking for more repetitions / longer duration before resting. (a through c above)
   b. **Challenging coordination:** Asking a dog for more precision movement, challenging posture, increasing balance demands and/or increasing the complexity of an exercise. (d above)

3. **FLUENCY**
   We measure the readiness of the dog to progress by assessing **fluency**, which is a measurement of how consistently the dog is able to correctly execute when meeting the challenge of maximum repetitions x sets (defined for each exercise).

   A dog is considered "fluent" and ready to progress within an exercise (adding repetitions or duration), or progress to the next exercise variation when…
   a. **Maximum repetitions** x sets has been reached
   b. **85% accuracy** is maintained throughout
   c. **Arousal level is maintained** (no significant increase or decrease in arousal)

4. **TRAIN THE DOG IN FRONT OF YOU**
   Some dogs will need many sessions of a specific exercise to meet the required strength/flexibility or coordination benchmarks before progressing to the next level. In other exercises, only one or two sessions may be necessary before progressing. Recording, and assessing the video of your exercise protocol can reveal valuable information, and help you determine when it is appropriate to progress.

5. HOW TO BUILD REPETITIONS

A typical conservative strength / endurance progression schedule would be...

5 reps x 3 sets
7 reps, 7 reps, 5 reps
10 reps, 7 reps, 7 reps
10 reps, 10 reps, 7 reps
10 reps x 3 sets

So when building reps this can be a helpful guide. There's no downside to progressing conservatively, aside from the fact that it takes more time. Conversely, progressing too quickly can lead to frustration, a loss of precision, and incorrect muscle recruitment.

NOTE: Change in arousal level, increase or decrease, is the first indicator of mental and/or physical fatigue. Taking a short break (30 seconds to 1 min) with a cookie scatter, or down-stay can help manage arousal levels.

6. MANAGING CIRCUITS

Not all exercises within a circuit will be progressed at the same time. But as a general guide, I try not to straddle more than 2 circuits at the same time.

a. **Example:** If my dog has reached fluency in 3 out of 4 exercises in Circuit 1, I would progress to Circuit 2, and also continue to implement the slow to develop exercise from Circuit 1. But I WOULD NOT progress to the exercises in Circuit 3 until the exercise from Circuit 1 was fluent.

b. If we progress only the skills the dog is naturally good at, and neglect the skills they struggle with, we will end up running into a **"bottleneck"** as the circuits progress. This could be a skills bottleneck, strength/endurance bottleneck or a flexibility bottleneck. So the exercises the dog struggles with the most are actually the most important to focus on!

c. **NOTE:** Puppies with growing bodies may need to return to previous progressions of an exercise when experiencing growth spurts. Past understanding of where their body parts are in space may not be applicable when the legs are suddenly several inches longer!! Patience pays off during these growing times!

7. REMEMBER

Static **before** Dynamic
Isolated **before** Integrated
Stable **before** Unstable
Form **drives** Function

Senior Specific Guidelines

1. **Arousal**
   Increased arousal and overarousal can result as much from a mental challenge as from a physical challenge… So we want to be on the lookout for increasing or decreasing arousal levels when implementing conditioning exercises. Brains can't think or learn very well when overly taxed… either by complexity of an exercise (having to hold many thoughts in the mind at once) or physical challenge, fatigue and adrenaline. Both situations can result in an adrenalized state, where learning doesn't happen well. Some signs of overarousal are… Moving quickly, offering other behaviors, vocalization, taking the cookie hard, general feeling of frantic movement, etc. Conversely, underarousal can manifest as looking away, leaving, freezing/standing still, offering easier movements, etc. If we are seeing any of these things, taking a short break (30 sec to 1 min) can be helpful.

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   Moving slowly requires significantly more effort in the joint stabilizers than moving quickly, and helps the dog to break their "habitual movement patterns" and implement correct movement patterns instead. Slow movement, particularly in the eccentric phase (where the dog is resisting gravity) can help improve flexibility without compromising stability.

3. **Brain Training**
   Most dogs just starting out on their conditioning adventure are dealing with learned compensatory movement patterns that are automatic. Along with moving slowly, we will be using props to "force" proper alignment, so the dog learns to move differently. This gives us a chance to reinforce/build value to proper mechanics, and increases the likelihood these new mechanics will be implemented in the real world. Muscles that fire together wire together… so this process of conditioning is just as much about training the brain as it is the body.

4. **Avoid Lumbar Spine Extension**
   Lumbar spine extension is contraindicated for many common issues in canines, it's something we want to be on the lookout for, and avoid as much as possible. If you are seeing any spine extension in your pup, it may mean your placement of reward is too high, or your prop set up needs adjusting.

   For more on what spine extension looks like, and other helpful anatomical terminology, please see this Canine Anatomy: Glossary of Terms I wrote a blog post about.

5. Spine Angle 45° or lower

With dogs not competing in sports, we want to be mindful of loading into the rear end/raising the height of the front end to avoid overloading the lumbar spine and hips. There may be some exercises that demonstrate a spine angle higher than 45°. In those instances, we may want to adjust the prop set up to keep the spine at 45° or lower to reduce the challenge level. This is especially important for long backed dogs, or dogs with degenerative changes in the spine, hips, stifle or rear toes.

6. Exit Props Carefully

When delivering a reward, we want to help your pup exit the props gently. In some of the videos I might toss a cookie to reset. I feel confident doing that because I know my dogs are controlled. That's not the case in all situations. We don't want any slipping or sliding to an abrupt stop when following a thrown cookie. If control is still being learned, I will often toss the cookie closer to my dogs to reduce speed, and then toss another to help them move into position to set up for the next repetition.

7. What's Rewarded will be Repeated

To change default posture, or engrained habitual mechanics we need to reward new mechanics. In the beginning, that will likely mean trying to "exaggerate" these new mechanics through placement of reward, prop setup, etc. Over time, we should start to see these new mechanics be offered automatically, because they have become a consistent way to receive a reward. BUT this needs to be rewarded heavily to help create the lightbulb moment for the dog.

8. Progress not Perfection

It can be challenging to implement new movement mechanics, and target underutilized muscles. This is especially true when we are dealing with a chronic issue or injury. Like learning to use your non-dominant hand to perform a fine motor skill, the first attempt at a skill is very likely to be clumsy, and inaccurate. REWARD ANYWAY! Rewarding the attempt will communicate to the dog that they are on the right track. It's a trap to hold out for perfection.

1. Front Foot Target: Foundation

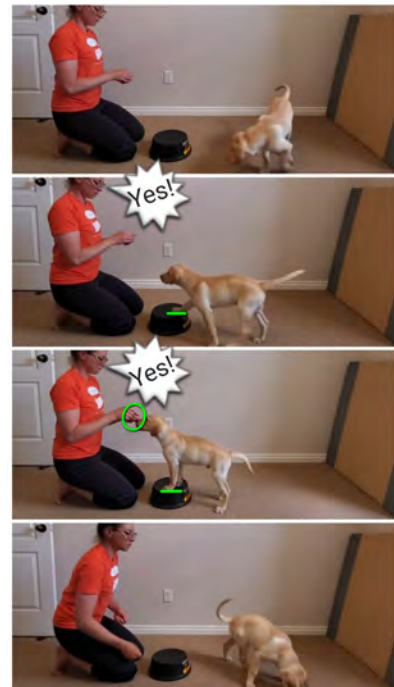0:20 of this video

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: An enthusiastic front foot target. We are looking for the dog to demonstrate understanding more than executing a high level of repetitions.

Appropriate to progress: Stay with this exercise until the dog is able to execute happily 10/10 times over 2 sets..

Note: Skimping on this step will likely lead to difficulty in the future. Notice how placement of the reset cookie, placement of reward and handler position influence the dog and increase the likelihood of success.

Goal: Front feet on target. Alignment and posture adjustments will come later as the exercises progress.

2. Rear Foot Targeting: Foundation

A. Walking forward method 0:44 of this video (left column)

5 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is easily / consistently navigating the prop, and stopping with the front feet off the target and rear feet on.

B. Transitioning to walking backward method 1:22 of this video (right column)

1-2 steps backward
5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 3-4 steps backward 5 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: when the dog is happily and consistently stepping back onto the target without deviating or bending the spine

Goal: Building value to automatically stepping backward/reaching backward with the rear feet.

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3. <u>Front Foot Target to Elevated Perch: Foundation</u>

2:18 of this video

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: An enthusiastic front foot target. We are looking for the dog to demonstrate understanding more than executing a high level of repetitions.

Appropriate to progress: Stay with this exercise until the dog is able to execute happily 10/10 times.

Front foot target should be slightly less than elbow height.

Note: Skimping on this step will likely lead to difficulty in the future. Notice how placement of the reset cookie, placement of reward and handler position influence the dog and increase the likelihood of success.

Goal: This exercise lays the foundation for many exercises to follow. Teaches body awareness and targeting skills. Shifts weight into rear by elevating the front feet.

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4. <u>Pivot: Foundation</u>

2:48 of this video

5 passes (Stepping to the right approx. 3 steps and back =1 pass)

Reward for each step.

Building to: 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily moving in both directions and responding to minimal / not exaggerated handler motion.

Note: Front feet elevated about ½ elbow height

Goal: Teaches rear end awareness, and builds value for each individual step to prevent rushing. Strengthens the gluteals, hamstrings and quadriceps by raising the height of the front feet and shifting weight into the rear. Sidestepping also strengthens the outer hip and inner thigh muscles (abductors and adductors).

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5. Posture Sit: Beginner

30 seconds - 1 min

Repeat x 3

Building to: 1 set for 3 min straight

Appropriate to progress: When your pup is able to maintain proper posture for 3 min

Goal: We're looking for proper posture through the spine, and proper alignment through the rear legs. If 30 seconds is too long for your pup to maintain proper alignment OR continue to adjust into correct alignment (as detailed in the video) you may need sets shorter than 30 seconds. Functional core challenge. Improves posture. Corrects a sloppy Sit. Fosters neuromuscular re-education. Appropriate for pups of all ages.

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CANINE CONDITIONING COACH.COM

Other Programs Available

CCC Puppy Program
CCC Beginner Program
CCC Strong Dog Program
CCC Sport Dog Program
CCC Sloppy Sitters Mini-Program
CCC Post Spay Mini-Program
CCC Postnatal Mini-Program
CCC Post TPLO Mini Program

Senior Dog Program

Comprehensive Track » All Circuits

The **Senior Dog Program** is designed specifically to meet the needs of senior dogs, and accommodate their limitations, while building strength and stability. Often, changes in senior dogs are attributed to AGE, when the actual problem is DISUSE in some muscles and OVERUSE in others. The Senior Dog Program selects exercises to rebalance the senior body and improve biomechanics, making getting around easier, and improving quality of life.

This **Comprehensive Track** is designed using a progressive approach, where the exercises in each circuit builds on the exercises in the previous circuit. This minimizes the time spent in the "dog training phase" of each exercise. The 9 circuit progression is split into 3 "chunks" to make things simpler, and more consistent. By the end of this 9 circuit progression, you will be left with 3 maintenance circuits to implement on an ongoing basis.

Table of Contents

This is a **dynamic** table of contents. When clicked, the listings below will take you directly to that Page, Circuit or Exercise. Pretty nifty! Also, this document is formatted to allow you to search for a word or phrase. Use the shortcut "command + F" on a Mac or "control + F" on a PC to open the search box.

MindMap » A visual representation

This MindMap is a visual representation of the path you'll be taking through the circuit.

You will begin with Circuit 1A and work those exercises 2-3x a week until reaching fluency. Then, you'll move on to Circuit 1B, working those exercises to fluency and finally Circuit 1C. This is shown in the graphic below.

All exercises in Circuit 1 build directly on each other. The same is true for the exercises in Circuit 2 as well as Circuit 3..
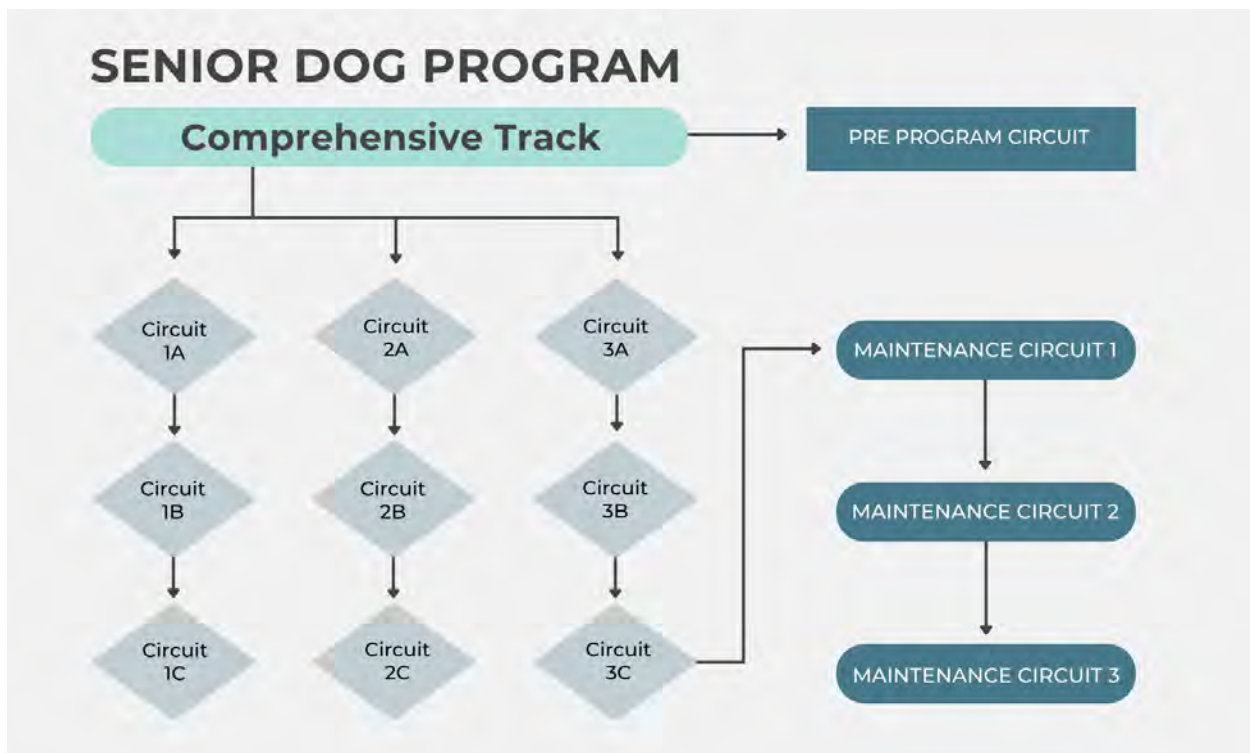
After completing Circuits 1A-C, you will move onto Circuit 2A, which contains a brand new set of exercises to work through. And so forth.

After completing all the exercises in Circuit 3A-C, you can implement the Maintenance Circuits, which contain the apex exercises you worked toward in the previous circuits. You can alternate between these Maintenance Circuits implementing each circuit 1-2x a week on an ongoing basis.

Equipment needed for this program

- ➔ 2-4 Sitting Platforms
- ➔ Standing Platform
- ➔ Plyo Box, Klimb or other stable elevated surface (about the height of the point of the shoulder)
- ➔ 2 Rubber feed bowls or similar stable foot targets
- ➔ 4 PawPods (TotoFit, Flexiness or BOSU are my preferred brands)
- ➔ 1 Propel Air Platform, 1 Fitbone or 1 disc
- ➔ 1 low inflatable (wedge, disc, foam pad, etc)
- ➔ 2 Traffic cones, or other similar pylons
- ➔ Cato Board, wobble board or large square platform
- ➔ Manners Minder / Treat n Train, or second handler to deliver reward (one exercise)
- ➔ 6+ pole cavaletti set (Optional but recommended)

How to measure for Platforms

Here's a graphic to help you measure for your sitting and standing platforms if you don't already have those.

Sitting Platform: Width, is the measurement between the point of the hocks (shown in the top portion of the photo) + 1or 2 inches. Length is 1.5-2x the width.

Standing Platform: Width is the measurement between the point of the hocks + 1or 2 inches (the same as the Sitting Platform). Length is the measurement shown in the bottom portion of the attached photo, plus a little bit extra. For a medium-large size dog 3-4 inches extra in the front, and 3-4 inches extra in the rear is sufficient. Tiny dogs need less "extra space". Giant dogs need a bit more.

Foot Targets: Width is the measurement between the point of the hocks + 1or 2 inches (the same as the Sitting Platform). Length is about half the width measurement.

For more specific instructions, I wrote a 3 part blog series that covers the difference between the various types of platforms, how to measure for each, and how to build them yourself. You can see these on my website.

Progression Tips & Considerations

1. When implementing a formal conditioning program, we're implementing movements that impact the body in a few different ways.
   a. Increasing the **strength** of a muscle concentrically and eccentrically, defined by the ability to move to end range while loaded and maintain 85% accuracy.
   b. Improving the **endurance** of the muscle, defined by the amount of repetitions or duration an exercise can be performed while still maintaining 85% proper alignment.
   c. Increasing the **flexibility** of a muscle.
   d. Improving **body awareness** of the dog.

2. We progress an exercise in one of two ways...
   a. **Building strength & endurance:** Asking for more repetitions / longer duration before resting. (a through c above)
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So when building reps this can be a helpful guide. There's no downside to progressing conservatively, aside from the fact that it takes more time. Conversely, progressing too quickly can lead to frustration, a loss of precision, and incorrect muscle recruitment.

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It can be challenging to implement new movement mechanics, and target underutilized muscles. This is especially true when we are dealing with a chronic issue or injury. Like learning to use your non-dominant hand to perform a fine motor skill, the first attempt at a skill is very likely to be clumsy, and inaccurate. REWARD ANYWAY! Rewarding the attempt will communicate to the dog that they are on the right track. It's a trap to hold out for perfection.

1. Square Stand: Foundation

5 reps x 2 sets

Initial goal: 3 seconds before releasing

Ultimate goal: 5 seconds before releasing
Building to: 5 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily targeting the front and rear foot targets, and adjusting into position automatically, with minimal reluctance.

Note: Ideal alignment has the forelimbs and hocks vertically aligned, but this posture can be too challenging right in the beginning. It's ok to shorten the space between the front foot target and rear foot target slightly in the very beginning during the learning phase. This should be adjusted relatively quickly in grown dogs.

Goal: Introduces the concept of front foot targeting plus rear foot targeting simultaneously. Begins to strengthen the postural muscles (stabilizers) and core in neutral alignment to promote proper alignment.

## 2. Pivot + Step Up: Beginner

Front foot target about elbow height. Rear foot target ½ hock height.
5 passes (moving to one side and back = 1 pass)

Repeat x 1

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets with 85% accuracy, is able to precisely target, lift onto, and lower off the rear foot targets without stumbling, hopping or losing balance.
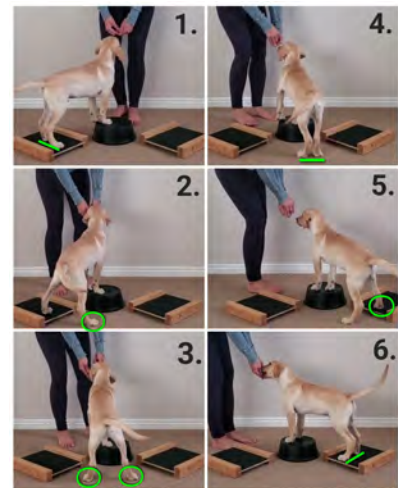
Note: Reward for every step.This exercise is not about rushing to get to the next target, but about building value to each individual step to improve coordination.

Goal: Strengthens hip abductors and adductors. Improves rear end awareness, by encouraging slow movement. Builds value to slow precise movement.
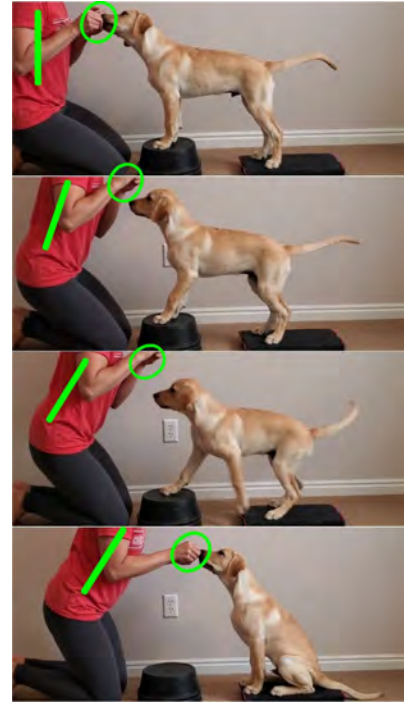
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3. Rock Back Sit-Push Forward Stand: Beginner

5 reps x 2 Sets

Building to: 5 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is offering the behavior easily, hitting max reps, and keeping rear feet staying still with 85% accuracy.

Note: The correct movement pattern during the transition from stand to sit is stifle flexing during the transition to sit, and fully flexed before the second front foot comes onto the sitting platform. Notice if your dog is bringing both front feet down and THEN moving into the sit position

Goal: Building value to keeping rear feet still, while transitioning to the stand.

---

4. Ipsilateral Foot Target/Side Step to Target: Foundation

5 reps on each side
Repeat x 3

Building to: 3-4 side steps moving into the ipsilateral foot target (demonstrated in the video)

5 reps on each side
Repeat for 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily, and independently offering ipsilateral feet simultaneously

Note: Any platform (or 2 platforms) propped against the wall can work for this. A wobble board doesn't have to be used.

In the beginning, don't worry about spinal alignment too much… that will come with the next progression. For now, we just want to build fluency and understanding to the ipsilateral foot target.

Goal: Improves coordination through the ipsilateral chains (connecting same side hip to same side shoulder). Strengthens the hip and shoulder abductor.

---

5. [Rear Foot to Hand Target (Part 1): Foundation](#)

5 reps in one direction
5 reps in the other direction

Building to: 5 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog demonstrates fluency, defined by a clear understanding of offering the rear foot to leg/obstacle.

Note: In the beginning focus on the dog training component (having the dog understand the intent of the movement) -vs- pushing for a specific number of repetitions.

Goal: This is a body awareness exercise that lays the foundation for an entire progression of exercises. You can progress to Part 2 as soon as understanding is achieved.

Note: If your dog is significantly larger/ longer than your leg, you can substitute an angled or flat Standing Platform to act as a leg extension.

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1. Teaching Stillness: Beginner

5 reps x 3 sets

Literally begin with asking for a single second only.

Reward BEFORE the dog moves. It is critical to build reward history without overasking. If your dog does happen to move, that means you overasked. No biggie! Just toss a reset cookie and begin again
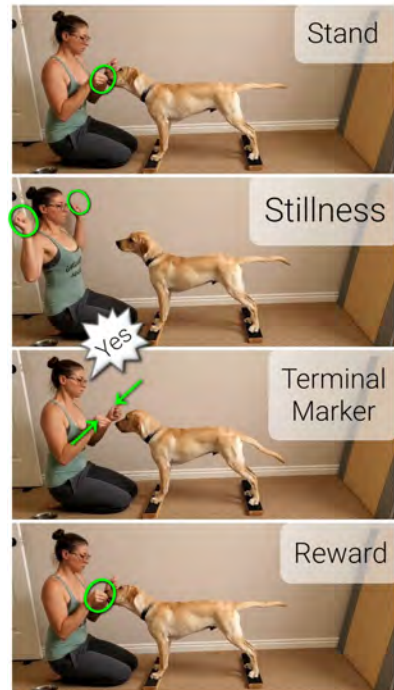
Building to: 5 seconds one second at a time. Stick with max 5 seconds for the first several sessions until fluency is achieved.

Increase the duration 1-2 seconds at a time

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain stillness for 20 seconds x 3 sets. Release from props between sets

Note: When progressing this exercise... Either ask for duration OR a new piece of equipment OR a new body position. And when making something harder, something else has to be made easier.

Goal: Building value to stillness, and teaching the dog that standing still is a rewarding behavior that PAYS! Prioritize stillness over duration.

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2. Pivot + Step Up: Intermediate

Front foot target about elbow height. Height of the rear foot target increased to ¾ hock height.

5 Passes
(Dog moving to the right and back to the left = 1 pass)
1 set only

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets, is able to precisely target, lift onto, and lower off the rear foot targets without stumbling, or losing balance.

Goal: Slow controlled movement. Precise targeting with the rear feet. When stepping onto and off of the rear foot target, we are looking for vertical movement more than horizontal movement.

3. Rock Back Sit-Push Forward Stand: Intermediate

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog reaches 85% accuracy at maximum reps, and is moving with both front feet simultaneously during the concentric phase (transition from sit to stand).

Note: Front foot target set at shoulder height (point of the shoulder, not the withers). The concentric phase (transition from sit to stand) will always
"come together" and become more fluent first. It will take time for your pup to control the eccentric phase (slow resisting of gravity in the transition from stand to sit).

Goal: Transitioning from the front feet stepping up onto the front foot target to fully loading into the rear, with front feet moving simultaneously during the concentric phase (transition from sit to stand). Increases strength through the large muscles in the pelvic limb (PL), including the quadriceps, hamstrings, and gluteals.
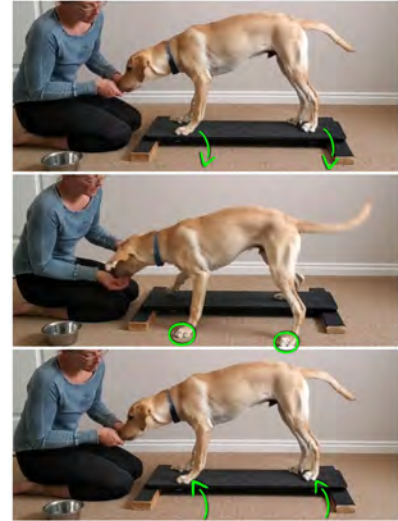
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4. Ipsilateral Step Up: Beginner

5 reps on each side x 2 sets

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: when the dog becomes fluent, as defined by stepping off the platform and onto the platform with ipsilateral legs synchronized, with 85% accuracy... so 4 out of 5x or better.

Note: This is the baseline movement that many exercises are built upon. Taking the time to ensure fluency/understanding will pay off in the long term.

Goal: Teaching synchronized movement through ipsilateral legs. Targets the muscles along the medial aspect of the shoulder and hip on the grounded legs, including the psoas. Keeping these muscles strong is an important component in avoiding MSI.

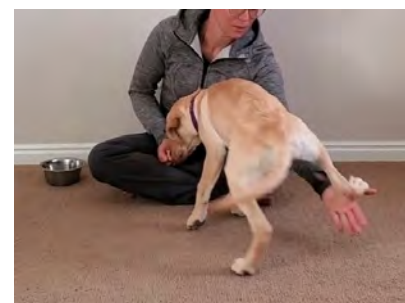5. Rear Foot to Hand Target (Part 2): Beginner

5 reps to the right
5 reps to the left
Repeat x 2

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog demonstrates fluency, and offers the rear foot to the smaller target of the hand vs the larger target of the leg or platform. And is able to execute to max reps with 85% accuracy.

Note: In the beginning focus on the dog training component -vs- pushing for a specific number of repetitions. It is very common for dogs to be "handed" the same way humans are

handed. So it's expected that one side will be "better". We want to build value to the non-dominant side to make up for this coordination deficit.

Goal: This is a body awareness exercise that lays the foundation for an entire progression of exercises. We're looking for an enthusiastic hit with the rear foot.

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1. Weight Shifting: Beginner

3 presses x 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat on other side
Release from equipment.
Repeat x 2

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is consistently and happily leaning back into the handler pressure, maintaining foot position, demonstrating a neutral or mostly neutral top line, and can meet max repetition x set requirements.

Note: Pay extra attention to the amount of pressure you're able to apply, and if there's a difference between the sides. Try and note on a scale of 1-10. 1 being almost no pressure. 10 being pressing as hard as you can.

Goal: Building value to the dog leaning back into the handler. Challenges hip and shoulder adductors/abductors and core muscles (including the psoas) on the side opposite handler pressure.

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2. Pistol Squats: Advanced

5 reps to the right
5 reps to the left
Release from equipment
Repeat x 3

Building to:
10 reps to the right
10 reps to the left
Release from equipment
Repeat x 3

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog is slowly lowering down with a mainly vertical movement vs stepping to the side with a lot of abduction. Free leg should land close to the rear foot target

Note: Spine angle about 45°. Rear foot target about ¾ hock height. Front foot target does not have to be unstable. Use whatever prop achieves the 45° spine angle. A lower front foot target can be used initially if needed to reduce the challenge.

Goal: Slow / controlled movement during the lowering phase is the goal. Strengthens the gluteals, psoas and core stabilizers in a more neutral hip alignment (which is muscularly more challenging than abduction/adduction).

---

3. Power Up Prep: Advanced

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3

Appropriate to Progress: When both front feet are moving simultaneously during the transition from Sit to Stand (concentric phase), and the transition from Stand to Sit (eccentric phase) is slow and controlled in 50% of the repetitions. .

Note: Using placement of reward, vertically above the dog's head can help encourage the dog to lower slowly to the sit.
(Peanut Butter spoon may be helpful). With a Senior Dog, you always have the option to stick with the previous variation if this variation seems too challenging.

Goal: Both front feet moving in tandem during the concentric phase. Starting to see some slow reps in the transition from stand to sit in the eccentric phase. Functional core challenge. Prepares for the plyometric progression.

4. Ipsilateral Step Up: Intermediate

5 reps on each side x 3 reps

Note: There are two speeds shown in this video.

> **Learning Speed:** A reward is delivered while the free legs are on the ground, as well as on the Sitting Platforms.
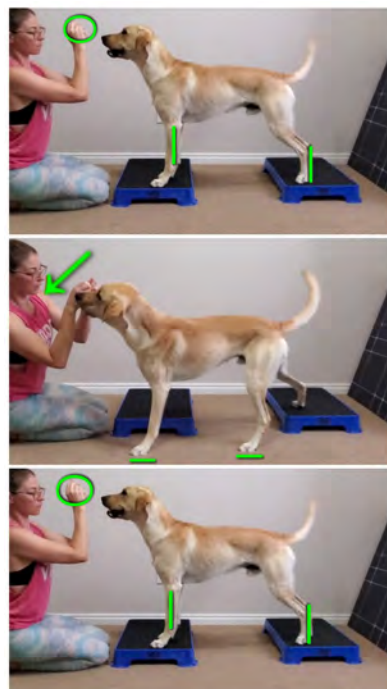>
> **Fluent Speed:** Free legs touching down is marked, but the reward is delivered once all 4 feet return to the Sitting Platforms. This increase in speed transitions the exercise to a more plyometric exercise, where the working muscles stay engaged throughout.

Building to: Fluent Speed 10 reps on each side x 2 sets

This variation uses a separate front and rear foot target to help refine foot placement and improve top line alignment. Foot targets should be about carpus height, or slightly higher.

Appropriate to progress: When the free legs are mostly synchronized, and the dog is executing to max reps with 85% accuracy.

Goal: Mostly synchronized movement, and a neutral spine in the stand. Targets the muscles along the medial and lateral aspect of the shoulder and hip, including the psoas.

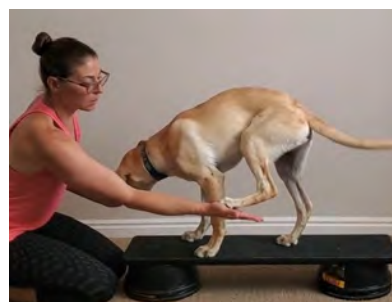### 5. Rear Foot to Hand Target (Part 3): Beginner

5 reps on the right
5 reps on the left

Repeat x 2

Building to: 4 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog demonstrates fluency, defined by a clear understanding of offering the rear foot to hand while maintaining position on the standing platform.

Note: Don't worry too much about the spine flexion that accompanies this exercise. We will correct for that in the progression. Also, if your dog is much larger than your arm's reach, feel free to use a target stick or kitchen spatula to "extend your arm".

Goal: Minimize / eliminate any side stepping that has been built into the rear foot to hand target in the previous variations.

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Senior Dog » Circuit 2a
2-4 x a week, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Backing Up: Beginner

5 reps x 3 sets at 1-3 body lengths

Building to: 3 reps 20-30 feet depending on the size of the dog. Small dogs have a goal closer to 20ft. Large dogs closer to 30ft.

Note: Start with 1-2 body lengths. If the dog is managing well, increase distance by 1-2 body lengths each session.

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog is backing up straight, keeping head up, and stepping/not hopping. Then it is appropriate to increase distance. When the dog is executing for 20-30ft x 3 with 85% accuracy, they can safely progress to the next exercise.

Goal: Definitely focus on not hopping or overreaching with the rear feet. Improves mechanics through the PL. Strengthens gluteals, hamstrings and hip flexors and helps to integrate proper mechanics back into the gait.
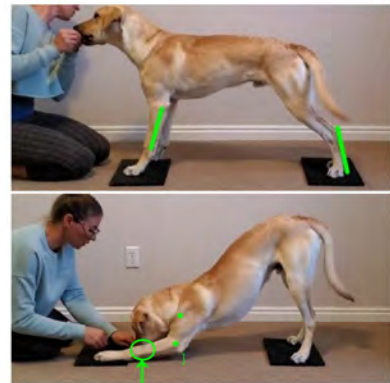
2. Bow Tutorial: Beginner

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is not confusing the Bow motion with the Fold Back Down, and is keeping all 4 feet still with 85% accuracy.

Note: Dog MUST start in a slightly overstretched stand to allow space for the shoulder to extend and the scapula to rotate properly. So props should be placed such that they encourage this.

Goal: Improves scapular mobility, and shoulder extension. Mobilizes and strengthens (eccentrically) the musculature on the caudal aspect of the shoulder and improves flexibility through the hamstring (AROM).

3. [Head Nods: Beginner](#)

Up: 3
Down: 3
Right: 3
Left: 3

Repeat for 1 set only

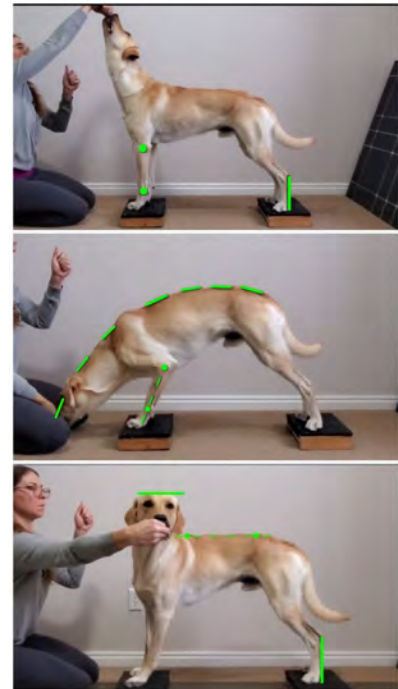**Building to:** 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to keep all 4 feet still, and move to the end range, without repositioning or losing balance. And is able to achieve 85% precision for 3 sets total.

Note: Because we are asking for maximum range of motion, any change in behavior or arousal should be seen as fatigue not disobedience. Resting off the props for 30 seconds to 1 min is usually sufficient.

Lastly, not all dogs will have the available range demonstrated in the video, age, breed, confidence, etc will all play a part in how far the individual pup can move. Working within your pup's available range, and deepening slowly (if appropriate) is important.

Goal: Tests the dog's ability to keep feet still while moving the head / neck. Highlights coordination deficit between the sides. Strengthens the hip and shoulder stabilizers against micro movements, and improves mobility through the neck and shoulder.

4. Sit-Walk Forward Down: Beginner
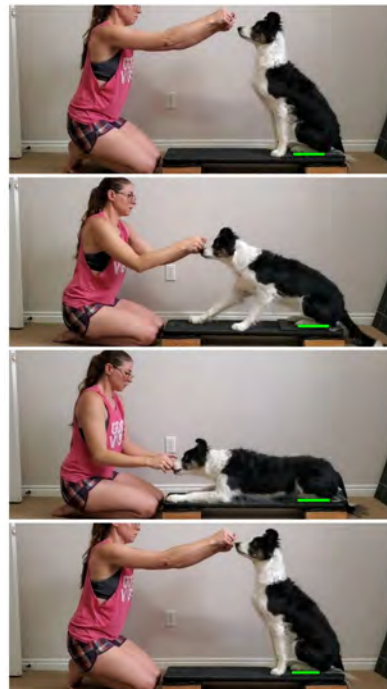
5 reps x 2 sets

Building to:
Growing dogs: 5 reps x3 sets
Grown dogs: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When a pup is through their big growth spurt, or when the toes / hocks / stifle are maintained in neutral alignment/pointed straight ahead throughout, and is able to execute max reps with 85% fluency.

Note: This exercise acts like training wheels (or a strider bike), allowing the dog to learn a less complicated movement with similar mechanics. Once those mechanics are ingrained, the dog is much more likely to be able to coordinate the different parts, and potentially move forward into a Fold Back Down.

Goal: Targets the hip and stifle stabilizers, and improves mobility through the above mentioned joints.

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5. Cone Wrap/ Intro to Cavaletti (Part 1): Foundation

Phase 1: Priming
Lure creates the movement.
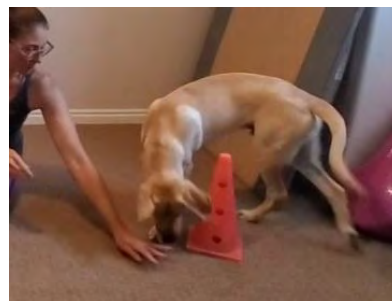3 repetitions in each direction.

Repeat 3x.

Appropriate to progress: Stay with phase 1 until the dog is reliably moving around the cone and not "backing out" (shown at 0:44)

Phase 2: Choosing
The option to choose is introduced.
3 repetitions in each direction.

Repeat 3x.

Appropriate to progress: Stay with phase 2 until the dog is reliably moving around the cone, and not cutting to the inside (an example of cutting to the inside is 2:34). This is supported by placement of reward. If the dog cuts to the inside of the cone consistently, this indicates a lack of understanding, and phase 1 should be revisited.

Phase 3: Distance
In this phase we add distance and switch from luring to rewarding.
3 repetitions in each direction.

Repeat 3x

Appropriate to progress: Stay with phase 3 until the dog is happily moving away from the handler.

This can be VERY hard for some dogs. Resist the urge to help by getting closer to the cone. Placement of reward + reward history should be enough. If the dog is struggling, more time at phase 2 is likely needed.

Phase 4: Proofing
In this phase we change the setup to more closely resemble what we need for the progression.

3 repetitions in each direction.

Repeat 3x

Appropriate to progress: Stay with phase 4 until the dog is happily moving away from the handler and confident enough in the dog's focus skills to move outside or to a large space

Note: The dog should always turn toward the handler to keep things consistent. Notice if your pup is reluctant to turn in one direction. This indicates an issue, and further diagnostics might be needed.

Goal: Independent execution, including focusing on the cone/not looking at the handler's hands, moving away from the handler and committing to the wrap before turning back or looking for the reward.

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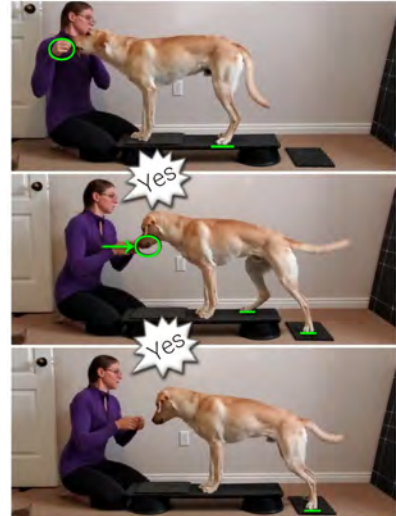
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1. Stepping Back: Beginner

5 reps

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is stepping backward, and off of the platform with confidence, and 85% of the repetitions are slow and straight.

Note: Make sure the platform is approximately ½ hock height, maybe a little more. Too low, and the dog won't be able to clearly differentiate when they're *on* the platform -vs- *off* the platform. Too high and the exercise will be too challenging.

Goal: Slow, intentional stepps, moving forward and back in a straight line. Minimal loss of balance. Prepares the body for more difficult variations.
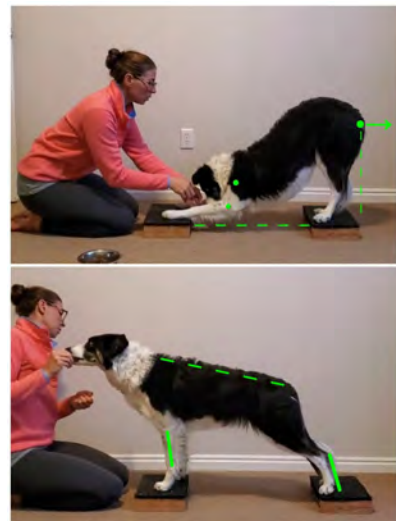

2. Bow-Stretch: Intermediate

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog is able to execute with proper form, while keeping all 4 feet still with 85% accuracy. This Includes shoulder behind the elbow and ischial tuberosity behind the rear foot during the bow phase and a neutral spine while extending the hip during the stretch phase.

Note: Dog MUST start in a slightly overstretched stand to allow space for the shoulder to extend and the scapula to rotate properly. This is detailed in the video

Goal: Improves scapular mobility, shoulder extension and hamstring mobility during the bow phase. Challenges the core and hip flexors (including the iliopsoas) during the stretch phase.

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3. Weight Shifting: Beginner

3 presses x 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat on other side
Release from equipment.
Repeat x 2

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is consistently and happily leaning back into the handler pressure, maintaining foot position, demonstrating a neutral or mostly neutral top line, and can meet max repetition x set requirements.

Note: Pay extra attention to the amount of pressure you're able to apply, and if there's a difference between the sides. Try and note on a scale of 1-10. 1 being almost no pressure. 10 being pressing as hard as you can.

Goal: Building value to the dog leaning back into the handler. Challenges hip and shoulder adductors/abductors and core muscles (including the psoas) on the side opposite handler pressure.
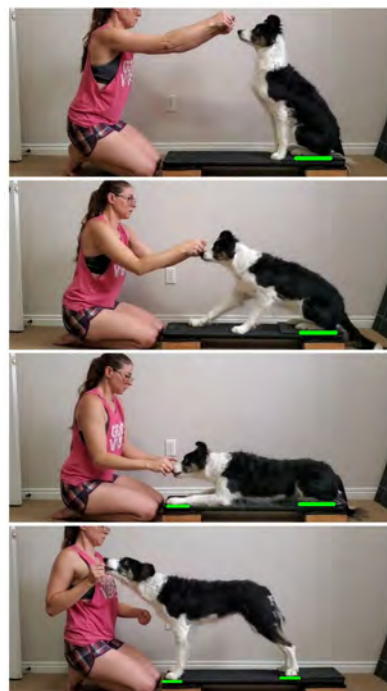
4. Sit- Walk Forward Down- Stand: Intermediate

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When a pup is through their big growth spurt, and can keep the rear feet staying still 85% accuracy. This is especially challenging in the transition from Stand to Rock Back Sit.

Note: If the spine is getting "squished" on the transition from Sit to Down, your reward placement may be too close to the dog. Conversely, if the rear feet are moving during that transition, your reward placement may be too far away.

Goal: Rear feet staying still throughout. Neutral spine alignment in the Stand, Sit and Down. Strengthens the large movers through the front and rear end and improves proprioception through the rear end.

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5. Intro to Cavaletti (Part 2): Beginner

4 passes x 3 sets

Note: This is an intermediary step implemented in an attempt to "split not lump". When your pup is executing 4 passes x 3 sets, you can begin to add poles. No need to build here.

Appropriate to progress: As soon as fluency is reached, defined by the dog focusing forward / away from the handler, choosing to wrap the cone toward the handler, and able to maintain an appropriate arousal level.

Goal: Acts as an intermediate step to proof focus forward, impulse control and begins to increase distance the dog has to travel away from the handler.

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Senior Dog » Circuit 2c
2-4 x a week, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

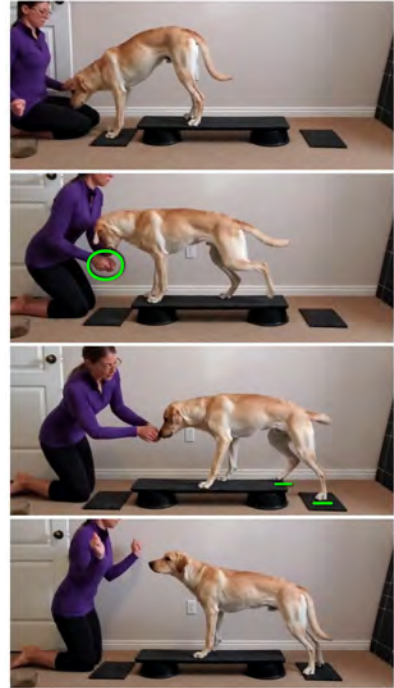1. [Stepping Forward-Stepping Back: Intermediate](#)

5 reps

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is reliably backing up straight/not off the side of the platform, and stepping back off the platform in a controlled manner with 85% accuracy, while maintaining arousal level.

Note: Keep hands low when transitioning from the position shown here in the top photo to the position shown in the second photo to help your pup not sit.

Goal: Slow, intentional stepps, moving forward and back in a straight line. Minimal loss of balance.

2. [Deep Bow: Advanced](#)

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to move to the end range without repositioning the front feet or removing one foot from the front foot target with 85% accuracy.

Note: Placement of reward is BELOW the height of the carpus,
That's what makes this a Deep Bow. Nose facing downward, as shown in this photo. Dog MUST start in an overstretched stand to allow space for the shoulder to extend and the scapula to rotate properly.

Goal: Continues to improve mobility through the shoulder, hip flexor and hamstring.

3. [Shoulder Strength & Stability Series: Beginner](#)

Stillness: 10 seconds
Head Nods Down: 5
Weight Shifting:
3 presses x 3 reps (all on one side)

Repeat presses on other side
Release from equipment

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is keeping all 4 feet still throughout, flexing the shoulder so the humerus is approx. horizontal, is demonstrating an even curve through the spine, and happily resisting the handler's pressure.

Note: NO head nods up here. Keep head low, so the neck and head follow the line of the spine.

Goal: 90° shoulder and elbow flexion (humerus approaching horizontal) during the head nods down. Easily resisting handler pressure during the weight shifting portion.
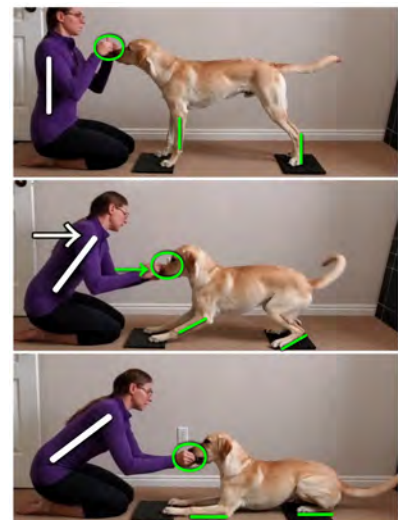
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4. [Fold Back Down Tutorial: Beginner](#)

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to fold back while keeping the forelimb and tarsus synchronized, resulting in the elbow and point of the hock touching down simultaneously. A dog who is touching down with elbows first is not yet strong enough to progress.

Note: Handler motion should be toward the dog's nose vs downward to differentiate between a "Bow" type movement and a Fold Back Down. I think about putting the cookie into the dog's eyeball. Dogs who are going through their big growth spurt may not physically be able to execute this movement pattern due to bone length discrepancy inherent in this time.

Goal: Forelimbs and hocks lowering and lifting in tandem / while staying parallel throughout. Teaches coordinated mechanics between the thoracic limb and pelvic limb.

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5. Intro to Cavaletti (Part 3): Intermediate

Progression 1:
3 passes x 3 sets

Building to:
Progression 2:
5 passes x 3 sets

Building to:
Progression 3:
10 passes x 3 sets

(down and back=1 pass)

Appropriate to progress: ONLY add more passes when 85% fluency is achieved. This includes focus away from the handler / independent execution, no ticking / knocking the poles and entering the poles with an appropriate amount of speed control. Adding too many repetitions too quickly will result in degradation of form from mental and/or physical fatigue.

Goal: Consistent independent execution. Introduces the beginning of plyometric exercise in a controlled manner to reduce overtaxing the system.

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1. Epaxial Strengthening Series: Beginner

Stillness: 10 sec
Vertical Head Nods: 5
Weight Shifting: 3 per side
Release off props
Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to:
Stillness: 30 sec
Vertical Head Nods: 10
Weight Shifting: 10 per side
One set ONLY

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is executing all components in a single set, with 85% accuracy, and a consistent level of arousal.

Goal: Specifically targets the epaxial muscles, and improves spinal alignment.

2. Standing Side Bend: Advanced

Nose to Hip: 5 reps
Nose to Rear Foot: 5 reps
Nose to Loin: 5 reps
Repeat on the second side.

Building to: 2 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When symmetry is displayed on both sides, in all 3 variations, and the dog is able to maintain rear end position without much assistance from the handler.

NOTE: Initially, the handler should assist in providing pelvic stability. The dog should assume responsibility for pelvic stability over time.

Also, a nose to hand target can be substituted for the cookie at the hip, rear foot and loin if this becomes too calorically expensive. Notice and note the difference between the sides.

Goal: Improves spinal mobility and stability through the whole length of the spine, and addresses right to left muscle imbalance (strength and / or flexibility).

---

3. Intro to Paw Pods: Beginner

Front Feet: 3-5 repetitions

If successful transition to
Rear Feet: 3-5 repetitions

Building to: 5 reps x 3 sets of each

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog is intentionally placing one foot on each pod, feet remaining mostly still, and is able to execute on the front and rear with 85% accuracy.

Goal: This is a body awareness exercise that teaches the pup where their feet are in space, and begins to introduce the concept that each foot can move independently to find a target.

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4. Manual Leg Lift: Intermediate

Lift each leg and hold for 5 seconds.

Building to: 3 continuous sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to stand still / no foot movement, with a neutral spine for maximum reps.

Note: Weight into the handler should be very light. Expect the limb diagonal the lifted limb to get "light" or offload. That's normal/correct. Notice if the dog is resistant to lifting one limb specifically, or if the alignment of the topline changes. This indicates an underlying imbalance, and this exercise should not yet be progressed.

Goal: Strengthens the hip and shoulder stabilizers, and tests for muscle imbalance.

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1. Rear Leg Lift + Target Stick: Intermediate

Begin with a 1-2 second hold.
5 reps on one side
Release from props
Repeat for 3 sets total (same side)

Repeat on the other side

Building to:
5 second hold
3 reps on one side
Stay on props
Repeat for 3 sets total

Note: Front foot target set between elbow and shoulder height spine angle approximately 45°.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute confidently, without much flailing of the free limb, and meet the endurance challenge.

Goal: Holding the target position until the terminal marker, Increases the strength and endurance of the hip stabilizers on the grounded leg, particularly the middle glute and hamstring. Also strengthens the psoas isometrically / eccentrically.

2. Turning on a Plank: Beginner

A. Phase 1: 5 repetitions in one direction. Releasing off the platform between reps. Repeat going the other direction

Repeat x 3 sets

B. Phase 2: Link the turns together., 4 cycles through (1 cycle equals turning right & turning left)

Building to: 3 sets of the phase 2 variation.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily keeping all 4 feet on the plank, demonstrating coordination, and somewhat anticipating the cookie will appear at the other end, and moving in that direction. If a coordination deficit was detected, this exercise can be carried forward and added to the next circuit.

Note: Try and have the new cookie in position before the pup is done eating the first cookie. That makes for more of a reward and less of a lure, ensure the brain is driving the movement -vs- the stomach.

Goal: Teaches body awareness, promotes flexibility, and strengthens the hip and shoulder stabilizers.

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3. PawPod Carpal Bias: Intermediate

Variation 1: Bias
Stillness for 20 seconds rewarding every 2-3 seconds to encourage weight shift forward and toe grip.

Release from props

Repeat   x 3 sets

Building to: 1 repetition of 60 seconds

Variation 2: Neutral
Forward Weight shifting
5 reps x 3 sets
Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Variation 3: Reverse Bias
Forward Weight shifting
5 reps x 3 sets
Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When an appropriate amount of carpal strength has been developed, and the dog's carpal angulation has improved, or after the dog has met the maximum requirements in Variation 3 (whichever comes first).

Note: If the weight of the body is too heavy for the musculature in the feet to properly engage, no amount of exercise is going to help. The weight has to be decreased to a manageable level in order for the pup to use proper form and target the correct musculature. This is why we elevate the front feet… to intentionally shift weight out of the front into the rear. You should be able to see the foot changing shape (like a kitten clawing) as the toe muscles engage.

Goal: To incrementally strengthen the musculature of the foot.

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4. Manual Leg Lift: Expert

Unstable surface under **FRONT FEET ONLY.** Rear feet elevated on a stable surface of equal height.

Lift each leg and hold for 5 seconds.
Release from the props

Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to: 30 sec for each leg lift
1 set only

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to meet the endurance challenge, with little to no reliance on the handler

Note: Weight into the handler should be very light. Expect the limb diagonal the lifted limb to get "light" or offload. That's normal/correct. Notice if the dog is resistant to lifting one limb specifically.

Goal: Targets the shoulder stabilizers and activates the core. Begins to expose the psoas to a stabilizing challenge. Indirectly challenges the hip and lumbar spine stabilizers.

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1. [Plank Tutorial: Beginner](#)

Rear feet elevated to carpus height only.

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is comfortable moving to 85% of full hip extension

Note: ALWAYS release from the counterpose position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Goal: Strengthens the core stabilizers including the iliopsoas. Rear feet should stay still throughout. Even weight bearing through the rear limbs is a priority over maximum range.

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2. [Controlled Cone Wrap: Intermediate](#)

5 single reps to the right
5 single reps to the left
Rest
Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to: Multi wrap (2 and then 3 wraps per rep)
3 repetitions of the multi wrap
Repeat going the other direction
Rest
Repeat for 3 sets total

Note: This is to be executed SLOWLY. For dogs trained to wrap a cone quickly, a reward may have to be used/tossed on the ground every ¼ wrap for a time until understanding is achieved. Then the reward can be offered every ½ wrap, and finally for a full wrap.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog's unique compensation pattern is replaced by correct movement / muscle recruitment for a triple wrap at maximum repetitions.

Goal: The intent of this exercise is to notice any asymmetry in the movement pattern, or the **individual pup's unique compensations**, and start to use neuromuscular reeducation to refine/correct the movement dysfunction. Notice if the dog is skipping steps or hopping, or executing a "teardrop shape" -vs- a round shape, and use the mark and reward to help build value to proper mechanics.

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3. Adducted Stand: Beginner

Stillness: 10 sec
Release off props
Repeat x 3

Building to: Horizontal Head nods:
3 to the right
3 to the left

Repeat for 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets, and is able to maintain alignment and stillness with 85% accuracy.

Note: PawPod under **REAR FEET ONLY**. Front feet stable and separated shoulders width. If the dog is struggling initially, 2 pods pushed together can be substituted for the single pod.

Goal: Maintain adductor engagement and equal rear foot contact with pod.

4. Manual Leg Lift: Expert

Unstable surface under **REAR FEET ONLY.** Front feet elevated on a stable surface of equal height.

Lift each leg and hold for 5 seconds.
Release from the props
Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to: 30 sec for each leg lift
1 set only

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to meet the endurance challenge, with little to no reliance on the handler

Note: Weight into the handler should be very light. Expect the limb diagonal the lifted limb to get "light" or offload. That's normal/correct. Notice if the dog is resistant to lifting one limb specifically.

Goal: Targets the hip stabilizers and core directly, especially if the chosen inflatable has rotational instability around the long axis as is the case with the FitBone or Propel Air. Indirectly challenges the shoulder stabilizers.

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5. Mountain Climber Prep- Tutorial : Advanced

5 reps on the right
Release from props
5 reps on the left

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain a vertical grounded leg hock, a level pelvis, and is easily targeting the front foot target with minimal handler assistance.

Spine angle should be between 30° and 45°.

Note: This exercise provides a surprising challenge to the middle glute on the standing leg. Be on the lookout for hip hiking or side bending/ lateral spine flexion. Be quick to rest if this compensation appears, as it changes the muscle recruitment pattern.

Goal: Introduces the rear foot to prop movement pattern, which targets the hip and core stabilizers mentioned above, and prepares the dog physically and mentally for the progression exercise.

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1. Plank Tutorial: Beginner

Rear feet elevated to carpus height only.

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is comfortable moving to 85% of full hip extension

Note: ALWAYS release from the counterpose position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Goal: Strengthens the core stabilizers including the iliopsoas. Rear feet should stay still throughout. Even weight bearing through the rear limbs is a priority over maximum range.

2. Weight Shifting: Beginner

3 presses x 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat on other side
Release from equipment.
Repeat x 2

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is consistently and happily leaning back into the handler pressure, maintaining foot position, demonstrating a neutral or mostly neutral top line, and can meet max repetition x set requirements.

Note: Pay extra attention to the amount of pressure you're able to apply, and if there's a difference between the sides. Try and note on a scale of 1-10. 1 being almost no pressure. 10 being pressing as hard as you can.

Goal: Building value to the dog leaning back into the handler. Challenges hip and shoulder adductors/abductors and core muscles (including the psoas) on the side opposite handler pressure.

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3. Adducted Stand: Beginner

Stillness: 10 sec
Release off props
Repeat x 3

Building to: Horizontal Head nods:
3 to the right
3 to the left

Repeat for 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets, and is able to maintain alignment and stillness with 85% accuracy.

Note: PawPod under rear feet ONLY. Front feet stable and separated shoulders width. If the dog is struggling initially, 2 pods pushed together can be substituted for the single pod.

Goal: Maintain adductor engagement and equal rear foot contact with pod.

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4. Controlled Cone Wrap: Intermediate

5 single reps to the right
5 single reps to the left
Rest
Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to: Multi wrap (2 and then 3 wraps per rep)
3 repetitions of the multi wrap
Repeat going the other direction
Rest
Repeat for 3 sets total

Note: This is to be executed SLOWLY. For dogs trained to wrap a cone quickly, a reward may have to be used/tossed on the ground every ¼ wrap for a time until understanding is achieved. Then the reward can be offered every ½ wrap, and finally for a full wrap.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog's unique compensation pattern is replaced by correct movement / muscle recruitment for a triple wrap at maximum repetitions.

Goal: The intent of this exercise is to notice any asymmetry in the movement pattern, or the **individual pup's unique compensations**, and start to use neuromuscular reeducation to refine/correct the movement dysfunction. Notice if the dog is skipping steps or hopping, or executing a "teardrop shape" -vs- a round shape, and use the mark and reward to help build value to proper mechanics.

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Senior Dog » Maintenance Circuit 2
1-2x a week alternating with Maintenance Circuit 1 & 3

1. Stepping Forward-Stepping Back: Intermediate

5 reps

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is reliably backing up straight/not off the side of the platform, and stepping back off the platform in a controlled manner with 85% accuracy, while maintaining arousal level.

Note: Keep hands low when transitioning from the position shown here in the top photo to the position shown in the second photo to help your pup not sit.

Goal: Slow, intentional stepps, moving forward and back in a straight line. Minimal loss of balance.

2. Mountain Climber Prep- Tutorial : Advanced

5 reps on the right
Release from props
5 reps on the left

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain a vertical grounded leg hock, a level pelvis, and is easily targeting the front foot target with minimal handler assistance.

Spine angle should be between 30° and 45°.

Note: This exercise provides a surprising challenge to the middle glute on the standing leg.

Be on the lookout for hip hiking or side bending/ lateral spine flexion. Be quick to rest if this compensation appears, as it changes the muscle recruitment pattern.

Goal: Introduces the rear foot to prop movement pattern, which targets the hip and core stabilizers mentioned above, and prepares the dog physically and mentally for the progression exercise.

---

3. [Shoulder Strength & Stability Series: Beginner](#)

Stillness: 10 seconds
Head Nods Down: 5
Weight Shifting:
3 presses x 3 reps (all on one side)

Repeat presses on other side
Release from equipment

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is keeping all 4 feet still throughout, flexing the shoulder so the humerus is approx. horizontal, is demonstrating an even curve through the spine, and happily resisting the handler's pressure.

Note: NO head nods up here. Keep head low, so the neck and head follow the line of the spine.

Goal: 90° shoulder and elbow flexion (humerus approaching horizontal) during the head nods down. Easily resisting handler pressure during the weight shifting portion.

4. [Fold Back Down Tutorial: Beginner](#)

7-10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to fold back while keeping the forelimb and tarsus synchronized, resulting in the elbow and point of the hock touching down simultaneously. A dog who is touching down with elbows first is not yet strong enough to progress.

Note: Handler motion should be toward the dog's nose vs downward to differentiate between a "Bow" type movement and a Fold Back Down. I think about putting the cookie into the dog's eyeball. Dogs who are going through their big growth spurt may not physically be able to execute this movement pattern due to bone length discrepancy inherent in this time.

Goal: Forelimbs and hocks lowering and lifting in tandem / while staying parallel throughout. Teaches coordinated mechanics between the thoracic limb and pelvic limb.

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5. [Intro to Cavaletti (Part 3): Intermediate](#)

Progression 2:
5 passes x 3 sets

Building to:
Progression 3:
10 passes x 3 sets

(down and back=1 pass)

Appropriate to progress: ONLY add more passes when 85% fluency is achieved. This includes focus away from the handler / independent execution, no ticking / knocking the poles and entering the poles with an appropriate amount of speed control. Adding too many repetitions too quickly will result in degradation of form from mental and/or physical fatigue.
Goal: Consistent independent execution. Introduces the beginning of plyometric exercise in a controlled manner to reduce overtaxing the system.

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Senior Dog » Maintenance Circuit 3
1–2x a week alternating with Maintenance Circuit 1 & 2

1. Pistol Squats: Advanced

7-10 reps to the right
7-10 reps to the left
Release from equipment
Repeat x 3

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog is slowly lowering down with a mainly vertical movement vs stepping to the side with a lot of abduction. Free leg should land close to the rear foot target

Note: Spine angle about 45°. Rear foot target about ¾ hock height. Front foot target does not have to be unstable. Use whatever prop achieves the 45° spine angle. A lower front foot target can be used initially if needed to reduce the challenge.

Goal: Slow / controlled movement during the lowering phase is the goal. Strengthens the gluteals, psoas and core stabilizers in a more neutral hip alignment (which is muscularly more challenging than abduction/adduction).

2. Power Up Prep: Advanced

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3

Appropriate to Progress: When both front feet are moving simultaneously during the transition from Sit to Stand (concentric phase), and the transition from Stand to Sit (eccentric phase) is slow and controlled in 50% of the repetitions. .

Note: Using placement of reward, vertically above the dog's head can help encourage the dog to lower slowly to the sit. (Peanut Butter spoon may be helpful).

Goal: Both front feet moving in tandem during the concentric phase. Starting to see some slow reps in the transition from stand to sit in the eccentric phase. Functional core challenge. Prepares for the plyometric progression.

---

3. Ipsilateral Step Up: Intermediate

5 reps on each side x 3 reps

Note: There are two speeds shown in this video.

> **Learning Speed:** A reward is delivered while the free legs are on the ground, as well as on the Sitting Platforms.
> **Fluent Speed:** Free legs touching down is marked, but the reward is delivered once all 4 feet return to the Sitting Platforms. This increase in speed transitions the exercise to a more plyometric exercise, where the working muscles stay engaged throughout.

Building to: Fluent Speed 10 reps on each side x 2 sets

This variation uses a separate front and rear foot target to help refine foot placement and improve top line alignment. Foot targets should be about carpus height, or slightly higher.

Appropriate to progress: When the free legs are mostly synchronized, and the dog is executing to max reps with 85% accuracy.

Goal: Mostly synchronized movement, and a neutral spine in the stand. Targets the muscles along the medial and lateral aspect of the shoulder and hip, including the psoas.

---

4. Deep Bow: Advanced

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to move to the end range without repositioning the front feet or removing one foot from the front foot target with 85% accuracy.

Note: Placement of reward is BELOW the height of the carpus, That's what makes this a Deep Bow. Nose facing downward, as shown in this photo. Dog MUST start in an overstretched stand to allow space for the shoulder to extend and the scapula to rotate properly.

Goal: Continues to improve mobility through the shoulder, hip flexor and hamstring.

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5. Manual Leg Lift: Expert

Unstable surface under front **AND** rear feet.

Lift each leg and hold for 5 seconds.
Release from the props

Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to: 30 sec for each leg lift
1 set only

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to meet the endurance challenge, with little to no reliance on the handler

Note: Weight into the handler should be very light. Expect the limb diagonal the lifted limb to get "light" or offload. That's normal/correct. Notice if the dog is resistant to lifting one limb specifically. Senior Dogs also have the option to implement the front and rear end instability separately, as practiced in previous variations.

Goal: Maximum stability challenge through the core, hips and shoulders.

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CANINE CONDITIONING COACH.COM

Other Programs Available

CCC Puppy Program
CCC Beginner Program
CCC Strong Dog Program
CCC Sport Dog Program
CCC Sloppy Sitters Mini-Program
CCC Post Spay Mini-Program
CCC Postnatal Mini-Program
CCC Post TPLO Mini Program

Sloppy Sitters Mini-Program

» All Circuits

This **Sloppy Sitters Mini-Program** is intended to be used by grown dogs who are struggling to maintain alignment through the rear limbs. Puppies (under 8 months), and growing dogs (8-12 months depending on breed) would be better served by following the **Puppy** or **Beginner** Programs respectively, which do have a focus on sitting squarely, but take growing bodies, and developing minds/attention spans into consideration.

This 5 circuit Mini-Program will take approximately 4-5 months to complete in its entirety and aims to help correct the muscle imbalance, and coordination deficit associated with a sloppy sit. Using a progressive formula, platforms and placement of reward, we can help teach your pup's body AND mind how to move into and maintain a square sit. This has a positive impact on posture through the spine, pelvis and rear legs. Sitting squarely reduces the strain on the ligaments in the spine, hip and stifle joint. Since ligaments are non-elastic, once they stretch they don't go back... So correcting a Sloppy Sit is important to reduce the risk of stress on the CCL in particular.

Keep in mind, It takes TIME for alignment to change... especially if your pup has been rehearsing improper posture for some time. Be patient, and don't be tempted to rush through the program. Spending more time on the initial circuits will likely result in a better outcome.

Table of Contents

This is a **dynamic** table of contents. When clicked, the listings below will take you directly to that Page, Circuit or Exercise. Pretty nifty! Also, this document is formatted to allow you to search for a word or phrase. Use the shortcut "command + F" on a Mac or "control + F" on a PC to open the search box.

MindMap » A visual representation

This MindMap is a visual representation of the path you'll be taking through the circuit.

In general, you will begin with Circuit 1 and work through those exercises to fluency. Then move to Circuit 2, and so forth, until reaching the Maintenance Circuit.

There are 6 exercises in each circuit which can be a bit too much for some pups, and result in mental fatigue. Splitting each Circuit into 2 "Mini-Circuits" (first 3 exercises, and second 3 exercises) and executing a.m. and p.m. on the same day, taking the following day off OR implementing the first 3 Mon/Wed/*maybe* Fri and the second 3 exercises Tue/Thurs/*maybe* Sat is always an option if necessary.

You will then have a choice to implement Circuit 5 for ongoing maintenance, or continue on to the **Strong Dog Program**, **Sport Dog Program** or **Senior Dog Program**, depending on the age and needs of your specific dog. The remaining mini-programs may also be appropriate depending on your individual pup's needs.
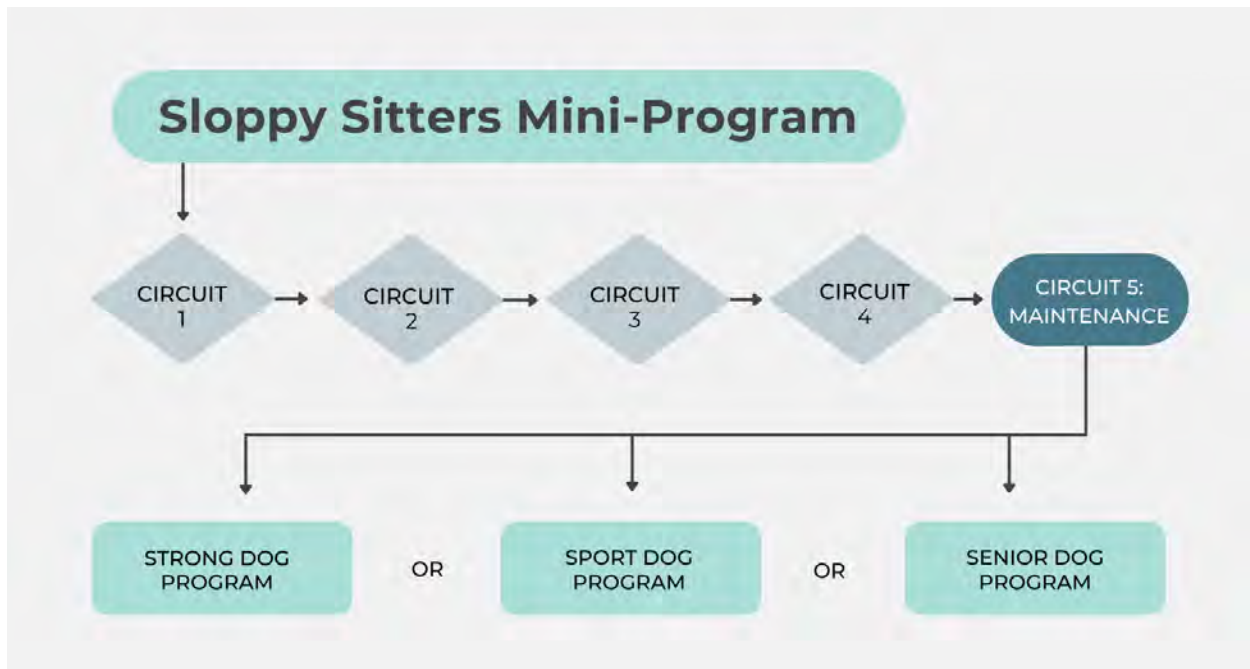
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Equipment needed for this program

- ➔ 2 Sitting Platforms
- ➔ Standing Platform
- ➔ Plyo Box, Klimb, or other stable raised prop
- ➔ 2 Propel Air Platforms, 2 Wedges or 2 FitBones
- ➔ 4 PawPods (TotoFit, Flexiness or BOSU are my preference)
- ➔ 4 Rubber Feed Bowls or similarly sized stable foot targets
- ➔ Cato Board, Wobble Board, or similar large stable platform that can be angled against the wall

How to measure for Platforms

Here's a graphic to help you measure for your sitting and standing platforms if you don't already have those.

Sitting Platform: Width, is the measurement between the point of the hocks (shown in the top portion of the photo). Length is 1.5-2x the width.

Standing Platform: Width is the measurement between the point of the hocks (the same as the Sitting Platform). Length is the measurement shown in the bottom portion of the attached photo, plus a little bit extra. For a medium-large size dog 3-4 inches extra in the front, and 3-4 inches extra in the rear is sufficient. Tiny dogs need less "extra space". Giant dogs need a bit more.

Foot Targets: Width is the measurement between the point of the hocks (the same as the Sitting Platform). Length is about half the width measurement.

For more specific instructions, I wrote a 3 part blog series that covers the difference between the various types of platforms, how to measure for each, and how to build them yourself. You can see these on my website.

Progression Tips & Considerations

1. When implementing a formal conditioning program, we're implementing movements that impact the body in a few different ways.
   a. Increasing the **strength** of a muscle concentrically and eccentrically, defined by the ability to move to end range while loaded and maintain 85% accuracy.
   b. Improving the **endurance** of the muscle, defined by the amount of repetitions or duration an exercise can be performed while still maintaining 85% proper alignment.
   c. Increasing the **flexibility** of a muscle.
   d. Improving **body awareness** of the dog.

2. We progress an exercise in one of two ways...
   a. **Building strength & endurance:** Asking for more repetitions / longer duration before resting. (a through c above)
   b. **Challenging coordination:** Asking a dog for more precision movement, challenging posture, increasing balance demands and/or increasing the complexity of an exercise. (d above)

3. We measure the readiness of the dog to progress by assessing **fluency**, which is a measurement of how consistently the dog is able to correctly execute when meeting the challenge of maximum repetitions x sets (defined for each exercise).

   A dog is considered "fluent" and ready to progress within an exercise (adding repetitions or duration), or progress to the next exercise variation when…
   a. **Maximum repetitions** x sets has been reached
   b. **85% accuracy** is maintained throughout
   c. **Arousal level is maintained** (no significant increase or decrease in arousal)

4. Some dogs will need many sessions of a specific exercise to meet the required strength/flexibility or coordination benchmarks before progressing to the next level. In other exercises, only one or two sessions may be necessary before progressing. Recording, and assessing the video of your exercise protocol can reveal valuable information, and help you determine when it is appropriate to progress.

5. **How to build repetitions:** A typical conservative strength / endurance progression schedule would be...

> 5 reps x 3 sets
> 7 reps, 7 reps, 5 reps
> 10 reps, 7 reps, 7 reps
> 10 reps, 10 reps, 7 reps
> 10 reps x 3 sets

So when building reps this can be a helpful guide. There's no downside to progressing conservatively, aside from the fact that it takes more time. Conversely, progressing too quickly can lead to frustration, a loss of precision, and incorrect muscle recruitment.

NOTE: Change in arousal level, increase or decrease, is the first indicator of mental and/or physical fatigue. Taking a short break (30 seconds to 1 min) with a cookie scatter, or down-stay can help manage arousal levels.

6. **Moving from one circuit to the next**
   Not all exercises within a circuit will be progressed at the same time. But as a general guide, I try not to span more than 2 circuits simultaneously.
   a. **Example:** If my dog has reached fluency in 3 out of 4 exercises in Circuit 1, I would progress to Circuit 2, and also continue to implement the slow to develop exercise from Circuit 1. But I WOULD NOT progress to the exercises in Circuit 3 until the exercise from Circuit 1 was fluent.
   b. If we progress only the skills the dog is naturally good at, and neglect the skills they struggle with, we will end up running into a **"bottleneck"** as the circuits progress. This could be a skills bottleneck, strength/endurance bottleneck or a flexibility bottleneck. So the exercises the dog struggles with the most are actually the most important to focus on!
   c. **NOTE:** Puppies with growing bodies may need to return to previous progressions of an exercise when experiencing growth spurts. Past understanding of where their body parts are in space may not be applicable when the legs are suddenly several inches longer!! Patience pays off during these growing times!

7. Static **before** Dynamic
   Isolated **before** Integrated
   Stable **before** Unstable
   Form **drives** Function

Sloppy Sitters Specific Guidelines

1. **Managing Arousal**
    Increased arousal and overarousal can result as much from a mental challenge as from a physical challenge… So we want to be on the lookout for increasing or decreasing arousal levels when implementing conditioning exercises. Brains can't think or learn very well when overly taxed… either by complexity of an exercise (having to hold many thoughts in the mind at once) or physical challenge, fatigue and adrenaline. Both situations can result in an adrenalized state, where learning doesn't happen well. Some signs of overarousal are… Moving quickly, offering other behaviors, vocalization, taking the cookie hard, general feeling of frantic movement, etc. Conversely, underarousal can manifest as looking away, leaving, freezing/standing still, offering easier movements, etc. If we are seeing any of these things, taking a short break (30 sec to 1 min) can be helpful.

2. **Focus on Form**
    When trying to correct a sloppy sit, it's likely we are dealing with learned compensatory movement patterns that are automatic. Along with moving slowly and managing arousal… using props to "force" proper alignment gives us a chance to reinforce/build value to proper mechanics, and increases the likelihood these new mechanics will be implemented in the real world. Muscles that fire together wire together… so this process of conditioning is just as much about training the brain as it is the body.

3. **What's Rewarded will be Repeated**
    To change your pup's default posture, we need to reward that posture. In the beginning, that will likely mean trying to "exaggerate" the posture through placement of reward, prop setup, etc. Over time, we should start to see this new posture offered automatically, because it has become a consistent way to receive a reward. BUT this needs to be rewarded heavily to help create the lightbulb moment for your pup.

4. **Progress not Perfection**
    It can be challenging to implement new movement mechanics, and target underutilized muscles. This is especially true when we are dealing with a heavily ingrained posture like a sloppy sit. Like learning to use your non-dominant hand to perform a fine motor skill, the first attempt at a skill is very likely to be clumsy, and inaccurate. REWARD ANYWAY! Rewarding the attempt will communicate to your pup that she is on the right track. It's a trap to hold out for perfection.

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Circuit 1
3-4 x a week, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency
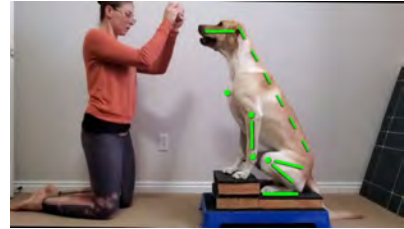
1. [Posture Sit: Beginner](#)

30 seconds - 1 min

Repeat x 3

Building to: 1 set for 3 min straight

Appropriate to progress: When your pup is able to maintain proper posture for 3 min

Goal: We're looking for proper posture through the spine, and proper alignment through the rear legs. If 30 seconds is too long for your pup to maintain proper alignment OR continue to adjust into correct alignment (as detailed in the video) you may need sets shorter than 30 seconds. Functional core challenge. Improves posture. Corrects a sloppy Sit. Fosters neuromuscular re-education. Appropriate for pups of all ages.

2. [Rock Back Sit-Push Forward Stand: Beginner](#)

5 reps x 2 Sets

Building to: 5 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is offering the behavior easily, hitting max reps, and keeping rear feet staying still with 85% accuracy.

Note: The correct movement pattern during the transition from stand to sit is stifle flexing during the transition to sit, and fully flexed before the second front foot comes onto the sitting platform. Notice if your dog is bringing both front feet down and THEN moving into the sit position

Goal: Building value to keeping rear feet still, while transitioning to the stand.

3. Pivot + Step Up: Intermediate

Front foot target about elbow height. Height of the rear foot target increased to ¾ hock height.

5 Passes
(Dog moving to the right and back to the left = 1 pass)
1 set only

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets, is able to precisely target, lift onto, and lower off the rear foot targets without stumbling, or losing balance.

Goal: Slow controlled movement. Precise targeting with the rear feet. When stepping onto and off of the rear foot target, we are looking for vertical movement more than horizontal movement.

4. Sit-Walk Forward Down: Beginner

5 reps x 2 sets

Building to:
Growing dogs: 5 reps x3 sets
Grown dogs: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When a pup is through their big growth spurt, or when the toes / hocks / stifle are maintained in neutral alignment/pointed straight ahead throughout, and is able to execute max reps with 85% fluency.

Note: This exercise acts like training wheels (or a strider bike), allowing the dog to learn a less complicated movement with similar mechanics. Once those mechanics are ingrained, the dog is much more likely to be able to coordinate the different parts, and potentially move forward into a Fold Back Down.

Goal: Targets the hip and stifle stabilizers, and improves mobility through the above mentioned joints.

5. [Adducted Stand: Beginner](#)

Stillness: 10 sec
Release off props
Repeat x 3

Building to: Horizontal Head nods:
3 to the right
3 to the left
Repeat for 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets, and is able to maintain alignment and stillness with 85% accuracy.

Note: PawPod under rear feet ONLY. Front feet stable and separated shoulders width. If the dog is struggling initially, 2 pods pushed together can be substituted for the single pod.

Goal: Maintain adductor engagement and equal rear foot contact with pod.

6. [Ipsilateral Foot Target/Side Step to Target: Foundation](#)

5 reps on each side
Repeat x 3

Building to: 3-4 side steps moving into the ipsilateral foot target (demonstrated in the video)

5 reps on each side
Repeat for 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily, and independently offering ipsilateral feet simultaneously

Note: Any platform (or 2 platforms) propped against the wall can work for this. A wobble board doesn't have to be used.In the beginning, don't worry about spinal alignment too much… that will come with the next progression. For now, we just want to build fluency and understanding to the ipsilateral foot target.

Goal: Improves coordination through the ipsilateral chains (connecting same side hip to same side shoulder). Strengthens the hip and shoulder abductor.

Notes:

Circuit 2
3-4 x a week, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Rock Back Sit-Push Forward Stand: Intermediate

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog reaches 85% accuracy at maximum reps, and is moving with both front feet simultaneously during the concentric phase (transition from sit to stand).

Note: Front foot target set at shoulder height (point of the shoulder, not the withers). The concentric phase (transition from sit to stand) will always "come together" and become more fluent first. It will take time for your pup to control the eccentric phase (slow resisting of gravity in the transition from stand to sit).

Goal: Transitioning from the front feet stepping up onto the front foot target to fully loading into the rear, with front feet moving simultaneously during the concentric phase (transition from sit to stand). Increases strength through the large muscles in the pelvic limb (PL), including the quadriceps, hamstrings, and gluteals.

2. Pivot/ Step to Target: Intermediate

Starts at 0:39 of this video.

Rear foot targets are close together.

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.
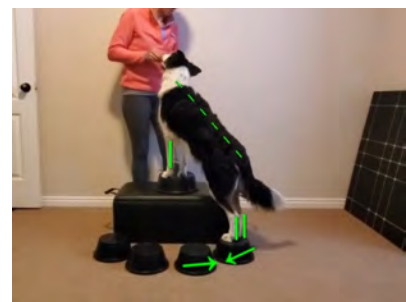
Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

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3. Sit- Walk Forward Down- Stand: Intermediate

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When a pup is through their big growth spurt, and can keep the rear feet staying still 85% accuracy. This is especially challenging in the transition from Stand to Rock Back Sit.

Note: If the spine is getting "squished" on the transition from Sit to Down, your reward placement may be too close to the dog. Conversely, if the rear feet are moving during that transition, your reward placement may be too far away.

Goal: Rear feet staying still throughout. Neutral spine alignment in the Stand, Sit and Down. Strengthens the large movers through the front and rear end and improves proprioception through the rear end.

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4. Adducted Stand: Intermediate

Stillness: 10 sec
Release off props
Repeat x 3

Building to: Horizontal Head nods:
3 to the right
3 to the left

Repeat x 3

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets, and is able to maintain alignment and stillness.

Note: PawPod under FRONT and REAR feet. Head Nods should be VERY SLOW in the beginning. Slower than you think

Goal: Maintain shoulder and hip adductor engagement, and balance with the addition of the second pod.

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5. Hiccup: Intermediate

Variation 1: Butt Up Stand → Sit ONLY

(Shown in the first portion of this video)

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog demonstrates fluency as defined by a neutral spine, front feet staying still, and the rear feet stepping backward and forward with control (no flinging)

Goal: Improves hamstring mobility, endurance through the shoulder, and teaches an important movement pattern the progressions will build upon.

6. [Ipsilateral Foot Target + Weight Shifting: Beginner](#)

Stillness 10 sec
Weight Shifting: 5 presses

Release from equipment

Repeat presses for 3 sets total

Repeat on the other side

Building to:
Stillness: 30 seconds
Weight Shifting: 15 presses
1 set only
Repeat on the other side

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain a neutral spine, is able to lean back into the handler pressure easily, and is meeting the maximum repetition requirement.

Note: Stable Surfaces Only. Foot targets positioned such that the standing and targeting legs are displaying a mild amount of abduction. Shoulders level. Pelvis level.

Goal: Neutral spine, with controlled abduction as the dog moves into position. The dog should be able to easily resist handler pressure.

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Circuit 3
3-4 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Power Up Prep: Advanced

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3

Appropriate to Progress: When both front feet are moving simultaneously during the transition from Sit to Stand (concentric phase), and the transition from Stand to Sit (eccentric phase) is slow and controlled in 50% of the repetitions. .

Note: Using placement of reward, vertically above the dog's head can help encourage the dog to lower slowly to the sit. (Peanut Butter spoon may be helpful)

Goal: Both front feet moving in tandem during the concentric phase. Starting to see some slow reps in the transition from stand to sit in the eccentric phase. Functional core challenge. Prepares for the plyometric progression.

---

2. Pivot/Step to Target: Advanced

Starts at 1:42 of this video. Increase the distance between the rear foot targets by 25-50%

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

3. Fold Back Down Tutorial: Beginner

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to fold back while keeping the forelimb and tarsus synchronized, resulting in the elbow and point of the hock touching down simultaneously. A dog who is touching down with elbows first is not yet strong enough to progress.

Note: Handler motion should be toward the dog's nose vs downward to differentiate between a "Bow" type movement and a Fold Back Down. I think about putting the cookie into the dog's eyeball. Dogs who are going through their big growth spurt may not physically be able to execute this movement pattern due to bone length discrepancy inherent in this time.

Goal: Forelimbs and hocks lowering and lifting in tandem / while staying parallel throughout. Teaches coordinated mechanics between the thoracic limb and pelvic limb.

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4. Adducted Stand -TL Focus: Advanced

Stillness: 10 sec
Horizontal Head Nods: 3 right and then 3 left
Vertical Head Nods: 3 up and then 3 down

Repeat 3x

Note: 1 Pod under FRONT feet. 2 Pods under REAR feet

Building to:

Stillness: 30 sec
Horizontal Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between right and left
Vertical Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between up and down
One set ONLY

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute all Head Nod variations without loss of balance, executing to maximum repetitions.

Goal: Specifically targets the medial shoulder and medial shoulder stabilizers at the end range. Indirectly targets the hip adductors, including the psoas, so can be a gentle reintroduction to hip adduction for dogs recovering from a psoas issue.

5. Hiccup: Advanced

Variation 2: Butt Up Stand→ Sit→Hiccup

(Shown in the second portion of this video)

3 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 8 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is "hopping" both front feet up onto the sitting platform simultaneously, and is able to hold Posture Sit principles with 85% accuracy.

Note: This is a very challenging core exercise and reps should be increased very slowly to avoid a grade 1 strain.

Goal: Smooth transition of the front feet up onto the sitting platform, while keeping the rear legs in alignment. Functional core strength.

6. [Ipsilateral Foot Target + Weight Shifting: Intermediate](#)

1:12 of this video

Stillness 10 sec
Weight Shifting: 5 presses
Release from equipment
Repeat presses for 3 sets total
Repeat on the other side

Building to:
Stillness: 30 seconds
Weight Shifting: 15 presses
1 set only
Repeat on the other side

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain a neutral spine, is able to lean back into the handler pressure easily, and is meeting the maximum repetition requirement.

Note: Unstable Surface under lifted legs. Foot targets positioned such that the standing and targeting legs are displaying a mild amount of abduction. Shoulders level. Pelvis level.

Goal: Neutral spine, with controlled abduction as the dog moves into position. The dog should be able to easily resist handler pressure.

Notes:

Notes:

Circuit 4
3-4 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Power-Up: Expert

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute 85% of the repetitions slowly during the eccentric phase

Note: Slow controlled return to the sit position is the main focus, and the dog's fluency in executing this slow movement is the main thing that differentiates this variation from the Power-Up Prep variation.

Goal: Slow controlled eccentric. Functional core strength. Specifically targets the quadriceps eccentrically, and fosters better balance, core control and body awareness.

2. Pivot/Step to Target: Expert

Starts at 2:08 of this video

Substituting unstable PawPods for the stable foot targets.

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

3. [Fold Back Down Decline/Incline: Intermediate](#)

Incline/ Facing Uphill:
5 reps x 3 sets

Decline/ Facing Downhill:
5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the forelimb and tarsus are moving in tandem with 85% accuracy, and the dog is maintaining a neutral spine.

Note: Facing uphill the rear end is more loaded, while facing downhill the front is more loaded. We can use this shift of weight to help regulate the challenge level. It's important to note which direction produces the smoother movement in the individual dog, and begin the exercise with that variation.

Goal: Focus is on the synchronized movement of the limbs, and maintaining a neutral spine throughout. Functional core strength that specifically targets the serratus ventralis, epaxials, obliques and iliopsoas, along with the latissimus.

---

4. [Adducted Stand PL Focus: Advanced](#)

Stillness: 10 sec
Horizontal Head Nods: 3 right and then 3 left
Vertical Head Nods: 3 up and then 3 down

Repeat 3x

Note: 2 Pods under FRONT feet. 1 Pod under REAR feet

Building to:
Stillness: 30 sec
Horizontal Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between right and left
Vertical Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between up and down

One set ONLY

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute all Head Nod variations without loss of balance, executing to maximum repetitions

Goal: Specifically targets the adductors, including the psoas at the end range. Indirectly targets the shoulder adductors/medial shoulder stabilizers adductors, so can be a gentle reintroduction to shoulder adduction for dogs recovering from a medial shoulder issue.

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5. Hiccup: Expert

Variation 3: Stand→Hiccup
Variation 1 can be used as a warm up.
(Shown in the third portion of this video)

3 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 8 reps x 3 sets

Note: This is a very challenging exercise due to the complex/integrated nature of the movement pattern. Deviation from the dog's standard execution should be seen as fatigue, not disobedience or lack of understanding

Goal: Apex core strengthening exercise. Controlled fluid movement is the goal.

---

6. Ipsilateral Step Up: Beginner

5 reps on each side x 2 sets

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: when the dog becomes fluent, as defined by stepping off the platform and onto the platform with ipsilateral legs synchronized, with 85% accuracy... so 4 out of 5x or better.

Note: This is the baseline movement that many exercises are built upon. Taking the time to ensure fluency/understanding will pay off in the long term.

Goal: Teaching synchronized movement through ipsilateral legs. Targets the muscles along the medial aspect of the shoulder and hip og the grounded legs, including the psoas. Keeping these muscles strong is an important component in avoiding MSI.

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Notes:

Circuit 5 ~ Maintenance
3-4 x a week for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Power-Up: Expert

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute 85% of the repetitions slowly during the eccentric phase

Note: Slow controlled return to the sit position is the main focus, and the dog's fluency in executing this slow movement is the main thing that differentiates this variation from the Power-Up Prep variation.

Goal: Slow controlled eccentric. Functional core strength. Specifically targets the quadriceps eccentrically, and fosters better balance, core control and body awareness.

2. Pivot/Step to Target: Expert

Starts at 2:08 of this video

Substituting unstable PawPods for the stable foot targets.

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

3. Fold Back Down- Split Surface: Advanced

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with 85% accuracy, limbs moving in tandem, neutral spine, elbows moving to horizontal but not below.

Note: Spacing between the targets should be such that...
1. front feet are at the very *back* edge of the front foot target (no carpus on the platform)
2. Rear feet are at the very *front* edge of the rear foot target
3. Any stable foot targets can be used. Feed buckets are not required

Goal: Strengthens the shoulder, core and hip stabilizers in a lengthened lever position. Promotes a high level of hip and shoulder stability. Functional core strength.

4 Adducted Stand: Expert

Vertical Head Nods: 5 up, then 5 down. Release off pods.
Horizontal Head Nods: 5 right, then 5 left. Release off pods.

Head Nod Circles:
3 Clockwise
3 Counter Clockwise
Release off pods.

Repeat 3x

Building to:
Horizontal Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between right and left.
Vertical Head Nods: 10 total. Alternating between up and down.
Head Nod Circles: 6 circles, alternating between clockwise and counterclockwise.
Remaining on pods for the duration
One set ONLY

Goal: Targets the musculature through the medial shoulder, medial hip and core. Challenges endurance of the above mentioned muscles as well as the stabilizers through the feet, carpus, tarsus and stifle. This is VERY DIFFICULT please make sure to move the lure very slowly to avoid loss of balance.

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5. Hiccup: Expert

Variation 3: Stand→Hiccup
Variation 1 can be used as a warm up.
(Shown in the third portion of this video)

3 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 8 reps x 3 sets

Note: This is a very challenging exercise due to the complex/integrated nature of the movement pattern. Deviation from the dog's standard execution should be seen as fatigue, not disobedience or lack of understanding

Goal: Apex core strengthening exercise. Controlled fluid movement is the goal.

---

6. Ipsilateral Step Up: Intermediate

5 reps on each side x 3 reps

Note: There are two speeds shown in this video.
> **Learning Speed:** A reward is delivered while the free legs are on the ground, as well as on the Sitting Platforms.
> **Fluent Speed:** Free legs touching down is marked, but the reward is delivered once all 4 feet return to the Sitting Platforms. This increase in speed transitions the exercise to a more plyometric exercise, where the working muscles stay engaged throughout.

Building to: Fluent Speed 10 reps on each side x 2 sets. This variation uses a separate front and rear foot target to help

refine foot placement and improve top line alignment. Foot targets should be about carpus height, or slightly higher.

Appropriate to progress: When the free legs are mostly synchronized, and the dog is executing to max reps with 85% accuracy.

Goal: Mostly synchronized movement, and a neutral spine in the stand. Targets the muscles along the medial and lateral aspect of the shoulder and hip, including the psoas.

Notes:

CANINE CONDITIONING COACH.COM

Other Programs Available

CCC Puppy Program
CCC Beginner Program
CCC Strong Dog Program
CCC Sport Dog Program
CCC Senior Dog Program
CCC Post Spay Mini-Program
CCC Postnatal Mini-Program
CCC Post TPLO Mini Program

Senior Dog Program

Zone Focus Track » All Zones

The **Senior Dog Program** is designed specifically to meet the needs of senior dogs, and accommodate their limitations, while building strength and stability. Often, changes in senior dogs are attributed to AGE, when the actual problem is DISUSE in some muscles and OVERUSE in others. The Senior Dog Program selects exercises to rebalance the senior body and improve biomechanics, making getting around easier, and improving quality of life.

The **Zone Focus Track** is intended to follow the **Comprehensive Track**, and splits the Senior Dog Program into zones that focus on specific areas that might be troublesome in a specific individual, allowing for a targeted, focused fitness approach. These Zones include Core, Shoulder, Hip, Foot Strength, and General Mobility. While each progression is intentionally weighted to affect a specific area, the body is a system and everything must work together to ensure proper biomechanics. So I've organized each circuit in the Zone Focus Track so the workout is safe, balanced and appropriately integrated.

Table of Contents

This is a **dynamic** table of contents. When clicked, the listings below will take you directly to that Page, Circuit or Exercise. Pretty nifty! Also, this document is formatted to allow you to search for a word or phrase. Use the shortcut "command + F" on a Mac or "control + F" on a PC to open the search box.

MindMap » A visual representation

This MindMap is a visual representation of the path you'll be taking through the circuit.

After completing the Comprehensive Track, if your Senior Dog needs more focused work, you can implement the Zone Focus option for a more targeted fitness approach. Begin by choosing the **Zone** your pup needs to focus on. You'll begin with **Circuit 1** of that specific Zone. Once you have reached fluency in the exercises contained in that circuit, you will progress to Circuit 2 (if that Zone includes a progression Circuit).
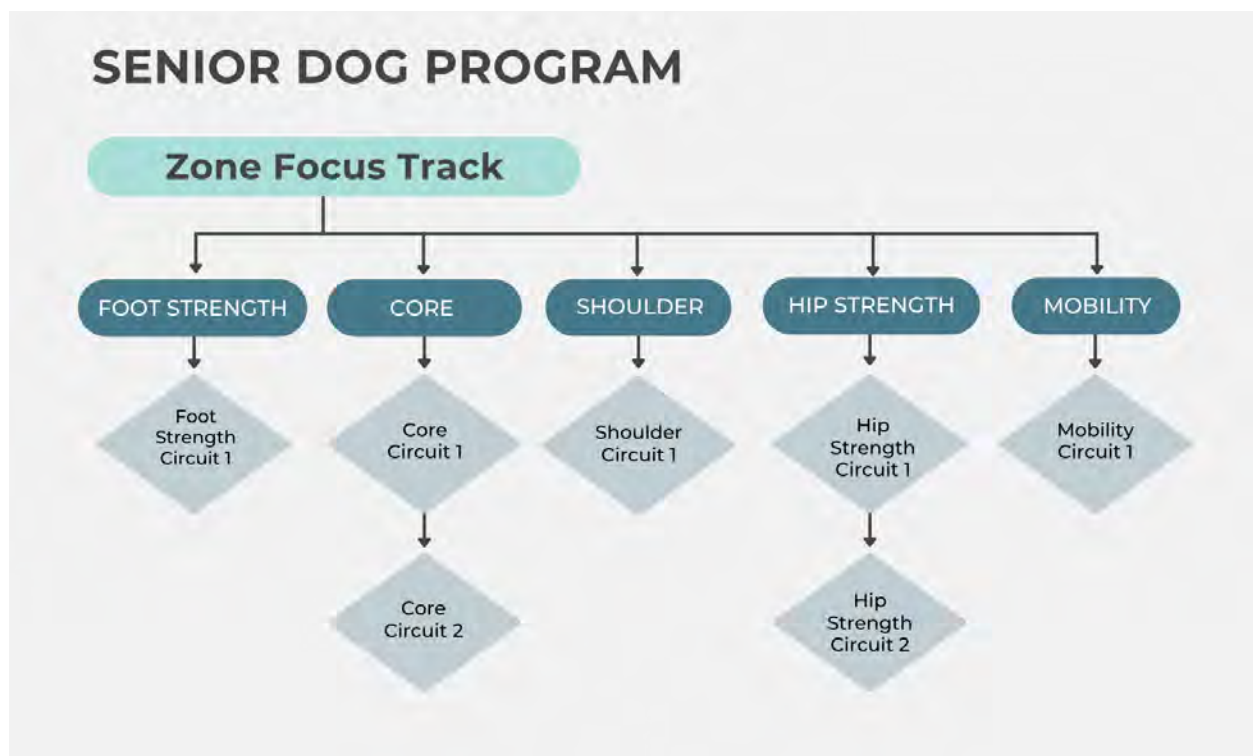
After the progression is completed, the Zone specific circuit can be used for maintenance, dogs can move to another Zone.

Not sure which zone to start with? There's a short description for each at the beginning of each Zone's section, with a graphic to help you decide.

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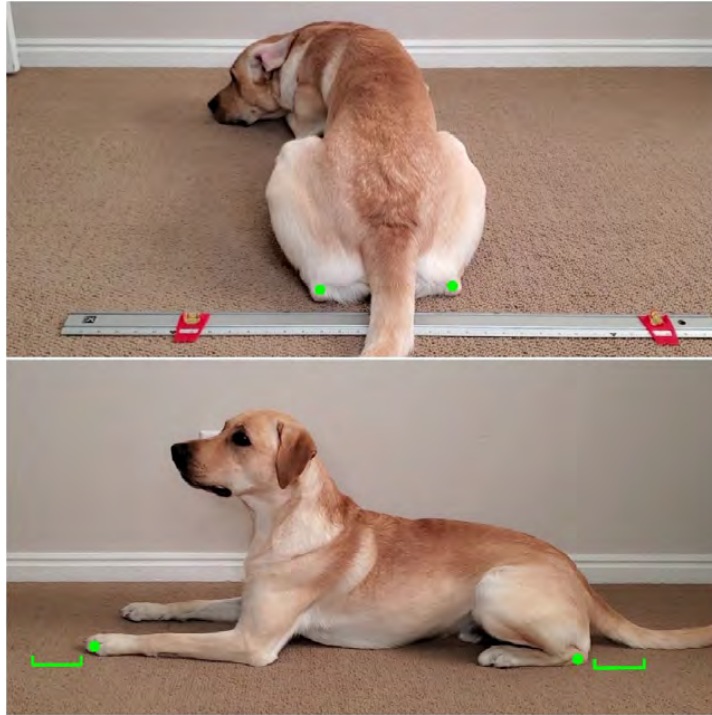
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Equipment needed for this program

- ➔ 2-4 Sitting Platforms
- ➔ Plyo Box, Kilmb or other elevated prop
- ➔ Standing Platform
- ➔ 2-4 PawPods (TotoFit, Flexiness or BOSU brand are preferred)
- ➔ 2 Rubber Feed Bowls or similarly sized stable Foot Targets
- ➔ 1 Propel Air Platforms, 1 FitBone or 1 Disc
- ➔ 1 low unstable prop (Wedge, Disc, Foam Pad, etc)
- ➔ Set of 6-10 Cavaletti Poles
- ➔ 1 Traffic Cone or other similar pylon
- ➔ Cato Board, wobble board or large square platform
- ➔ Manners Minder or second handler to deliver reward (one exercise)
- ➔ Large square of fleece material (1 meter²)

How to measure for Platforms

Here's a graphic to help you measure for your sitting and standing platforms if you don't already have those.

Sitting Platform: Width, is the measurement between the point of the hocks (shown in the top portion of the photo) + 1or 2 inches. Length is 1.5-2x the width.

Standing Platform: Width is the measurement between the point of the hocks + 1or 2 inches (the same as the Sitting Platform). Length is the measurement shown in the bottom portion of the attached photo, plus a little bit extra. For a medium-large size dog 3-4 inches extra in the front, and 3-4 inches extra in the rear is sufficient. Tiny dogs need less "extra space". Giant dogs need a bit more.

Foot Targets: Width is the measurement between the point of the hocks + 1or 2 inches (the same as the Sitting Platform). Length is about half the width measurement.

For more specific instructions, I wrote a 3 part blog series that covers the difference between the various types of platforms, how to measure for each, and how to build them yourself. You can see these on my website.

Progression Tips & Considerations

1. **CONDITIONING VARIABLES**
   When implementing a formal conditioning program, we're implementing movements that impact the body in a few different ways.
   a. Increasing the **strength** of a muscle concentrically and eccentrically, defined by the ability to move to end range while loaded and maintain 85% accuracy.
   b. Improving the **endurance** of the muscle, defined by the amount of repetitions or duration an exercise can be performed while still maintaining 85% proper alignment.
   c. Increasing the **flexibility** of a muscle.
   d. Improving **body awareness** of the dog.

2. **PROGRESSION**
   We progress an exercise in one of two ways...
   a. **Building strength & endurance:** Asking for more repetitions / longer duration before resting. (a through c above)
   b. **Challenging coordination:** Asking a dog for more precision movement, challenging posture, increasing balance demands and/or increasing the complexity of an exercise. (d above)

3. **FLUENCY**
   We measure the readiness of the dog to progress by assessing **fluency**, which is a measurement of how consistently the dog is able to correctly execute when meeting the challenge of maximum repetitions x sets (defined for each exercise).

   A dog is considered "fluent" and ready to progress within an exercise (adding repetitions or duration), or progress to the next exercise variation when…
   a. **Maximum repetitions** x sets has been reached
   b. **85% accuracy** is maintained throughout
   c. **Arousal level is maintained** (no significant increase or decrease in arousal)

4. **TRAIN THE DOG IN FRONT OF YOU**
   Some dogs will need many sessions of a specific exercise to meet the required strength/flexibility or coordination benchmarks before progressing to the next level. In other exercises, only one or two sessions may be necessary before progressing. Recording, and assessing the video of your exercise protocol can reveal valuable information, and help you determine when it is appropriate to progress.

5. **HOW TO BUILD REPETITIONS**

A typical conservative strength / endurance progression schedule would be...

       5 reps x 3 sets
       7 reps, 7 reps, 5 reps
       10 reps, 7 reps, 7 reps
       10 reps, 10 reps, 7 reps
       10 reps x 3 sets

So when building reps this can be a helpful guide. There's no downside to progressing conservatively, aside from the fact that it takes more time. Conversely, progressing too quickly can lead to frustration, a loss of precision, and incorrect muscle recruitment.

NOTE: Change in arousal level, increase or decrease, is the first indicator of mental and/or physical fatigue. Taking a short break (30 seconds to 1 min) with a cookie scatter, or down-stay can help manage arousal levels.

6. **MANAGING CIRCUITS**

Not all exercises within a circuit will be progressed at the same time. But as a general guide, I try not to straddle more than 2 circuits at the same time.

    a. **Example:** If my dog has reached fluency in 3 out of 4 exercises in Circuit 1, I would progress to Circuit 2, and also continue to implement the slow to develop exercise from Circuit 1. But I WOULD NOT progress to the exercises in Circuit 3 until the exercise from Circuit 1 was fluent.

    b. If we progress only the skills the dog is naturally good at, and neglect the skills they struggle with, we will end up running into a **"bottleneck"** as the circuits progress. This could be a skills bottleneck, strength/endurance bottleneck or a flexibility bottleneck. So the exercises the dog struggles with the most are actually the most important to focus on!

    c. **NOTE:** Puppies with growing bodies may need to return to previous progressions of an exercise when experiencing growth spurts. Past understanding of where their body parts are in space may not be applicable when the legs are suddenly several inches longer!! Patience pays off during these growing times!

7. **REMEMBER**

Static **before** Dynamic
Isolated **before** Integrated
Stable **before** Unstable
Form **drives** Function

Senior Specific Guidelines

1. **Arousal**
   Increased arousal and overarousal can result as much from a mental challenge as from a physical challenge… So we want to be on the lookout for increasing or decreasing arousal levels when implementing conditioning exercises. Brains can't think or learn very well when overly taxed… either by complexity of an exercise (having to hold many thoughts in the mind at once) or physical challenge, fatigue and adrenaline. Both situations can result in an adrenalized state, where learning doesn't happen well. Some signs of overarousal are… Moving quickly, offering other behaviors, vocalization, taking the cookie hard, general feeling of frantic movement, etc. Conversely, underarousal can manifest as looking away, leaving, freezing/standing still, offering easier movements, etc. If we are seeing any of these things, taking a short break (30 sec to 1 min) can be helpful.

2. **Moving Slowly**
   Moving slowly requires significantly more effort in the joint stabilizers than moving quickly, and helps the dog to break their "habitual movement patterns" and implement correct movement patterns instead. Slow movement, particularly in the eccentric phase (where the dog is resisting gravity) can help improve flexibility without compromising stability.

3. **Brain Training**
   Most dogs just starting out on their conditioning adventure are dealing with learned compensatory movement patterns that are automatic. Along with moving slowly, we will be using props to "force" proper alignment, so the dog learns to move differently. This gives us a chance to reinforce/build value to proper mechanics, and increases the likelihood these new mechanics will be implemented in the real world. Muscles that fire together wire together… so this process of conditioning is just as much about training the brain as it is the body.

4. **Avoid Lumbar Spine Extension**
   Lumbar spine extension is contraindicated for many common issues in canines, it's something we want to be on the lookout for, and avoid as much as possible. If you are seeing any spine extension in your pup, it may mean your placement of reward is too high, or your prop set up needs adjusting.

   For more on what spine extension looks like, and other helpful anatomical terminology, please see this Canine Anatomy: Glossary of Terms I wrote a blog post about.

5. **Spine Angle 45° or lower**

    With dogs not competing in sports, we want to be mindful of loading into the rear end/raising the height of the front end to avoid overloading the lumbar spine and hips. There may be some exercises that demonstrate a spine angle higher than 45°. In those instances, we may want to adjust the prop set up to keep the spine at 45° or lower to reduce the challenge level. This is especially important for long backed dogs, or dogs with degenerative changes in the spine, hips, stifle or rear toes.

6. **Exit Props Carefully**

    When delivering a reward, we want to help your pup exit the props gently. In some of the videos I might toss a cookie to reset. I feel confident doing that because I know my dogs are controlled. That's not the case in all situations. We don't want any slipping or sliding to an abrupt stop when following a thrown cookie. If control is still being learned, I will often toss the cookie closer to my dogs to reduce speed, and then toss another to help them move into position to set up for the next repetition.

7. **What's Rewarded will be Repeated**

    To change default posture, or engrained habitual mechanics we need to reward new mechanics. In the beginning, that will likely mean trying to "exaggerate" these new mechanics through placement of reward, prop setup, etc. Over time, we should start to see these new mechanics be offered automatically, because they have become a consistent way to receive a reward. BUT this needs to be rewarded heavily to help create the lightbulb moment for the dog.

8. **Progress not Perfection**

    It can be challenging to implement new movement mechanics, and target underutilized muscles. This is especially true when we are dealing with a chronic issue or injury. Like learning to use your non-dominant hand to perform a fine motor skill, the first attempt at a skill is very likely to be clumsy, and inaccurate. REWARD ANYWAY! Rewarding the attempt will communicate to the dog that they are on the right track. It's a trap to hold out for perfection.

Zone Focus » Foot Strength

The **Foot Strength Focus Circuits** target the musculature that runs from the lower fore and rear limb, through the carpus / tarsus and into the feet. Feet are the foundation of the body. They are the FIRST interface between the ground and the dog. As such, these muscles represent the first opportunity for the dog to intake input from the surface, make adjustments, and respond to changing variables. This is especially important in senior dogs, and helps to maintain good balance, and body awareness. Keeping the foot muscles strong is critical to ensuring proper alignment of the limbs, and avoiding compensation up the kinetic chain. Ingraining proper alignment into the nervous system (which starts with the feet) ensures forces are transferred through the joints correctly and avoids overstressing the cartilage and ligaments that surround the joints.

This graphic shows the main musculature targeted by the exercises in this zone.

While each progression is intentionally weighted to affect a specific area, the body is a system and everything must work together to ensure proper biomechanics. So I've organized each circuit in the Zone Focus Track so the workout is safe, balanced and appropriately integrated.

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1. PawPod Carpal Bias: Intermediate

Variation 1: Bias
Stillness for 20 seconds rewarding every 2-3 seconds to encourage weight shift forward and toe grip.

Release from props

Repeat x 3 sets

Building to: 1 repetition of 60 seconds

Variation 2: Neutral
Forward Weight shifting
5 reps x 3 sets
Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Variation 3: Reverse Bias
Forward Weight shifting
5 reps x 3 sets
Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When an appropriate amount of carpal strength has been developed, and the dog's carpal angulation has improved, or after the dog has met the maximum requirements in Variation 3 (whichever comes first).

Note: If the weight of the body is too heavy for the musculature in the feet to properly engage, no amount of exercise is going to help. The weight has to be decreased to a manageable level in order for the pup to use proper form and target the correct musculature. This is why we elevate the front feet… to intentionally shift weight out of the front into the rear. You should be able to see the foot changing shape (like a kitten clawing) as the toe muscles engage.

Goal: To incrementally strengthen the musculature of the foot.

2. Manual Leg Lift: Intermediate

Lift each leg and hold for 5 seconds.

Building to: 3 continuous sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to stand still / no foot movement, with a neutral spine for maximum reps.

Note: Weight into the handler should be very light. Expect the limb diagonal the lifted limb to get "light" or offload. That's normal/correct. Notice if the dog is resistant to lifting one limb specifically, or if the alignment of the topline changes. This indicates an underlying imbalance, and this exercise should not yet be progressed.

Goal: Strengthens the hip and shoulder stabilizers, and tests for muscle imbalance.

3. Adducted Stand: Beginner

Stillness: 10 sec
Release off props
Repeat x 3

Building to: Horizontal Head nods:
3 to the right
3 to the left

Repeat for 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets, and is able to maintain alignment and stillness with 85% accuracy.

Note: PawPod under rear feet ONLY. Front feet stable and separated shoulders width. If the dog is struggling initially, 2 pods pushed together can be substituted for the single pod.

Goal: Maintain adductor engagement and equal rear foot contact with pod.

4. Weight Shifting: Beginner

3 presses x 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat on other side
Release from equipment.
Repeat x 2

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is consistently and happily leaning back into the handler pressure, maintaining foot position, demonstrating a neutral or mostly neutral top line, and can meet max repetition x set requirements.

Note: Pay extra attention to the amount of pressure you're able to apply, and if there's a difference between the sides. Try and note on a scale of 1-10. 1 being almost no pressure. 10 being pressing as hard as you can.

Goal: Building value to the dog leaning back into the handler. Challenges hip and shoulder adductors/abductors and core muscles (including the psoas) on the side opposite handler pressure.

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5. Dig Dig: Beginner

3-5 seconds x 5 reps

Building to: 30 seconds straight x 3 reps for mature dogs.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is digging until the terminal marker ("yes" or reward delivery), without needing much encouragement.

Note: Dogs who are more toy driven can take advantage of that and use a toy to build drive in this exercise.

Goal: Think of this as a sprint workout. The ultimate goal is high speed, high energy output, fast rhythm, and short duration. Strengthens the front end, specifically the musculature in the shoulder, elbow and carpus/pastern.

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Zone Focus » Core

The **Core Focus Circuits** target the musculature that stabilizes the scapula, spine, and pelvis, helping the dog maintain alignment integrity and promoting optimal biomechanics. Without a strong core, the limbs are not able to function as effectively. For Senior Dogs maintaining a strong core helps minimize compensation in the limbs, and promotes the best biomechanics possible. Using proper mechanics minimizes the stress on the joints and spine, and can prolong quality of life.

This graphic shows the main musculature targeted by the exercises in this zone.

While each progression is intentionally weighted to affect a specific area, the body is a system and everything must work together to ensure proper biomechanics. So I've organized each circuit in the Zone Focus Track so the workout is safe, balanced and appropriately integrated.

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1. Weight Shifting: Beginner

3 presses x 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat on other side
Release from equipment.
Repeat x 2

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is consistently and happily leaning back into the handler pressure, maintaining foot position, demonstrating a neutral or mostly neutral top line, and can meet max repetition x set requirements.

Note: Pay extra attention to the amount of pressure you're able to apply, and if there's a difference between the sides. Try and note on a scale of 1-10. 1 being almost no pressure. 10 being pressing as hard as you can.

Goal: Building value to the dog leaning back into the handler. Challenges hip and shoulder adductors/abductors and core muscles (including the psoas) on the side opposite handler pressure.

---

2. Plank Tutorial: Beginner

Rear feet elevated to carpus height only.

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is comfortable moving to 85% of full hip extension

Note: ALWAYS release from the counterpose position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Goal: Strengthens the core stabilizers including the iliopsoas. Rear feet should stay still throughout. Even weight bearing through the rear limbs is a priority over maximum range.

---

3. [Epaxial Strengthening Series: Beginner](#)

Stillness: 10 sec
Vertical Head Nods: 5
Weight Shifting: 3 per side
Release off props

Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to:
Stillness: 30 sec
Vertical Head Nods: 10
Weight Shifting: 10 per side
One set ONLY

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is executing all components in a single set, with 85% accuracy, and a consistent level of arousal.

Goal: Specifically targets the epaxial muscles, and improves spinal alignment.

---

4. [Sit- Walk Forward Down- Stand: Intermediate](#)

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When a pup is through their big growth spurt, and can keep the rear feet staying still 85% accuracy. This is especially challenging in the transition from Stand to Rock Back Sit.

Note: If the spine is getting "squished" on the transition from Sit to Down, your reward placement may be too close to the dog. Conversely, if the rear feet are moving during that transition, your reward placement may be too far away.

Goal: Rear feet staying still throughout. Neutral spine alignment in the Stand, Sit and Down. Strengthens the large movers through the front and rear end and improves proprioception through the rear end.

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Senior Dog » Core Strength Circuit 2
2-3 x a week, alternating with Circuit 1b, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

2. Weight Shifting: Intermediate

Variation 1: Unstable surface under the **front** feet

a. 5 presses x 3 reps
(all on one side)
b. Repeat pressing on the other shoulder.
c. Release from equipment.
d. Repeat x 2 total

Variation 2: Unstable surface under the **rear** feet

a. 5 presses x 3 reps
(all on one side)
b. Repeat pressing on the other shoulder.
c. Release from equipment.
d. Repeat x 2 total

Building to:
15 presses on one side
15 presses on the other side
Stay on props
Repeat x 3

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is maintaining a neutral spine (no side bending), and resisting with an 8/10 pressure on both sides for max reps.

Note: Pay extra attention to the amount of pressure you're able to apply, and if there's a difference between the sides. Try and note on a scale of 1-10. 1 being almost no pressure. 10 being pressing as hard as you can.

Goal: Challenges hip and shoulder adductors/abductors (including the psoas). Functional core strength. Particularly good for rebalancing the iliopsoas.

2. <u>Plank Tutorial: Beginner</u> » This is the same

Rear feet elevated to carpus height only.

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is comfortable moving to 85% of full hip extension

Note: ALWAYS release from the counterpose position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Goal: Strengthens the core stabilizers including the iliopsoas. Rear feet should stay still throughout. Even weight bearing through the rear limbs is a priority over maximum range.

3. <u>Epaxial Strengthening Series: Intermediate</u>

Vertical Head Nods: 5
Weight Shifting: 3
Single Rear Leg Lift: 3 per side
Release off props
Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to:
Vertical Head Nods: 10
Weight Shifting: 6 per side
Single Rear Leg Lift: 6 per side
Repeat x 2

Note:
1. For Senior Dogs, the spine angle should not be higher than 45°, so a slight adjustment to the props may be necessary. To achieve this, we can lower the height of the front feet, or raise the height of the rear feet.
2. The lifted leg should track straight forward, stifle facing forward. Allowing the lifted leg to abduct away from the midline will create a change in pelvic alignment. This should be avoided as much as possible. Using a target stick can be helpful.
3. A peanut is not necessary. Any stable surface that's an appropriate height can be substituted.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is executing all components with 85% accuracy, and a consistent level of arousal.

Goal: Increases the challenge by raising the height of the front foot target to the height of the withers, further loading the epaxials.

---

4. [Fold Back Down Tutorial: Beginner](#)

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to fold back while keeping the forelimb and tarsus synchronized, resulting in the elbow and point of the hock touching down simultaneously. A dog who is touching down with elbows first is not yet strong enough to progress.

Note: Handler motion should be toward the dog's nose vs downward to differentiate between a "Bow" type movement and a Fold Back Down. I think about putting the cookie into the dog's eyeball. Dogs who are going through their big growth spurt may not physically be able to execute this movement pattern due to bone length discrepancy inherent in this time.

Goal: Forelimbs and hocks lowering and lifting in tandem / while staying parallel throughout. Teaches coordinated mechanics between the thoracic limb and pelvic limb.

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Zone Focus » Shoulder

The **Shoulder Focus Circuits** target the musculature that stabilizes the shoulder joint, elbow and carpu. Because dogs lack a collar bone, this area is vulnerable and requires extra attention. The exercises in this zone help prepare the whole thoracic limb for the demands of life, including navigating stairs in a controlled manner, maintaining balance and confidence over unstable or unavoidable slick surfaces (like at the vet's office).

These graphics show the main musculature targeted by the exercises in this zone.

While each progression is intentionally weighted to affect a specific area, the body is a system and everything must work together to ensure proper biomechanics. So I've organized each circuit in the Zone Focus Track so the workout is safe, balanced and appropriately integrated.

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1. Shoulder Strength & Stability Series: Beginner

Stillness: 10 seconds
Head Nods Down: 5
Weight Shifting:
3 presses x 3 reps (all on one side)

Repeat presses on other side
Release from equipment

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is keeping all 4 feet still throughout, flexing the shoulder so the humerus is approx. horizontal, is demonstrating an even curve through the spine, and happily resisting the handler's pressure.

Note: NO head nods up here. Keep head low, so the neck and head follow the line of the spine.

Goal: 90° shoulder and elbow flexion (humerus approaching horizontal) during the head nods down. Easily resisting handler pressure during the weight shifting portion.

2. Deep Bow: Advanced

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to move to the end range without repositioning the front feet or removing one foot from the front foot target with 85% accuracy.

Note: Placement of reward is BELOW the height of the carpus,
That's what makes this a Deep Bow. Nose facing downward, as shown in this photo. Dog MUST start in an overstretched stand to allow space for the shoulder to extend and the scapula to rotate properly.
Goal: Continues to improve mobility through the shoulder, hip flexor and hamstring.

3. Ipsilateral Step Up: Intermediate

5 reps on each side x 3 reps

Note: There are two speeds shown in this video.
>**Learning Speed:** A reward is delivered while the free legs are on the ground, as well as on the Sitting Platforms.
>**Fluent Speed:** Free legs touching down is marked, but the reward is delivered once all 4 feet return to the Sitting Platforms. This increase in speed transitions the exercise to a more plyometric exercise, where the working muscles stay engaged throughout.

Building to: Fluent Speed 10 reps on each side x 2 sets

This variation uses a separate front and rear foot target to help refine foot placement and improve top line alignment. Foot targets should be about carpus height, or slightly higher.

Appropriate to progress: When the free legs are mostly synchronized, and the dog is executing to max reps with 85% accuracy.

Goal: Mostly synchronized movement, and a neutral spine in the stand. Targets the muscles along the medial and lateral aspect of the shoulder and hip, including the psoas.

4. Controlled Cone Wrap: Intermediate

5 single reps to the right
5 single reps to the left
Rest
Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to: Multi wrap (2 and then 3 wraps per rep)
3 repetitions of the multi wrap
Repeat going the other direction
Rest
Repeat for 3 sets total

Note: This is to be executed SLOWLY. For dogs trained to wrap a cone quickly, a reward may have to be used/tossed on the ground every ¼ wrap for a time until understanding is achieved. Then the reward can be offered every ½ wrap, and finally for a full wrap.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog's unique compensation pattern is replaced by correct movement / muscle recruitment for a triple wrap at maximum repetitions.

Goal: The intent of this exercise is to notice any asymmetry in the movement pattern, or the **individual pup's unique compensations**, and start to use neuromuscular reeducation to refine/correct the movement dysfunction. Notice if the dog is skipping steps or hopping, or executing a "teardrop shape" -vs- a round shape, and use the mark and reward to help build value to proper mechanics.

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5. [Backing Up: Beginner](#)

5 reps x 3 sets at 1-3 body lengths

Building to: 3 reps 20-30 feet depending on the size of the dog. Small dogs have a goal closer to 20ft. Large dogs closer to 30ft.

Note: Start with 1-2 body lengths. If the dog is managing well, increase distance by 1-2 body lengths each session.

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog is backing up straight, keeping head up, and stepping/not hopping. Then it is appropriate to increase distance. When the dog is executing for 20-30ft x 3 with 85% accuracy, they can safely progress to the next exercise.

Goal: Definitely focus on not hopping or overreaching with the rear feet. Improves mechanics through the PL. Strengthens gluteals, hamstrings and hip flexors and helps to integrate proper mechanics back into the gait.

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Zone Focus » Hip Strength

The **Hip Strength Focus Circuits** target the large musculature in the rear end. These muscles have a tendency to become weak as a dog ages. That weakness in the rear end leads to overuse of the front end, loss of confidence, and a declining quality of life. Implementing the exercises can help prevent a loss of strength, or help regain strength if a weakness is detected. Help your Senior Dog navigate a variety of surfaces, transition easily from a down to a stand, and maintain rear end stability as long as possible.

These graphics show the main musculature targeted by the exercises in this zone.

While each progression is intentionally weighted to affect a specific area, the body is a system and everything must work together to ensure proper biomechanics. So I've organized each circuit in the Zone Focus Track so the workout is safe, balanced and appropriately integrated.

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1. Rock Back Sit-Push Forward Stand: Beginner

5 reps x 2 Sets

Building to: 5 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is offering the behavior easily, hitting max reps, and keeping rear feet staying still with 85% accuracy.

Note: The correct movement pattern during the transition from stand to sit is stifle flexing during the transition to sit, and fully flexed before the second front foot comes onto the sitting platform. Notice if your dog is bringing both front feet down and THEN moving into the sit position

Goal: Building value to keeping rear feet still, while transitioning to the stand.

2. Pivot + Step Up: Intermediate

Front foot target about elbow height. Height of the rear foot target increased to ¾ hock height.

5 Passes
(Dog moving to the right and back to the left = 1 pass)
1 set only

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets, is able to precisely target, lift onto, and lower off the rear foot targets without stumbling, or losing balance.

Goal: Slow controlled movement. Precise targeting with the rear feet. When stepping onto and off of the rear foot target, we are looking for vertical movement more than horizontal movement.

---

3. Rear Leg Lift + Target Stick: Intermediate

Begin with a 1-2 second hold.
5 reps on one side
Release from props
Repeat for 3 sets total (same side)
Repeat on the other side

Building to:
5 second hold
3 reps on one side
Stay on props
Repeat for 3 sets total

Note: Front foot target set between elbow and shoulder height spine angle approximately 45°.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute confidently, without much flailing of the free limb, and meet the endurance challenge.

Goal: Holding the target position until the terminal marker, Increases the strength and endurance of the hip stabilizers on the grounded leg, particularly the middle glute and hamstring. Also strengthens the psoas isometrically / eccentrically.

4. Ipsilateral Foot Target + Weight Shifting: Beginner

Stillness 10 sec
Weight Shifting: 5 presses
Release from equipment
Repeat presses for 3 sets total
Repeat on the other side

Building to:
Stillness: 30 seconds
Weight Shifting: 15 presses
1 set only
Repeat on the other side

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain a neutral spine, is able to lean back into the handler pressure easily, and is meeting the maximum repetition requirement.

Note: Stable Surfaces Only. Foot targets positioned such that the standing and targeting legs are displaying a mild amount of abduction. Shoulders level. Pelvis level.

Goal: Neutral spine, with controlled abduction as the dog moves into position. The dog should be able to easily resist handler pressure.

---

5. Stepping Back: Beginner

5 reps

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is stepping backward, and off of the platform with confidence, and 85% of the repetitions are slow and straight.

Note: Make sure the platform is approximately ½ hock height, maybe a little more. Too low, and the dog won't be able to clearly differentiate when they're *on* the platform -vs- *off* the platform. Too high and the exercise will be too challenging.

Goal: Slow, intentional stepps, moving forward and back in a straight line. Minimal loss of balance. Prepares the body for more difficult variations.

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1. [Rock Back Sit-Push Forward Stand: Intermediate](#)

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog reaches 85% accuracy at maximum reps, and is moving with both front feet simultaneously during the concentric phase (transition from sit to stand).

Note:
1. Front foot target set at shoulder height (point of the shoulder, not the withers), so that the spine angle is about 45° or slightly lower.
2. A peanut does not have to be used. Any appropriately sized stable prop can be substituted.
3. The concentric phase (transition from sit to stand) will always "come together" and become more fluent first. It will take time for your pup to control the eccentric phase (slow resisting of gravity in the transition from stand to sit).

Goal: Transitioning from the front feet stepping up onto the front foot target to fully loading into the rear, with front feet moving simultaneously during the concentric phase (transition from sit to stand). Increases strength through the large muscles in the pelvic limb (PL), including the quadriceps, hamstrings, and gluteals.

2. [Pistol Squats: Advanced](#)

5 reps to the right
5 reps to the left
Release from equipment
Repeat x 3

Building to:
10 reps to the right

10 reps to the left
Release from equipment
Repeat x 3

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog is slowly lowering down with a mainly vertical movement vs stepping to the side with a lot of abduction. Free leg should land close to the rear foot target

Note: Spine angle about 45°. Rear foot target about ¾ hock height. Front foot target does not have to be unstable. Use whatever prop achieves the 45° spine angle. A lower front foot target can be used initially if needed to reduce the challenge.

Goal: Slow / controlled movement during the lowering phase is the goal. Strengthens the gluteals, psoas and core stabilizers in a more neutral hip alignment (which is muscularly more challenging than abduction/adduction).

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3. Mountain Climber Prep- Tutorial : Advanced

5 reps on the right
Release from props
5 reps on the left

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain a vertical grounded leg hock, a level pelvis, and is easily targeting the front foot target with minimal handler assistance.

Spine angle should be between 30° and 45°.

Note: This exercise provides a surprising challenge to the middle glute on the standing leg. Be on the lookout for hip hiking or side bending/ lateral spine flexion. Be quick to rest if this compensation appears, as it changes the muscle recruitment pattern.

Goal: Introduces the rear foot to prop movement pattern, which targets the hip and core stabilizers mentioned above, and prepares the dog physically and mentally for the progression exercise.

4. [Ipsilateral Foot Target + Weight Shifting: Intermediate](#)

1:12 of this video

Stillness 10 sec
Weight Shifting: 5 presses
Release from equipment
Repeat presses for 3 sets total
Repeat on the other side

Building to:
Stillness: 30 seconds
Weight Shifting: 15 presses
1 set only
Repeat on the other side

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain a neutral spine, is able to lean back into the handler pressure easily, and is meeting the maximum repetition requirement.

Note: Unstable Surface under lifted legs. Foot targets positioned such that the standing and targeting legs are displaying a mild amount of abduction. Shoulders level. Pelvis level.

Goal: Neutral spine, with controlled abduction as the dog moves into position. The dog should be able to easily resist handler pressure.

5. [Stepping Forward-Stepping Back: Intermediate](#)

5 reps

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is reliably backing up straight/not off the side of the platform, and stepping back off the platform in a controlled manner with 85% accuracy, while maintaining arousal level.

Note: Keep hands low when transitioning from the position shown here in the top photo to the position shown in the second photo to help your pup not sit.

Goal: Slow, intentional stepps, moving forward and back in a straight line. Minimal loss of balance.

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Zone Focus » Mobility

The **Mobility Focus Circuits** target general mobility throughout the entire body, and implement Active Range of Motion or aROM. aROM is preferred over passive stretches, and it allows the dog to determine depth, ensuring we don't unintentionally over stretch an area and create a pain spiral for our Senior Dog.

Another benefit of aROM over passive methods, is the dog is still working. aROM exercises use eccentric contraction to work the muscle in the lengthening phase, as the dog slowly resists gravity. This method is the safest method to implement for home use.

These graphics show the main musculature targeted by the exercises in this zone… Which you'll notice is the entire body.

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1. Turning on a Plank: Beginner

A. Phase 1: 5 repetitions in one direction. Releasing off the platform between reps. Repeat going the other direction

Repeat x 3 sets

B. Phase 2: Link the turns together., 4 cycles through (1 cycle equals turning right & turning left)

Building to: 3 sets of the phase 2 variation.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily keeping all 4 feet on the plank, demonstrating coordination, and somewhat anticipating the cookie will appear at the other end, and moving in that direction. If a coordination deficit was detected, this exercise can be carried forward and added to the next circuit.

Note: Try and have the new cookie in position before the pup is done eating the first cookie. That makes for more of a reward and less of a lure, ensure the brain is driving the movement -vs- the stomach.

Goal: Teaches body awareness, promotes flexibility, and strengthens the hip and shoulder stabilizers.

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2. Deep Bow: Advanced

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to move to the end range without repositioning the front feet or removing one foot from the front foot target with 85% accuracy.

Note: Placement of reward is BELOW the height of the carpus, That's what makes this a Deep Bow. Nose facing downward, as shown in this photo. Dog MUST start in an overstretched stand to allow space for the shoulder to extend and the scapula to rotate properly.

Goal: Continues to improve mobility through the shoulder, hip flexor and hamstring.

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3. Head Nods: Beginner

Up: 3
Down: 3
Right: 3
Left: 3

Repeat for 1 set only

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to keep all 4 feet still, and move to the end range, without repositioning or losing balance. And is able to achieve 85% precision for 3 sets total.

Note: Because we are asking for maximum range of motion, any change in behavior or arousal should be seen as fatigue not disobedience. Resting off the props for 30 seconds to 1 min is usually sufficient.

Lastly, not all dogs will have the available range demonstrated in the video, age, breed, confidence, etc will all play a part in how far the individual pup can move. Working within your pup's available range, and deepening slowly (if appropriate) is important.

Goal: Tests the dog's ability to keep feet still while moving the head / neck. Highlights coordination deficit between the sides. Strengthens the hip and shoulder stabilizers against micro movements, and improves mobility through the neck and shoulder.

4. Plank Tutorial: Beginner

Rear feet elevated to carpus height only.

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is comfortable moving to 85% of full hip extension

Note: ALWAYS release from the counterpose position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Goal: Strengthens the core stabilizers including the iliopsoas. Rear feet should stay still throughout. Even weight bearing through the rear limbs is a priority over maximum range.

5. Standing Side Bend: Advanced

Nose to Hip: 5 reps
Nose to Rear Foot: 5 reps
Nose to Loin: 5 reps
Repeat on the second side.

Building to: 2 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When symmetry is displayed on both sides, in all 3 variations, and the dog is able to maintain rear end position without much assistance from the handler.

NOTE: Initially, the handler should assist in providing pelvic stability. The dog should assume responsibility for pelvic stability over time. Also, a nose to hand target can be substituted for the cookie at the hip, rear foot and loin if this becomes too calorically expensive. Notice and note the difference between the sides.

Goal: Improves spinal mobility and stability through the whole length of the spine, and addresses right to left muscle imbalance (strength and / or flexibility).

Nose to hip

Nose to foot

Nose to loin

6. Intro to Cavaletti (Part 3): Intermediate

Progression 1:
3 passes x 3 sets

Building to:
Progression 2:
5 passes x 3 sets

Building to:
Progression 3:
10 passes x 3 sets

(down and back=1 pass)

Appropriate to progress: ONLY add more passes when 85% fluency is achieved. This includes focus away from the handler / independent execution, no ticking / knocking the poles and entering the poles with an appropriate amount of speed control. Adding too many repetitions too quickly will result in degradation of form from mental and/or physical fatigue.

Goal: Consistent independent execution. Introduces the beginning of plyometric exercise in a controlled manner to reduce overtaxing the system.

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CANINE CONDITIONING COACH.COM

Other Programs Available

CCC Puppy Program
CCC Beginner Program
CCC Strong Dog Program
CCC Sport Dog Program
CCC Sloppy Sitters Mini-Program
CCC Post Spay Mini-Program
CCC Postnatal Mini-Program
CCC Post TPLO Mini Program

Post TPLO Mini-Program

» All Circuits

Underwhelmed by the "Standard Protocol", 8 weeks of highly restricted activity and then suddenly allowing a full force return to activity?? Yeah, me too. That would never be the advice for a human recovering from such an extensive surgery.

Help guide your best pup back to function and protect the stifle, patellar tendon and meniscus. Implementing a structured loading protocol properly prepares the tissues in the pelvic limb, so your pup can return to "normal" without risking another set back.

It's impossible to completely eliminate the risk of rupture on the other side... Or to guarantee a compensatory injury won't happen. Anyone making that claim is overstating what fitness/rehab can do. BUT this is your best shot. And if your pup does sustain another injury because of genetics, a freak accident, or a sport related overload... they will be strong, and well trained to recover again... and YOU will be trained to help them in the best way possible.

*To be implemented starting 8 weeks post TPLO or after bone healing has been confirmed, with clearance from your vet.

Table of Contents

This is a **dynamic** table of contents. When clicked, the listings below will take you directly to that Page, Circuit or Exercise. Pretty nifty! Also, this document is formatted to allow you to search for a word or phrase. Use the shortcut "command + F" on a Mac or "control + F" on a PC to open the search box.

MindMap » A visual representation

You'll begin with either the **Pre-Program Circuit** or **Circuit 1** depending on your pup's existing skill set.
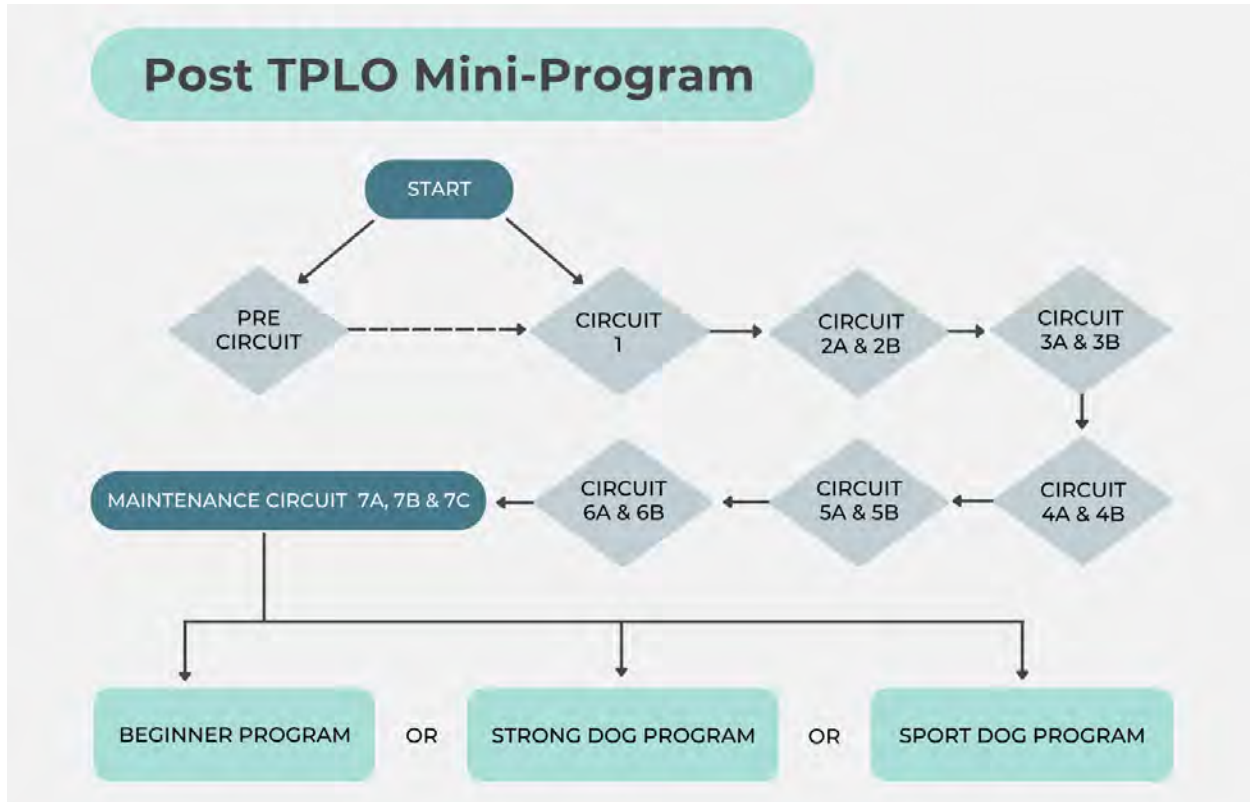
The **Pre-Program Circuit** will give you and your pup the necessary foundation skills to be successful. After the Pre-Program Circuit you will move to **Circuit 1** and build those exercises to fluency.

Beginning with **Circuit 2a & 2b**, You'll be alternating between the exercises contained in the two circuits. Depending on your individual schedule, and how well your girl is handling the exercises physically and mentally, you could implement each circuit once or twice a week, resulting in 4 workouts a week max. This protocol will likely take 6-7 months to work through to fluency.

It is likely the beginning circuits will take longer to work through than the following circuits, due to the inherent learning curve. These are the most important exercises in your program, and lay the foundation for all exercises to come. If these are taught to fluency, and mastered, the remaining circuits will progress much more quickly. Fast is slow and smooth is fast!
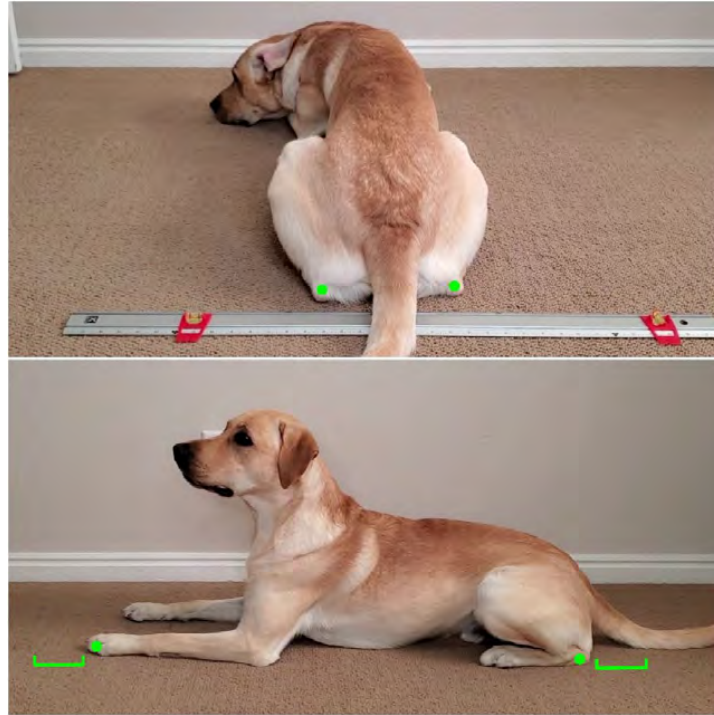
Equipment needed for this program

➔ 2-4 Sitting Platforms

➔ 1 Standing Platform

➔ 1 Plyo Box, Klimb or other stable elevated surface (about the height of the point of the shoulder)

➔ 1 Cato Board, Wobble Board or large square platform

➔ 4 Rubber Feed Bowls or stable foot targets

➔ 4 PawPods (TotoFit, Flexiness or BOSU are my preferred brands)

➔ 2 Propel Air Platforms, 2 FitBones or 2 Discs

➔ 6-10 pole cavaletti set

➔ 2 Large-ish traffic cones or other similar pylon

➔ Peanut + Holder or BOSU Ball (Optional)

How to measure for Platforms

Here's a graphic to help you measure for your sitting and standing platforms if you don't already have those.

Sitting Platform: Width, is the measurement between the point of the hocks (shown in the top portion of the photo). Length is 1.5-2x the width.

Standing Platform: Width is the measurement between the point of the hocks (the same as the Sitting Platform). Length is the measurement shown in the bottom portion of the attached photo, plus a little bit extra. For a medium-large size dog 3-4 inches extra in the front, and 3-4 inches extra in the rear is sufficient. Tiny dogs need less "extra space". Giant dogs need a bit more.

Foot Targets: Width is the measurement between the point of the hocks (the same as the Sitting Platform). Length is about half the width measurement.

For more specific instructions, I wrote a 3 part blog series that covers the difference between the various types of platforms, how to measure for each, and how to build them yourself. You can see these on my website.

Progression Tips & Considerations

1. **CONDITIONING VARIABLES**
   When implementing a formal conditioning program, we're implementing movements that impact the body in a few different ways.
   a. Increasing the **strength** of a muscle concentrically and eccentrically, defined by the ability to move to end range while loaded and maintain 85% accuracy.
   b. Improving the **endurance** of the muscle, defined by the amount of repetitions or duration an exercise can be performed while still maintaining 85% proper alignment.
   c. Increasing the **flexibility** of a muscle.
   d. Improving **body awareness** of the dog.

2. **PROGRESSION**
   We progress an exercise in one of two ways...
   a. **Building strength & endurance:** Asking for more repetitions / longer duration before resting. (a through c above)
   b. **Challenging coordination:** Asking a dog for more precision movement, challenging posture, increasing balance demands and/or increasing the complexity of an exercise. (d above)

3. **FLUENCY**
   We measure the readiness of the dog to progress by assessing **fluency**, which is a measurement of how consistently the dog is able to correctly execute when meeting the challenge of maximum repetitions x sets (defined for each exercise).

   A dog is considered "fluent" and ready to progress within an exercise (adding repetitions or duration), or progress to the next exercise variation when…
   a. **Maximum repetitions** x sets has been reached
   b. **85% accuracy** is maintained throughout
   c. **Arousal level is maintained** (no significant increase or decrease in arousal)

4. **TRAIN THE DOG IN FRONT OF YOU**
   Some dogs will need many sessions of a specific exercise to meet the required strength/flexibility or coordination benchmarks before progressing to the next level. In other exercises, only one or two sessions may be necessary before progressing. Recording, and assessing the video of your exercise protocol can reveal valuable information, and help you determine when it is appropriate to progress.

5. HOW TO BUILD REPETITIONS

A typical conservative strength / endurance progression schedule would be...

5 reps x 3 sets
7 reps, 7 reps, 5 reps
10 reps, 7 reps, 7 reps
10 reps, 10 reps, 7 reps
10 reps x 3 sets

So when building reps this can be a helpful guide. There's no downside to progressing conservatively, aside from the fact that it takes more time. Conversely, progressing too quickly can lead to frustration, a loss of precision, and incorrect muscle recruitment.

NOTE: Change in arousal level, increase or decrease, is the first indicator of mental and/or physical fatigue. Taking a short break (30 seconds to 1 min) with a cookie scatter, or down-stay can help manage arousal levels.

6. MANAGING CIRCUITS

Not all exercises within a circuit will be progressed at the same time. But as a general guide, I try not to straddle more than 2 circuits at the same time.

a. **Example:** If my dog has reached fluency in 3 out of 4 exercises in Circuit 1, I would progress to Circuit 2, and also continue to implement the slow to develop exercise from Circuit 1. But I WOULD NOT progress to the exercises in Circuit 3 until the exercise from Circuit 1 was fluent.

b. If we progress only the skills the dog is naturally good at, and neglect the skills they struggle with, we will end up running into a **"bottleneck"** as the circuits progress. This could be a skills bottleneck, strength/endurance bottleneck or a flexibility bottleneck. So the exercises the dog struggles with the most are actually the most important to focus on!

c. **NOTE:** Puppies with growing bodies may need to return to previous progressions of an exercise when experiencing growth spurts. Past understanding of where their body parts are in space may not be applicable when the legs are suddenly several inches longer!! Patience pays off during these growing times!

7. REMEMBER

Static **before** Dynamic
Isolated **before** Integrated
Stable **before** Unstable
Form **drives** Function

TPLO Specific Guidelines

1. **Pre-Program**
   For dogs new to conditioning, I've also included a **Pre-Program Circuit.** This circuit covers the Foundation and Beginner exercises needed to execute the Post TPLO program well, and ensure proper muscle recruitment. If your dog has not completed the Puppy, Beginner Program, or one of the full CCC Programs, **please begin with the Pre-Program Circuit.**

2. **Reset Cookie**
   When using a "reset cookie" it's critical that your pup doesn't run and dive to find the cookie. I find using an "off cookie" and then tossing a few reset cookies within 1 body length of the dog is a better approach. Less distance between the cookie and dog equals less speed.

3. **Stable is Critical**
   Make sure the equipment you use is absolutely not going to flip. A fall type injury now, could be catastrophic.I use the rubber feed bowls with Hot Rod, my BC because she is exceptionally mindful, and I am 100% confident she will not be crazy. Wooden platforms, garden pavers or other completely stable surfaces might be a better choice for your pup.

4. **Focus on Form**
   If you notice an increase in offloading, or a reluctance to flex the stifle or tibiotarsal joint (hock), it's likely you're asking for too many repetitions, progressing too quickly, or implementing too many exercises on the same day. Slow and steady is the best method here. Fast is slow. Smooth is fast. We want to avoid setbacks if possible.

5. **Walk. Walk. Walk.**
   Definitely continue with your walking protocol. By 8 weeks post-op your pup should have built up to three 25 min walks a day. You can start to combine into longer walks, as long as your pup isn't limping. I liked using the "loop method", which includes walking around 1 block (or area) several times… That way if my pup started to get sore, I could stop and wasn't too far from home. So making several smaller loops vs one big loop. Once I was confident Hot Rod could handle a set duration, I switched to a single loop, which Hot Rod much preferred.

6. **Rapid Deceleration is Dangerous**

Please be careful of stairs, as well as rapid deceleration. The way the patellar tendon has to absorb these forces is different than pre-op, because of the change in the angulation of the tibial plateau, and joint mechanics. Patellar tendonitis/ tendonosis is extremely difficult to treat and recover from. Collection and deceleration are both covered in circuits 6 and 7. Until then please help your pup avoid overloading the patellar tendon by managing their activity.

7. **Don't beat yourself up**

It's impossible to completely eliminate the risk of rupture on the other side… Or to guarantee a compensatory injury won't happen. Anyone making that claim is overstating what fitness/rehab can do. **But** this is your best shot. And if your pup does sustain another injury because of genetics, a freak injury, or a sport related overload… they will be strong, and well trained to recover again. YOU will be trained to help them in the best way possible… And you'll know you did everything you possibly could to prevent reinjury.

8. **Definitely take notes!!**

Keeping track of reps x sets, how your pup handled the exercise, where they were amazing AND where they struggled will provide an objective record of your progress. I guarantee there will be days where you will over-do, get overwhelmed, and misremember your progress. Having notes to review is invaluable, especially if you encounter a setback. Take an extra minute to record each session as it's happening. Include the date, reps x sets, and if there was anything remarkable either positive or negative. It doesn't have to be complicated.

Pre-Program Circuit
3-4 x a week, for 2 weeks or until Fluency

1. [Front Foot Target: Foundation](#)

0:20 of this video

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: An enthusiastic front foot target. We are looking for the dog to demonstrate understanding more than executing a high level of repetitions.

Appropriate to progress: Stay with this exercise until the dog is able to execute happily 10/10 times over 2 sets..

Note: Skimping on this step will likely lead to difficulty in the future. Notice how placement of the reset cookie, placement of reward and handler position influence the dog and increase the likelihood of success.

Goal: Front feet on target. Alignment and posture adjustments will come later as the exercises progress.

2. [Rear Foot Targeting: Foundation](#)

A. Walking forward method 0:44 of this video (left column)

5 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is easily / consistently navigating the prop, and stopping with the front feet off the target and rear feet on.

B. Transitioning to walking backward method 1:22 of this video (right column)

1-2 steps backward

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 3-4 steps backward 5 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: when the dog is happily and consistently stepping back onto the target without deviating or bending the spine

Goal: Building value to automatically stepping backward/reaching backward with the rear feet.
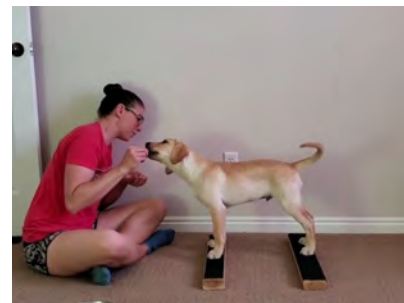
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3. [Square Stand: Foundation](#)

5 reps x 2 sets

Initial goal: 3 seconds before releasing

Ultimate goal: 5 seconds before releasing
Building to: 5 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily targeting the front and rear foot targets, and adjusting into position automatically, with minimal reluctance.

Note: Ideal alignment has the forelimbs and hocks vertically aligned, but this posture can be too challenging right in the beginning. It's ok to shorten the space between the front foot target and rear foot target slightly in the very beginning during the learning phase. This should be adjusted relatively quickly in grown dogs.

Goal: Introduces the concept of front foot targeting plus rear foot targeting simultaneously. Begins to strengthen the postural muscles (stabilizers) and core in neutral alignment to promote proper alignment.

4. Front Foot Target to Elevated Perch: Foundation

2:18 of this video

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: An enthusiastic front foot target. We are looking for the dog to demonstrate understanding more than executing a high level of repetitions.

Appropriate to progress: Stay with this exercise until the dog is able to execute happily 10/10 times.

Front foot target should be slightly less than elbow height.

Note: Skimping on this step will likely lead to difficulty in the future. Notice how placement of the reset cookie, placement of reward and handler position influence the dog and increase the likelihood of success.

Goal: This exercise lays the foundation for many exercises to follow. Teaches body awareness and targeting skills. Shifts weight into rear by elevating the front feet.
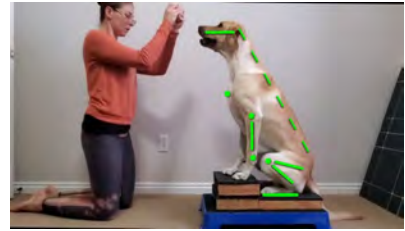
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5. Posture Sit: Beginner

30 seconds - 1 min

Repeat x 3

Building to: 1 set for 3 min straight

Appropriate to progress: When your pup is able to maintain proper posture for 3 min

Goal: We're looking for proper posture through the spine, and proper alignment through the rear legs. If 30 seconds is too long for your pup to maintain proper alignment OR continue to adjust into correct alignment (as detailed in the video) you may need sets shorter than 30 seconds. Functional core challenge. Improves posture. Corrects a sloppy Sit. Fosters neuromuscular re-education. Appropriate for pups of all ages.

6. [Pivot: Foundation](#)

2:48 of this video

5 passes (Stepping to the right approx. 3 steps and back =1 pass)

Reward for each step.

Building to: 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily moving in both directions and responding to minimal / not exaggerated handler motion.

Note: Front feet elevated about ½ elbow height

Goal: Teaches rear end awareness, and builds value for each individual step to prevent rushing. Strengthens the gluteals, hamstrings and quadriceps by raising the height of the front feet and shifting weight into the rear. Sidestepping also strengthens the outer hip and inner thigh muscles (abductors and adductors).

Notes:

Notes:

Circuit 1
3-4 x a week, for 2 weeks or until Fluency

1. Posture Sit: Beginner

30 seconds - 1 min

Repeat x 3

Building to: 1 set for 3 min straight

Appropriate to progress: When your pup is able to maintain proper posture for 3 min

Goal: We're looking for proper posture through the spine, and proper alignment through the rear legs. If 30 seconds is too long for your pup to maintain proper alignment OR continue to adjust into correct alignment (as detailed in the video) you may need sets shorter than 30 seconds. Functional core challenge. Improves posture. Corrects a sloppy Sit. Fosters neuromuscular re-education. Appropriate for pups of all ages.

2. Sit-Walk Forward Down: Beginner

5 reps x 2 sets

Building to:
Growing dogs: 5 reps x3 sets
Grown dogs: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When a pup is through their big growth spurt, or when the toes / hocks / stifle are maintained in neutral alignment/pointed straight ahead throughout, and is able to execute max reps with 85% fluency.

Note: This exercise will be challenging as we start to increase the degree of flexion in the stifle joint. Maintaining square pelvic alignment is important. Prioritize squareness over a full down initially.

Goal: Targets the hip and stifle stabilizers, and begins to challenge range of motion in the stifle.

3. [Teaching Stillness: Beginner](#)

5 reps x 3 sets

Literally begin with asking for a single second only.

Reward BEFORE the dog moves. It is critical to build reward history without overasking. If your dog does happen to move, that means you overasked. No biggie! Just toss a reset cookie and begin again.

Building to: 5 seconds one second at a time. Stick with max 5 seconds for the first several sessions until fluency is achieved. Increase the duration 1-2 seconds at a time

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain stillness for 20 seconds x 3 sets. Release from props between sets

Note: When progressing this exercise… Either ask for duration OR a new piece of equipment OR a new body position. And when making something harder, something else has to be made easier.

Goal: Building value to stillness, and teaching the dog that standing still is a rewarding behavior that PAYS! Prioritize stillness over duration.

---

4. [Stepping Back: Beginner](#)

5 reps

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is stepping backward, and off of the platform with confidence, and 85% of the repetitions are slow and straight.

Note: Make sure the platform is approximately ½ hock height, maybe a little more. Too low, and the dog won't be able to clearly differentiate when they're *on* the platform -vs- *off*
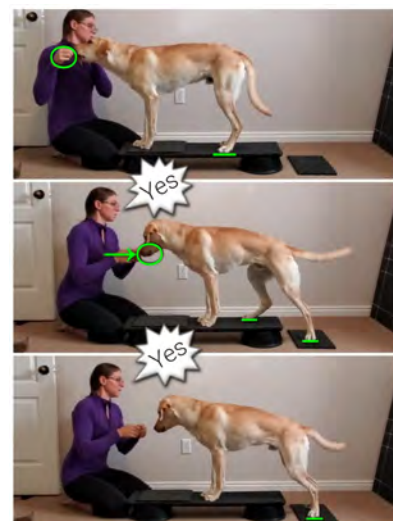
the platform. Too high and the exercise will be too challenging.

Goal: Slow, intentional stepps, moving forward and back in a straight line. Minimal loss of balance. Prepares the body for more difficult variations.

---

5. [Pivot: Foundation](#)

2:48 of this video

5 passes (Stepping to the right approx. 3 steps and back =1 pass)

Reward for each step.

Building to: 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily moving in both directions and responding to minimal / not exaggerated handler motion.

Note: Front feet elevated about ½ elbow height

Goal: Teaches rear end awareness, and builds value for each individual step to prevent rushing. Strengthens the gluteals, hamstrings and quadriceps by raising the height of the front feet and shifting weight into the rear. Sidestepping also strengthens the outer hip and inner thigh muscles (abductors and adductors).

Notes:

Circuit 2a
2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 2b, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Posture Sit: Beginner
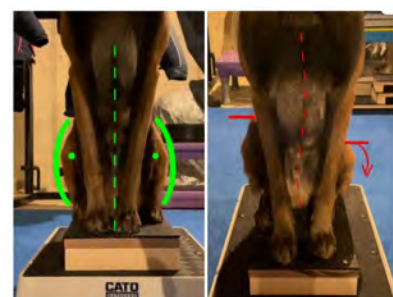
(Yes... again. That's how important this exercise is.)

30 seconds - 1 min

Repeat x 3

Building to: 1 set for 3 min straight

Appropriate to progress: When your pup is able to maintain proper posture for 3 min

Goal: We're looking for proper posture through the spine, and proper alignment through the rear legs. We may still see some symmetry like the photo on the right. That's ok. Just stick with it. Improves posture. Corrects a sloppy Sit. Fosters neuromuscular re-education. Appropriate for pups of all ages.

2. Pivot + Step Up: Beginner

Front foot target about elbow height. Rear foot target ½ hock height.

5 passes (moving to one side and back = 1 pass)

Repeat x 1

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets with 85% accuracy, is able to precisely target, lift onto, and lower off the rear foot targets without stumbling, hopping or losing balance.

Note: Reward for every step. This exercise is not about rushing to get to the next target, but about building value to each individual step to improve coordination.

Goal: Strengthens hip abductors and adductors. Improves rear end awareness, by encouraging slow movement. Builds value to slow precise movement.

3. [Weight Shifting: Beginner](#)

3 presses x 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat on other side
Release from equipment.
Repeat x 2

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is consistently and happily leaning back into the handler pressure, maintaining foot position, demonstrating a neutral or mostly neutral top line, and can meet max repetition x set requirements.

Note: Pay extra attention to the amount of pressure you're able to apply, and if there's a difference between the sides. Try and note on a scale of 1-10. 1 being almost no pressure. 10 being pressing as hard as you can.

Goal: Building value to the dog leaning back into the handler. Challenges hip and shoulder adductors/abductors and core muscles (including the psoas) on the side opposite handler pressure.

Notes:

Notes:

Circuit 2b
2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 2a, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency
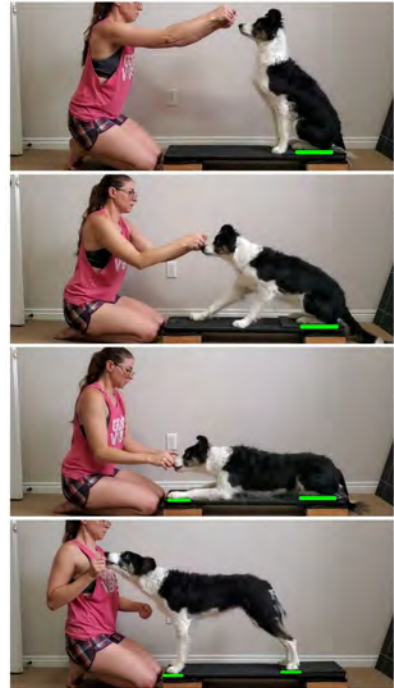
1. Sit- Walk Forward Down- Stand: Intermediate

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When a pup is through their big growth spurt, and can keep the rear feet staying still 85% accuracy. This is especially challenging in the transition from Stand to Rock Back Sit.

Note: If the spine is getting "squished" on the transition from Sit to Down, your reward placement may be too close to the dog. Conversely, if the rear feet are moving during that transition, your reward placement may be too far away.

Goal: Rear feet staying still throughout. Neutral spine alignment in the Stand, Sit and Down. Strengthens the large movers through the front and rear end and improves proprioception through the rear end.

2. Epaxial Strengthening Series: Beginner

Stillness: 10 sec
Vertical Head Nods: 5
Weight Shifting: 3 per side
Release off props

Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to:
Stillness: 30 sec
Vertical Head Nods: 10
Weight Shifting: 10 per side
One set ONLY
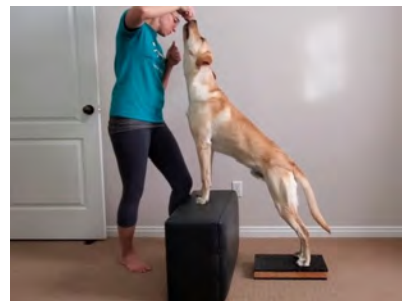
Appropriate to progress: When the dog is executing all components in a single set, with 85% accuracy, and a consistent level of arousal.

Goal: Specifically targets the epaxial muscles, and improves spinal alignment. Strengthens the hamstring to guard against a pivot shift.

---

3. [Backing Up: Beginner](#)

5 reps x 3 sets at 1-3 body lengths

Building to: 3 reps 20-30 feet depending on the size of the dog. Small dogs have a goal closer to 20ft. Large dogs closer to 30ft.

Note: Start with 1-2 body lengths. If the dog is managing well, increase distance by 1-2 body lengths each session.

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog is backing up straight, keeping head up, and stepping/not hopping. Then it is appropriate to increase distance. When the dog is executing for 20-30ft x 3 with 85% accuracy, they can safely progress to the next exercise.

Goal: Definitely focus on not hopping or overreaching with the rear feet. Improves mechanics through the PL. Strengthens gluteals, hamstrings and hip flexors and helps to integrate proper mechanics back into the gait.

Notes:

Notes:

Circuit 3a
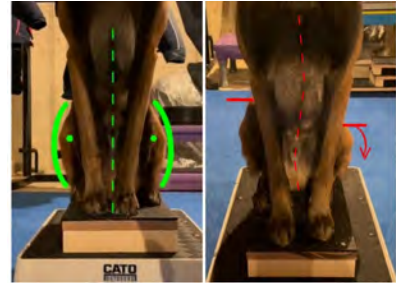## 2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 3b, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Posture Sit: Beginner

(Last time I promise 😁)

30 seconds - 1 min

Repeat x 3

Building to: 1 set for 3 min straight

Appropriate to progress: When your pup is able to maintain proper posture for 3 min

Goal: We're looking for proper posture through the spine, and proper alignment through the rear legs. By this point you should be seeing the stifle alignment even out like the photo on the left.Corrects a sloppy Sit. Fosters neuromuscular re-education. Appropriate for pups of all ages.

---

2. Rock Back Sit-Push Forward Stand: Beginner

5 reps x 2 Sets

Building to: 5 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is offering the behavior easily, hitting max reps, and keeping rear feet staying still with 85% accuracy.

Note: The correct movement pattern during the transition from stand to sit is stifle flexing during the transition to sit, and fully flexed before the second front foot comes onto the sitting platform. Notice if your dog is bringing both front feet down and THEN moving into the sit position

Goal: Building value to keeping rear feet still, while transitioning to the stand.

3. Ipsilateral Foot Target/Side Step to Target: Foundation

5 reps on each side
Repeat x 3

Building to: 3-4 side steps moving into the ipsilateral foot target (demonstrated in the video)

5 reps on each side
Repeat for 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily, and independently offering ipsilateral feet simultaneously

Note: Any platform (or 2 platforms) propped against the wall can work for this. A wobble board doesn't have to be used. In the beginning, don't worry about spinal alignment too much... that will come with the next progression. For now, we just want to build fluency and understanding to the ipsilateral foot target.

Goal: Improves coordination through the ipsilateral chains (connecting same side hip to same side shoulder). Strengthens the hip and shoulder abductor.

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4. Manual Leg Lift: Intermediate

Lift each leg and hold for 5 seconds.

Building to: 3 continuous sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to stand still / no foot movement, with a neutral spine for maximum reps.

Note: Weight into the handler should be very light. Expect the limb diagonal the lifted limb to get "light" or offload. That's normal/correct. Notice if the dog is resistant to lifting one limb specifically, or if the alignment of the topline changes. This indicates an underlying imbalance, and this exercise should not yet be progressed.

Goal: Strengthens the hip, stifle and shoulder stabilizers, and tests for muscle imbalance.

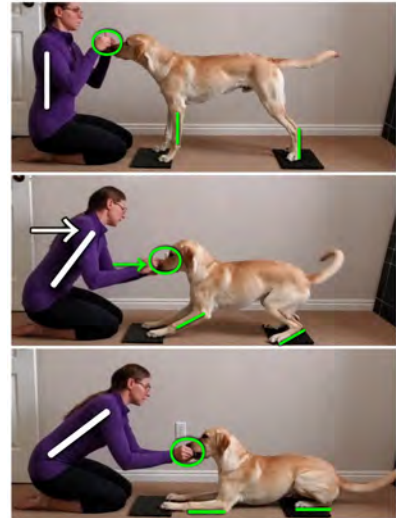Notes:

Notes:

1. Fold Back Down Tutorial: Beginner

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to fold back while keeping the forelimb and tarsus synchronized, resulting in the elbow and point of the hock touching down simultaneously. A dog who is touching down with elbows first is not yet strong enough to progress.

Note: Handler motion should be toward the dog's nose vs downward to differentiate between a "Bow" type movement and a Fold Back Down. I think about putting the cookie into the dog's eyeball. Dogs who are going through their big growth spurt may not physically be able to execute this movement pattern due to bone length discrepancy inherent in this time.

Goal: Forelimbs and hocks lowering and lifting in tandem / while staying parallel throughout. Teaches coordinated mechanics between the thoracic limb and pelvic limb.

2. Plank Tutorial: Beginner

Rear feet elevated to carpus height only.

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is comfortable moving to 85% of full hip extension

Note: ALWAYS release from the counterpose position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Goal: Strengthens the core stabilizers including the iliopsoas. Rear feet should stay still throughout. Even weight bearing through the rear limbs is a priority over maximum range.

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3. Head Nods: Beginner
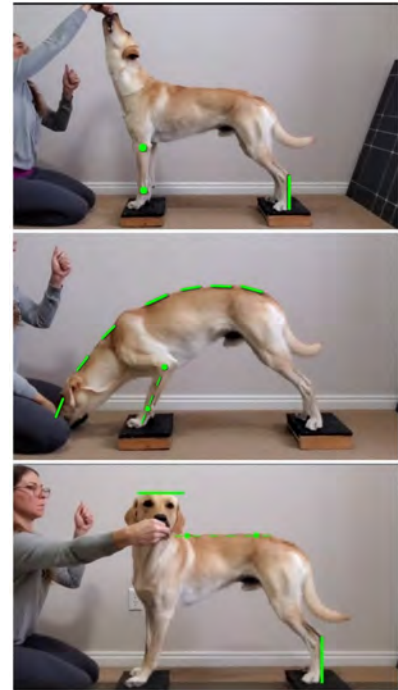
Up: 3
Down: 3
Right: 3
Left: 3

Repeat for 1 set only

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to keep all 4 feet still, and move to the end range, without repositioning or losing balance. And is able to achieve 85% precision for 3 sets total.

Note: Because we are asking for maximum range of motion, any change in behavior or arousal should be seen as fatigue not disobedience. Resting off the props for 30 seconds to 1 min is usually sufficient.

Lastly, not all dogs will have the available range demonstrated in the video, age, breed, confidence, etc will all play a part in how far the individual pup can move. Working within your pup's available range, and deepening slowly (if appropriate) is important.

Goal: Tests the dog's ability to keep feet still while moving the head / neck. Highlights coordination deficit between the sides. Strengthens the hip and shoulder stabilizers against micro movements, and improves mobility through the neck and shoulder.

4. [Stepping Forward-Stepping Back: Intermediate](#)

5 reps

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is reliably backing up straight/not off the side of the platform, and stepping back off the platform in a controlled manner with 85% accuracy, while maintaining arousal level.

Note: Keep hands low when transitioning from the position shown here in the top photo to the position shown in the second photo to help your pup avoid sitting.

Goal: Slow, intentional stepps, moving forward and back in a straight line. Minimal loss of balance. No hopping.

Notes:

Circuit 4a
2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 4b, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Fold Back Down Tutorial: Beginner

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to fold back while keeping the forelimb and tarsus synchronized, resulting in the elbow and point of the hock touching down simultaneously. A dog who is touching down with elbows first is not yet strong enough to progress.

Note: Handler motion should be toward the dog's nose vs downward to differentiate between a "Bow" type movement and a Fold Back Down. I think about putting the cookie into the dog's eyeball. We want to keep the spine parallel to the ground to ensure proper loading into the rear end.

Goal: Forelimbs and hocks lowering and lifting in tandem / while staying parallel throughout. Teaches coordinated mechanics between the thoracic limb and pelvic limb.
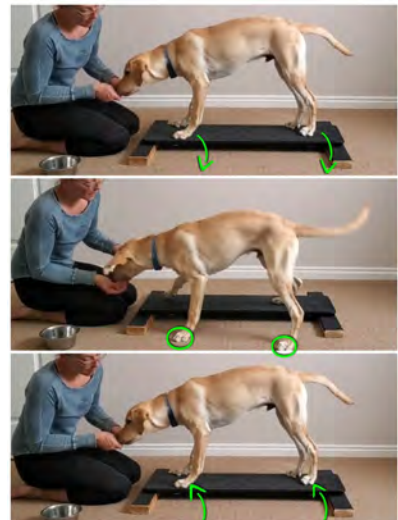

2. Ipsilateral Step Up: Beginner

5 reps on each side x 2 sets

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: when the dog becomes fluent, as defined by stepping off the platform and onto the platform with ipsilateral legs synchronized, with 85% accuracy… so 4 out of 5x or better.

Note: This is the baseline movement that many exercises are built upon. Taking the time to ensure fluency/understanding will pay off in the long term.

Goal: Teaching synchronized movement through ipsilateral legs. Targets the muscles along the medial aspect of the shoulder and hip on the grounded legs, including the psoas. Keeping these muscles strong is an important component in avoiding a pivot shift.

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3. Pivot/ Step to Target: Intermediate

Starts at 0:39 of this video.

Rear foot targets are close together.

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually. Any stable foot targets can be used. Feed buckets are not required or appropriate for all dogs.

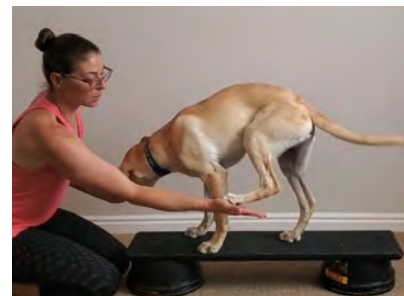**Goal:** Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

4a. Rear Foot to Hand Target (Part 3): Beginner

5 reps on the right
5 reps on the left

Repeat x 2

Building to: 4 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog demonstrates fluency, defined by a clear understanding of offering the rear foot to hand while maintaining position on the standing platform.

Note: Don't worry too much about the spine flexion that accompanies this exercise. We will correct for that in the progression. Also, if your dog is much larger than your arm's reach, feel free to use a target stick or kitchen spatula to "extend your arm".

Goal: Minimize / eliminate any side stepping that has been built into the rear foot to hand target in the previous variations.

→**OR**←

4b. Independent Rear Leg Lift-Tutorial: Intermediate

Initial Goal: 5 second independent hold
5 reps x 3 sets

Start with literally 1 second of duration
Initially to "capture" the independent hold.

Building to: 10 second independent hold x 3 sets

Note: In the beginning, it's important to prioritize the dog training aspect over the "conditioning" aspect of the training process. Fluency and understanding come first. Duration and reps come second.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog holds the limb lifted in space until they hear the terminal marker, and the endurance goal is met.

Goal: Transition from a manual leg lift to an independent lift.

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Circuit 4b
2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 4a, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Weight Shifting: Intermediate

Variation 1: Unstable surface under the **front** feet

a. 5 presses x 3 reps
(all on one side)
b. Repeat pressing on the other shoulder.
c. Release from equipment.
d. Repeat x 2 total

Variation 2: Unstable surface under the **rear** feet

a. 5 presses x 3 reps
(all on one side)
b. Repeat pressing on the other shoulder.
c. Release from equipment.
d. Repeat x 2 total

Building to:
15 presses on one side
15 presses on the other side
Stay on props
Repeat x 3

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is maintaining a neutral spine (no side bending), and resisting with an 8/10 pressure on both sides for max reps.

Note: Pay extra attention to the amount of pressure you're able to apply, and if there's a difference between the sides. Try and note on a scale of 1-10. 1 being almost no pressure. 10 being pressing as hard as you can.

Goal: Challenges hip and shoulder adductors/abductors (including the psoas). Functional core strength. Particularly good for rebalancing the iliopsoas.

2. Plank: Intermediate

Increases the height of the rear feet to elbow height
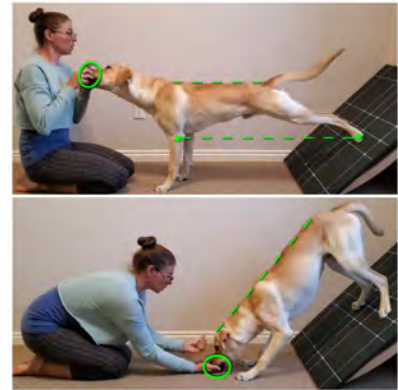
5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute pose and counterpose with fluidity and understanding, keeping the rear feet still 85% of the time, to maximum repetitions.

Note: ALWAYS release from the counterpose position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Goal: Increases the load through the core muscles and the iliopsoas, and begins to introduce full range hip extension.

---

3. Cone Wrap/ Intro to Cavaletti (Part 1): Foundation

Phase 1: Priming
Lure creates the movement.
3 repetitions in each direction.
Repeat 3x.

Appropriate to progress: Stay with phase 1 until the dog is reliably moving around the cone and not "backing out" (shown at 0:44)

Phase 2: Choosing
The option to choose is introduced.
3 repetitions in each direction.
Repeat 3x.

Appropriate to progress: Stay with phase 2 until the dog is reliably moving around the cone, and not cutting to the inside (an example of cutting to the inside is 2:34). This is supported by placement of reward. If the dog cuts to the inside of the cone consistently, this indicates a lack of understanding, and phase 1 should be revisited.

Phase 3: Distance

In this phase we add distance and switch from luring to rewarding.
3 repetitions in each direction.

Repeat 3x

Appropriate to progress: Stay with phase 3 until the dog is happily moving away from the handler.

This can be VERY hard for some dogs. Resist the urge to help by getting closer to the cone. Placement of reward + reward history should be enough. If the dog is struggling, more time at phase 2 is likely needed.

Phase 4: Proofing

In this phase we change the setup to more closely resemble what we need for the progression.

3 repetitions in each direction.

Repeat 3x

Appropriate to progress: Stay with phase 4 until the dog is happily moving away from the handler and confident enough in the dog's focus skills to move outside or to a large space

Note: This exercise is being used to re-introduce lateral forces in the stifle. Even if your pup is quite experienced, please move slowly through this phase. One inherent flaw of the TPLO itself is it does not stabilize the stifle on the rotational plane, leaving the stifle vulnerable to meniscus tear when excessive lateral forces come into play. We have to strengthen the medial and lateral stifle stabilizers by incorporating lateral/ turning forces slowly, allowing the stabilizers time to assume responsibility for the stabilization that used to fall to the CCL. This is UNNATURAL, so please progress slowly. Watch the <u>Controlled Cone Wrap: Intermediate</u> video for more information on where this exercise is headed.

Goal: Independent execution, including focusing on the cone/not looking at the handler's hands, moving away from the handler and committing to the wrap before turning back or looking for the reward.
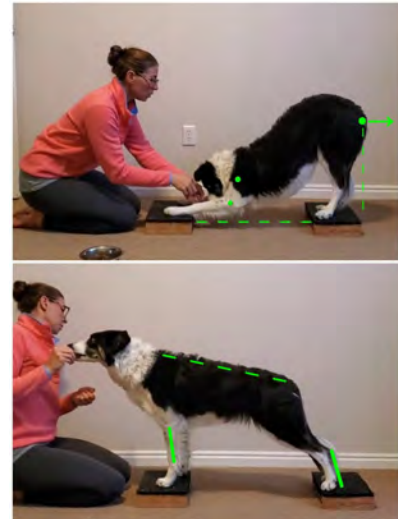
4. [Bow-Stretch: Intermediate](#)

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog is able to execute with proper form, while keeping all 4 feet still with 85% accuracy. This Includes shoulder behind the elbow and ischial tuberosity behind the rear foot during the bow phase and a neutral spine while extending the hip during the stretch phase.

Note: Dog MUST start in a slightly overstretched stand to allow space for the shoulder to extend and the scapula to rotate properly. This is detailed in the video

Goal: Improves scapular mobility, shoulder extension and hamstring mobility during the bow phase. Challenges the core and hip flexors (including the iliopsoas) during the stretch phase.

Notes:

Notes:

Circuit 5a
2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 5b, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. [Fold Back Down Decline/Incline: Intermediate](#)

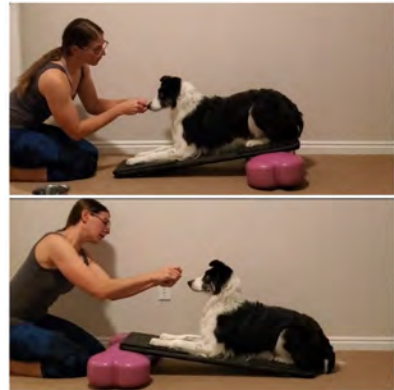Incline/ Facing Uphill:
5 reps x 3 sets

Decline/ Facing Downhill:
5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the forelimb and tarsus are moving in tandem with 85% accuracy, and the dog is maintaining a neutral spine.

Note: Facing uphill the rear end is more loaded, while facing downhill the front is more loaded. We can use this shift of weight to help regulate the challenge level. It's important to note which direction produces the smoother movement in the individual dog, and begin the exercise with that variation.

Goal: Focus is on the synchronized movement of the limbs, and maintaining a neutral spine throughout. Functional core strength that specifically targets the serratus ventralis, epaxials, obliques and iliopsoas, along with the latissimus.

2. Ipsilateral Step Up: Intermediate

5 reps on each side x 3 reps

Note: There are two speeds shown in this video.

> **Learning Speed:** A reward is delivered while the free legs are on the ground, as well as on the Sitting Platforms.
> **Fluent Speed:** Free legs touching down is marked, but the reward is delivered once all 4 feet return to the Sitting Platforms. This increase in speed transitions the exercise to a more plyometric exercise, where the working muscles stay engaged throughout.

Building to: Fluent Speed 10 reps on each side x 2 sets

This variation uses a separate front and rear foot target to help refine foot placement and improve top line alignment. Foot targets should be about carpus height, or slightly higher.

Appropriate to progress: When the free legs are mostly synchronized, and the dog is executing to max reps with 85% accuracy.

Goal: Mostly synchronized movement, and a neutral spine in the stand. Targets the muscles along the medial and lateral aspect of the shoulder and hip, including the psoas.
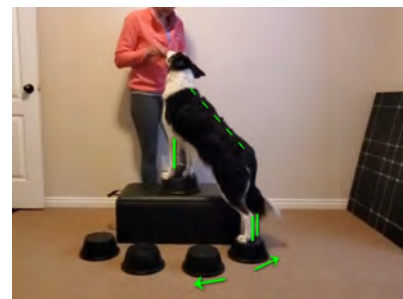
3. Pivot/Step to Target: Advanced

Starts at 1:42 of this video

Increase the distance between the rear foot targets by 25-50%

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually. Any stable foot targets can be used. Feed buckets are not required or appropriate for all dogs.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

---

4. Mountain Climber Prep- Tutorial : Advanced

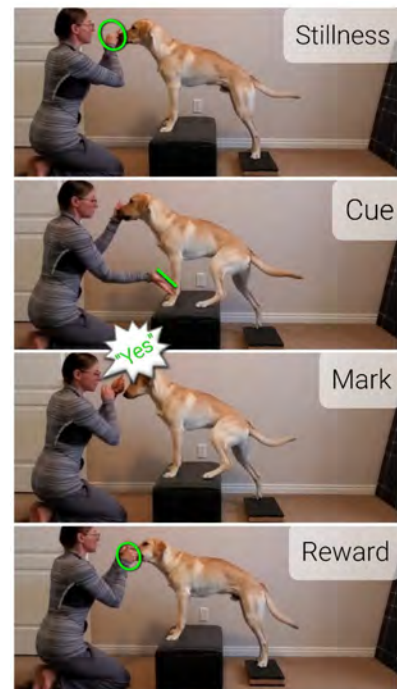

5 reps on the right
Release from props
5 reps on the left

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain a vertical grounded leg hock, a level pelvis, and is easily targeting the front foot target with minimal handler assistance.

Spine angle should be between 30° and 45°.

Note: This exercise provides a surprising challenge to the middle glute on the standing leg. Be on the lookout for hip hiking or side bending/ lateral spine flexion. Be quick to rest if this compensation appears, as it changes the muscle recruitment pattern.

Goal: Introduces the rear foot to prop movement pattern, which targets the hip and core stabilizers mentioned above, and prepares the dog physically and mentally for the progression exercise.

Notes:

Circuit 5b
2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 5a, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency
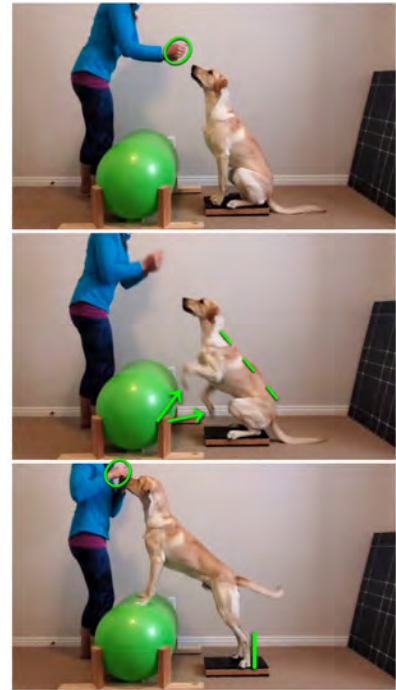
1. Rock Back Sit-Push Forward Stand: Intermediate

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog reaches 85% accuracy at maximum reps, and is moving with both front feet simultaneously during the concentric phase (transition from sit to stand).

Note: Front foot target set at shoulder height (point of the shoulder, not the withers). The concentric phase (transition from sit to stand) will always
"come together" and become more fluent first. It will take time for your pup to control the eccentric phase (slow resisting of gravity in the transition from stand to sit).

Goal: Transitioning from the front feet stepping up onto the front foot target to fully loading into the rear, with front feet moving simultaneously during the concentric phase (transition from sit to stand). Increases strength through the large muscles in the pelvic limb (PL), including the quadriceps, hamstrings, and gluteals.

2. Weight Shifting: Advanced

3 presses for 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat on other side
Release from equipment.
Repeat x3

Building to:
15 presses on one side
15 presses on the other side
Stay on props
Repeat x 3

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is maintaining a neutral spine (no side bending), and resisting with an 8/10 pressure on both sides for max reps.

Note: Be very mindful during the release of pressure. Because we are integrating 2 unstable surfaces, the dog is at an increased risk of falling upon release of handler pressure.

Goal: Significant stability challenge for the core, shoulder and hip, targeting both the diagonal and ipsilateral chains.

---

3. Deep Bow: Advanced

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to move to the end range without repositioning the front feet or removing one foot from the front foot target with 85% accuracy.

Note: Placement of reward is BELOW the height of the carpus,
That's what makes this a Deep Bow. Nose facing downward, as shown in this photo. Dog MUST start in an overstretched stand to allow space for the shoulder to extend and the scapula to rotate properly.

Goal: Continues to improve mobility through the shoulder, hip flexor and hamstring.

---

4. Controlled Cone Wrap: Intermediate

5 single reps to the right
5 single reps to the left
Rest
Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to: Multi wrap (2 and then 3 wraps per rep)
3 repetitions of the multi wrap
Repeat going the other direction
Rest
Repeat for 3 sets total

Note: This is to be executed SLOWLY. For dogs trained to wrap a cone quickly, a reward may have to be used/tossed on the ground every ¼ wrap for a time until understanding is achieved. Then the reward can be offered every ½ wrap, and finally for a full wrap. This video shows specifically how Hot Rod compensated after her TPLO. Be on the lookout for that little hop.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog's unique compensation pattern is replaced by correct movement / muscle recruitment for a triple wrap at maximum repetitions.

Goal: The intent of this exercise is to notice any asymmetry in the movement pattern, or the **individual pup's unique compensations**, and start to use neuromuscular reeducation to refine/correct the movement dysfunction. Notice if the dog is skipping steps or hopping, or executing a "teardrop shape" -vs- a round shape, and use the mark and reward to help build value to proper mechanics.

Notes:

Circuit 6a
2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 6b, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. [Fold Back Down- Split Surface: Advanced](#)

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with 85% accuracy, limbs moving in tandem, neutral spine, elbows moving to horizontal but not below.

Note: Spacing between the targets should be such that...
1. front feet are at the very *back* edge of the front foot target (no carpus on the platform)
2. Rear feet are at the very *front* edge of the rear foot target
3. Any stable foot targets can be used. Feed buckets are not required or appropriate for all dogs.

Goal: Strengthens the shoulder, core and hip stabilizers in a lengthened lever position. Promotes a high level of hip and shoulder stability. Functional core strength.

---

2. [Adducted Stand: Beginner](#)

Stillness: 10 sec
Release off props
Repeat x 3

Building to: Horizontal Head nods:
3 to the right
3 to the left
Repeat for 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets, and is able to maintain alignment and stillness with 85% accuracy.

Note: PawPod under rear feet ONLY. Front feet stable and separated shoulders width. If the dog is struggling initially, 2 pods pushed together can be substituted for the single pod.

Goal: Maintain adductor engagement and equal rear foot contact with pod.

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3. Hiccup: Intermediate

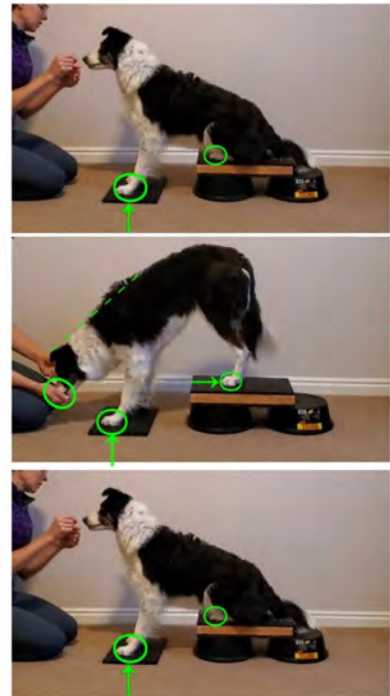Variation 1: Butt Up Stand → Sit ONLY

(Shown in the first portion of this video)

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog demonstrates fluency as defined by a neutral spine, front feet staying still, and the rear feet stepping backward and forward with control (no flinging)

Goal: Improves hamstring mobility, endurance through the shoulder, and teaches an important movement pattern the progressions will build upon.

---

4. Intro to Cavaletti (Part 3): Intermediate

Progression 1:
3 passes x 3 sets

Building to:
Progression 2:
5 passes x 3 sets

Building to:
Progression 3:
10 passes x 3 sets

(down and back=1 pass)

Appropriate to progress: ONLY add more passes when 85% fluency is achieved. This includes focus away from the handler / independent execution, no ticking / knocking the poles and entering the poles with an appropriate amount of speed control. Adding too many repetitions too quickly will result in degradation of form from mental and/or physical fatigue.

Goal: Consistent independent execution. Introduces the beginning of plyometric exercise in a controlled manner to reduce overtaxing the system.

Notes:

Circuit 6b
2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 6a, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Power Up Prep: Advanced

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3

Appropriate to Progress: When both front feet are moving simultaneously during the transition from Sit to Stand (concentric phase), and the transition from Stand to Sit (eccentric phase) is slow and controlled in 50% of the repetitions. .

Note: Using placement of reward, vertically above the dog's head can help encourage the dog to lower slowly to the sit. (Peanut Butter spoon may be helpful)

Goal: Both front feet moving in tandem during the concentric phase. Starting to see some slow reps in the transition from stand to sit in the eccentric phase. Functional core challenge. Prepares for the plyometric progression.

2. Deep Bow: Advanced

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to move to the end range without repositioning the front feet or removing one foot from the front foot target with 85% accuracy.

Note: Placement of reward is BELOW the height of the carpus, That's what makes this a Deep Bow. Nose facing downward, as shown in this photo. Dog MUST start in an overstretched stand to allow space for the shoulder to extend and the scapula to rotate properly.

Goal: Continues to improve mobility through the shoulder, hip flexor and hamstring.
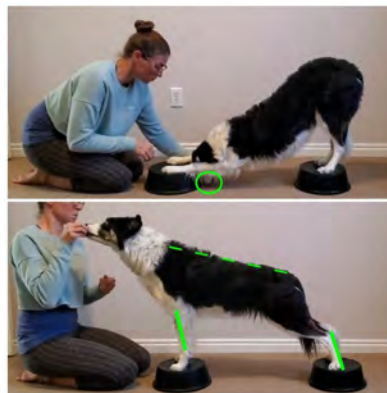
3. [Pivot/Step to Target: Expert](#)

Starts at 2:08 of this video

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

---

4. [Wheelbarrow: Advanced](#)

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is reaching full hip extension and maintaining a neutral spine (NO SPINE EXTENSION), and able to maintain alignment to maximum repetitions.

NOTE: ALWAYS release from the sit position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Progression of the Plank exercise. [Butt Up Stand](#) may be needed as a prep for dogs who struggle with the sitting position.

Goal: Targets the alternating diagonal muscle chains in the core while moving from short to long lever position.

Notes:

Notes:

Circuit 7a ~ Maintenance
1-2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 7b & 7c for maintenance

1. Burpees: Expert

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is executing max reps, with 85% accuracy.

Note: This is a very challenging exercise and care should be taken when increasing repetitions. Proper form needs to be maintained through the PL in its entirety.
Changes in alignment should be considered signs of fatigue not disobedience.

Goal: Significant functional core challenge, specifically targeting the epaxials, hypaxials and abdominals. The hip and shoulder stabilizers are also under a significant amount of load as they must stabilize against significant forcesas the dog transitions from a long lever to a short lever challenge.

2. Weight Shifting: Advanced

3 presses for 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat on other side
Release from equipment.
Repeat x3

Building to:
15 presses on one side
15 presses on the other side
Stay on props
Repeat x 3

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is maintaining a neutral spine (no side bending), and resisting with an 8/10 pressure on both sides for max reps.

Note: Be very mindful during the release of pressure. Because we are integrating 2 unstable surfaces, the dog is at an increased risk of falling upon release of handler pressure.

Goal: Significant stability challenge for the core, shoulder and hip, targeting both the diagonal and ipsilateral chains.

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3. [Controlled Cone Wrap: Advanced](#)

Initially start with the progression detailed in the video working

5 single reps to the right
5 single reps to the left
Rest
Repeat x 3

Work each variation to fluency before progressing

1. Single Wrap
2. Double Wrap
3. Triple Wrap
4. Distance

Building to: Adding distance to the cone, one body length at a time, building to 25 ft.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is maintaining a tight turn at speed + maximum distance.

NOTE: Focus in on the planting of the outside TL. The placement of the limb/foot and neck should be close to the cone on all wraps, to create a round/circular dog path -vs- a teardrop shaped dog path. Marking the correct execution is critical.

Goal: Tight bend through the body, and intentional footwork.

This exercise is an accurate simulation of the kinds of forces that a dog is likely to meet "in real life". So testing the joint stabilizers and biomechanics here is a critical step in determining if these mechanics will hold up under real life conditions, or if more work is still needed.

This is also a sport specific progression intended to mimic the demands of an advanced weave pole entry, where the approach is from the pole 12 side, and the dog's path is parallel to the poles before having to wrap tightly into the poles, executing a 180° or 270° change in direction.

This also simulates the beginning of a flyball box turn, and/or other quick changes of direction needed in many sports.

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4. [Cavaletti Circles: Advanced](#)

5 passes x 3 sets

Building to: 10 passes x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: ONLY add more passes when 85% fluency is achieved. This includes focus away from the handler / independent execution, no knocking poles or double stepping, and entering the poles with an appropriate amount of speed control.

Note:
1. Spacing between the cones on the *inside* of the curve should be slightly less than the height of the withers (or 2x elbow height), and fan out evenly.
2. The dog can then adjust their proximity to the cones, in order to find their striding/ideal spacing.
3. Poles are 1inch or less off the ground as is typical with extension cavaletti.

Goal: Applies lateral/centrifugal forces in motion to build strength and endurance through the medial and lateral limb stabilizers through the PL and TL.

Notes:

Circuit 7b ~ Maintenance
1-2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 7a & 7c for maintenance

1. Power-Up: Expert

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute 85% of the repetitions slowly during the eccentric phase

Note: Slow controlled return to the sit position is the main focus, and the dog's fluency in executing this slow movement is the main thing that differentiates this variation from the Power-Up Prep variation.

Goal: Slow controlled eccentric. Functional core strength. Specifically targets the quadriceps eccentrically, and fosters better balance, core control and body awareness. This is one of the most important exercises to keep the stifle stabilizers strong long term.
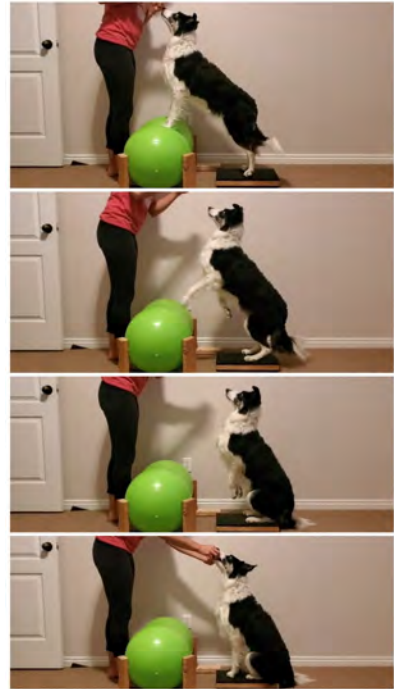
2a. Hiccup: Advanced

Variation 2: Butt Up Stand→ Sit→Hiccup

(Shown in the second portion of this video)

3 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 8 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is "hopping" both front feet up onto the sitting platform simultaneously, and is able to hold Posture Sit principles with 85% accuracy.

Note: This is a very challenging core exercise and reps should be increased very slowly to avoid a grade 1 strain.

Goal: Smooth transition of the front feet up onto the sitting platform, while keeping the rear legs in alignment. Functional core strength.

→**Progressing To**←

2b. Hiccup: Expert

Variation 3: Stand→Hiccup
Variation 1 can be used as a warm up.
(Shown in the third portion of this video)

3 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 8 reps x 3 sets

Note: This is a very challenging exercise due to the complex/integrated nature of the movement pattern. Deviation from the dog's standard execution should be seen as fatigue, not disobedience or lack of understanding
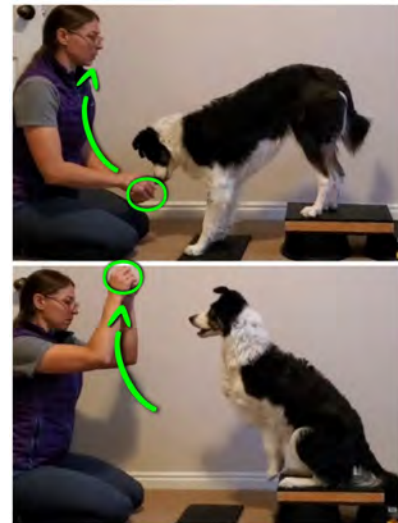
Goal: Apex core strengthening exercise. Controlled fluid movement is the goal.

---

3. Deep Bow: Advanced

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to move to the end range without repositioning the front feet or removing one foot from the front foot target with 85% accuracy.

Note: Placement of reward is BELOW the height of the carpus, That's what makes this a Deep Bow. Nose facing downward, as shown in this photo. Dog MUST start in an overstretched stand to allow space for the shoulder to extend and the scapula to rotate properly.

Goal: Continues to improve mobility through the shoulder, hip flexor and hamstring.

4. [Fold Back Down- Stable Surface Unstable Base: Advanced](#)

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to confidently execute with a neutral spine, keeping all 4 feet still, and moving forelimbs and tarsus in tandem with 85% accuracy.

Note: This step introduces instability to the equation while still maintaining a stable surface. This allows the dog's stabilizers to get stronger without adding the further challenge of having a squishy surface under foot.

Goal: Challenges the core and stifle stabilizers, while maintaining a stable surface.
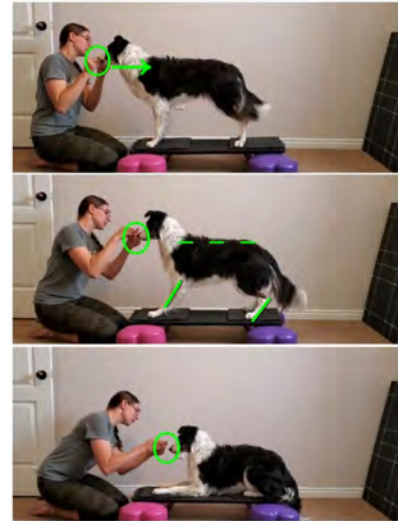
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Circuit 7c ~ Maintenance
1-2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 7a & 7b for maintenance.

1. Adducted Stand: Intermediate

Stillness: 10 sec
Release off props
Repeat x 3

Building to: Horizontal Head nods:
3 to the right
3 to the left

Repeat x 3

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets, and is able to maintain alignment and stillness.

Note: PawPod under FRONT and REAR feet. Head Nods should be VERY SLOW in the beginning. Slower than you think

Goal: Maintain shoulder and hip adductor engagement, and balance with the addition of the second pod.

---

2. Fold Back Down- Split Surface: Advanced

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with 85% accuracy, limbs moving in tandem, neutral spine, elbows moving to horizontal but not below.

Note: Spacing between the targets should be such that...
1. front feet are at the very *back* edge of the front foot target (no carpus on the platform)
2. Rear feet are at the very *front* edge of the rear foot target

3. Any stable foot targets can be used. Feed buckets are not required or appropriate for all dogs.

Goal: Strengthens the shoulder, core and hip stabilizers in a lengthened lever position. Promotes a high level of hip and shoulder stability. Functional core strength. Stable surfaces target the global movers for power.

---

3. Pivot/Step to Target: Expert

Starts at 2:08 of this video

Substituting unstable PawPods for the stable foot targets.

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

4. [Wheelbarrow: Advanced](#)

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is reaching full hip extension and maintaining a neutral spine (NO SPINE EXTENSION), and able to maintain alignment to maximum repetitions.

NOTE: ALWAYS release from the sit position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Progression of the Plank exercise. [Butt Up Stand](#) may be needed as a prep for dogs who struggle with the sitting position.

Goal: Targets the alternating diagonal muscle chains in the core while moving from short to long lever position.

Notes:

Notes:

CANINE CONDITIONING COACH.COM

Other Programs Available

CCC Puppy Program
CCC Beginner Program
CCC Strong Dog Program
CCC Sport Dog Program
CCC SeniorDog Program
CCC Sloppy Sitters Mini-Program
CCC Post Spay Mini-Program
CCC Postnatal Mini-Program

Post Spay Mini-Program

» All Circuits

Underwhelmed by the "Standard Protocol", 2 weeks of crate rest and then suddenly allowing a full force return to activity?? Yeah, me too. That would never be the advice for a human recovering from abdominal surgery.

Help your girl return to activity SAFELY, while reducing the risk of injury, by implementing this **Post Spay Mini-Program.** Strengthen the pelvic stabilizes, restore core strength and mobilize the intra-abdominal fascia to effectively return your girl to function*. This 4 circuit program is to be implemented on alternating days and should take 2-4 months to complete in its entirety. Upon completion, your girl will be ready to return to the exercises in the Strong Dog or Sport Dog Program. Once she is executing those exercises fluently, it's fair to reintroduce sport specific work a little at a time. The most vulnerable time for soft tissue is in the first week or so returning to work after time off. Please proceed mindfully.

*To be implemented starting 2 weeks post spay or after suture removal, with clearance from your vet.

Table of Contents

This is a **dynamic** table of contents. When clicked, the listings below will take you directly to that Page, Circuit or Exercise. Pretty nifty! Also, this document is formatted to allow you to search for a word or phrase. Use the shortcut "command + F" on a Mac or "control + F" on a PC to open the search box.

MindMap » A visual representation

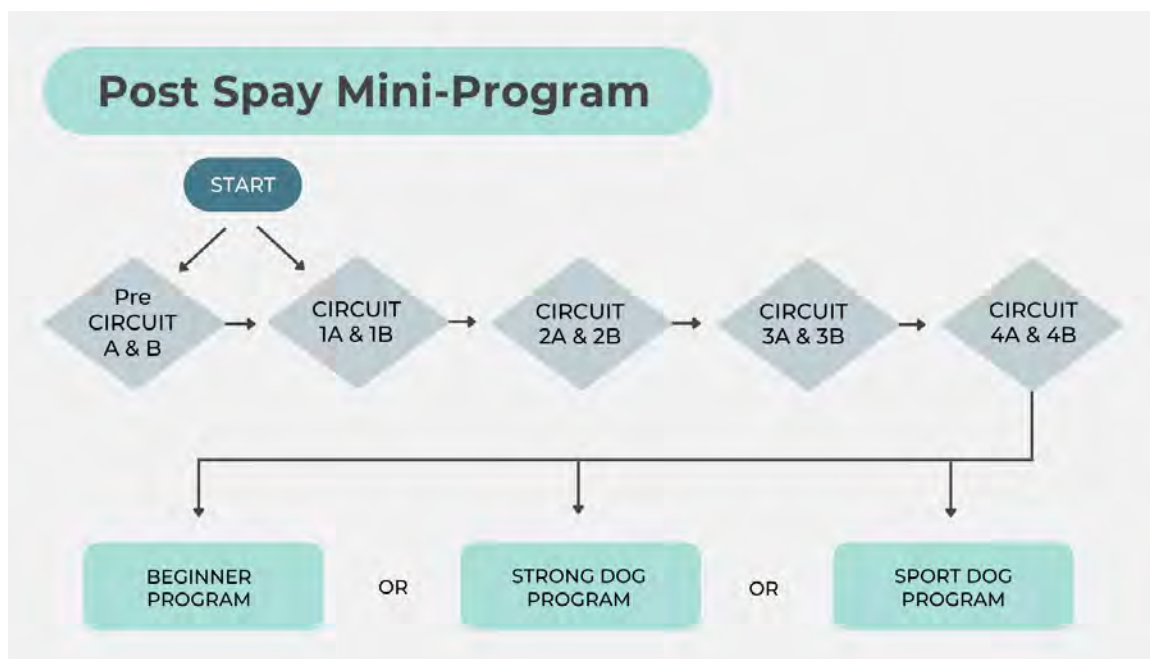This MindMap is a visual representation of the path you'll be taking through the circuit.

You'll begin with either the **Pre-Program Circuits** or **Circuit 1a & 1b** depending on your girl's existing skill set.

The **Pre-Program Circuits** will give you and your girl the necessary foundation skills to be successful. These Pre-Program Circuits build on each other. So you will execute Pre-Program Circuit A, complete that circuit then move on to Pre-Program Circuit B, and then into the Post Spay Mini-Program itself Starting with Circuit 1 a & 1b.

Beginning with **Circuit 1a & 1b**, You'll be alternating between the exercises contained in the two circuits. Depending on your individual schedule, and how well your girl is handling the exercises physically and mentally, you could implement each circuit 2 or 3 times a week, resulting in 4-6 workouts a week total.

This protocol will likely take 2-4 months to work through to fluency.

It is likely the beginning circuits will take longer to work through than the following circuits, due to the inherent learning curve. These are the most important exercises in your program, and lay the foundation for all exercises to come. If these are taught to fluency, and mastered, the remaining circuits will progress much more quickly. Fast is slow and smooth is fast!

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Equipment needed for this program

➔ 2 Sitting Platforms

➔ Standing Platform

➔ 4 Rubber Feed Bowls or 4 stable foot targets

➔ Plyo Box, Klimb or other stable elevated surface (about the height of the point of the shoulder)

➔ 1 low unstable prop (disc, wedge, foam pad, etc)

➔ 4 PawPods (TotoFit, Flexiness or BOSU are my preferred brands)

➔ Cato Board, Wobble Board or large square platform

➔ 2 Propel Air Platforms, 2 FitBones or 2 Discs

➔ 1-2 traffic cones or other similar pylons

➔ 6-10 pole cavaletti set (Optional)

➔ Peanut + Holder (Optional)

➔ Manners Minder or second handler to deliver reward (Optional: One exercise)

How to measure for Platforms

Here's a graphic to help you measure for your sitting and standing platforms if you don't already have those.

Sitting Platform: Width, is the measurement between the point of the hocks (shown in the top portion of the photo). Length is 1.5-2x the width.

Standing Platform: Width is the measurement between the point of the hocks (the same as the Sitting Platform). Length is the measurement shown in the bottom portion of the attached photo, plus a little bit extra. For a medium-large size dog 3-4 inches extra in the front, and 3-4 inches extra in the rear is sufficient. Tiny dogs need less "extra space". Giant dogs need a bit more.

Foot Targets: Width is the measurement between the point of the hocks (the same as the Sitting Platform). Length is about half the width measurement.

For more specific instructions, I wrote a 3 part blog series that covers the difference between the various types of platforms, how to measure for each, and how to build them yourself. You can see these on my website.

Progression Tips & Considerations

1. When implementing a formal conditioning program, we're implementing movements that impact the body in a few different ways.
   a. Increasing the **strength** of a muscle concentrically and eccentrically, defined by the ability to move to end range while loaded and maintain 85% accuracy.
   b. Improving the **endurance** of the muscle, defined by the amount of repetitions or duration an exercise can be performed while still maintaining 85% proper alignment.
   c. Increasing the **flexibility** of a muscle.
   d. Improving **body awareness** of the dog.

2. We progress an exercise in one of two ways...
   a. **Building strength & endurance:** Asking for more repetitions / longer duration before resting. (a through c above)
   b. **Challenging coordination:** Asking a dog for more precision movement, challenging posture, increasing balance demands and/or increasing the complexity of an exercise. (d above)

3. We measure the readiness of the dog to progress by assessing **fluency**, which is a measurement of how consistently the dog is able to correctly execute when meeting the challenge of maximum repetitions x sets (defined for each exercise).

   A dog is considered "fluent" and ready to progress within an exercise (adding repetitions or duration), or progress to the next exercise variation when…
   a. **Maximum repetitions** x sets has been reached
   b. **85% accuracy** is maintained throughout
   c. **Arousal level is maintained** (no significant increase or decrease in arousal)

4. Some dogs will need many sessions of a specific exercise to meet the required strength/flexibility or coordination benchmarks before progressing to the next level. In other exercises, only one or two sessions may be necessary before progressing. Recording, and assessing the video of your exercise protocol can reveal valuable information, and help you determine when it is appropriate to progress.

5. **How to build repetitions:** A typical conservative strength / endurance progression schedule would be...

> 5 reps x 3 sets
> 7 reps, 7 reps, 5 reps
> 10 reps, 7 reps, 7 reps
> 10 reps, 10 reps, 7 reps
> 10 reps x 3 sets

So when building reps this can be a helpful guide. There's no downside to progressing conservatively, aside from the fact that it takes more time. Conversely, progressing too quickly can lead to frustration, a loss of precision, and incorrect muscle recruitment.

NOTE: Change in arousal level, increase or decrease, is the first indicator of mental and/or physical fatigue. Taking a short break (30 seconds to 1 min) with a cookie scatter, or down-stay can help manage arousal levels.

6. **Moving from one circuit to the next**
Not all exercises within a circuit will be progressed at the same time. But as a general guide, I try not to straddle more than 2 circuits at the same time.
   a. **Example:** If my dog has reached fluency in 3 out of 4 exercises in Circuit 1, I would progress to Circuit 2, and also continue to implement the slow to develop exercise from Circuit 1. But I WOULD NOT progress to the exercises in Circuit 3 until the exercise from Circuit 1 was fluent.
   b. If we progress only the skills the dog is naturally good at, and neglect the skills they struggle with, we will end up running into a **"bottleneck"** as the circuits progress. This could be a skills bottleneck, strength/endurance bottleneck or a flexibility bottleneck. So the exercises the dog struggles with the most are actually the most important to focus on!

      NOTE: Puppies with growing bodies may need to return to previous progressions of an exercise when experiencing growth spurts. Past understanding of where their body parts are in space may not be applicable when the legs are suddenly several inches longer!! Patience pays off during these growing times!

7. Static **before** Dynamic
   Isolated **before** Integrated
   Stable **before** Unstable
   Form **drives** Function

Post Spay Specific Guidelines

1. **Managing Arousal**
   Increased arousal and overarousal can result as much from a mental challenge as from a physical challenge… So we want to be on the lookout for increasing or decreasing arousal levels when implementing conditioning exercises. Brains can't think or learn very well when overly taxed… either by complexity of an exercise (having to hold many thoughts in the mind at once) or physical challenge, fatigue and adrenaline. Both situations can result in an adrenalized state, where learning doesn't happen well. Some signs of overarousal are… Moving quickly, offering other behaviors, vocalization, taking the cookie hard, general feeling of frantic movement, etc. Conversely, underarousal can manifest as looking away, leaving, freezing/standing still, offering easier movements, etc. If we are seeing any of these things, taking a short break (30 sec to 1 min) can be helpful.

2. **Eccentric Phase for functional stability**
   The Eccentric phase of a movement or muscle contraction is when the dog is slowly resisting gravity, and working muscle is elongating. This phase produces functional stability, especially through the core, as the dog is "forced" to use their muscles to control their movement vs relying on the elasticity of the fascia. This is especially important as it is likely your girl is going to have lost some core strength post spay. Focusing on the eccentric phase happening slowly will be important for returning functionality to the abdominal muscles, hip & shoulder stabilizers, and the intra abdominal myofascial web.

3. **Focus on Form**
   Because of the changes to your girl's body, it's likely we are dealing with some compensatory movement patterns. Along with moving slowly… Using props to "force" proper alignment gives us a chance to reinforce/build value to proper mechanics, and increases the likelihood these new mechanics will be implemented later in the program, and in the real world. Muscles that fire together wire together… so this process of reconditioning the core is just as much about training the brain as it is the body.

4. **Avoid Lumbar Spine Extension**

   Because of the hormonal and physiological changes present as the result of spay surgery, we'll want to avoid any spine extension from the TL junction (where the rib cage ends) and into the lumbar spine. This is especially important early in the program when your girl's core is the weakest. We can always adjust placement of reward, or return to an easier circuit to help improve your girl make this alignment adjustment.

5. **Reward the attempt**

   It can be challenging to implement new movement mechanics, and target underutilized muscles. This is especially true following a surgery. Like learning to use your non-dominant hand to perform a fine motor skill, the first attempt at a skill is very likely to be clumsy, and inaccurate. REWARD ANYWAY! Rewarding the attempt will communicate to your girl that she is on the right track. It's a trap to hold out for perfection.

Pre-Program Circuit A
3-4 x a week, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Front Foot Target: Foundation

0:20 of this video

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: An enthusiastic front foot target. We are looking for the dog to demonstrate understanding more than executing a high level of repetitions.

Appropriate to progress: Stay with this exercise until the dog is able to execute happily 10/10 times over 2 sets..

Note: Skimping on this step will likely lead to difficulty in the future. Notice how placement of the reset cookie, placement of reward and handler position influence the dog and increase the likelihood of success.

Goal: Front feet on target. Alignment and posture adjustments will come later as the exercises progress.

2. Rear Foot Targeting: Foundation

A. Walking forward method 0:44 of this video (left column)

5 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is easily / consistently navigating the prop, and stopping with the front feet off the target and rear feet on.

B. Transitioning to walking backward method 1:22 of this video (right column)

1-2 steps backward
5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 3-4 steps backward 5 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: when the dog is happily and consistently stepping back onto the target without deviating or bending the spine

Goal: Building value to automatically stepping backward/reaching backward with the rear feet.

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3. [Front Foot Target to Elevated Perch: Foundation](#)
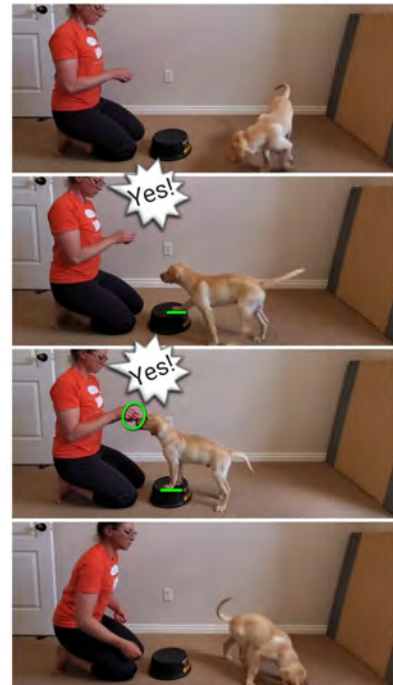
2:18 of this video

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: An enthusiastic front foot target. We are looking for the dog to demonstrate understanding more than executing a high level of repetitions.

Appropriate to progress: Stay with this exercise until the dog is able to execute happily 10/10 times.

Front foot target should be slightly less than elbow height.

Note: Skimping on this step will likely lead to difficulty in the future. Notice how placement of the reset cookie, placement of reward and handler position influence the dog and increase the likelihood of success.

Goal: This exercise lays the foundation for many exercises to follow. Teaches body awareness and targeting skills. Shifts weight into rear by elevating the front feet.

4. Pivot: Foundation

2:48 of this video

5 passes (Stepping to the right approx. 3 steps and back =1 pass)

Reward for each step.

Building to: 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily moving in both directions and responding to minimal / not exaggerated handler motion.

Note: Front feet elevated about ½ elbow height

Goal: Teaches rear end awareness, and builds value for each individual step to prevent rushing. Strengthens the gluteals, hamstrings and quadriceps by raising the height of the front feet and shifting weight into the rear. Sidestepping also strengthens the outer hip and inner thigh muscles (abductors and adductors).
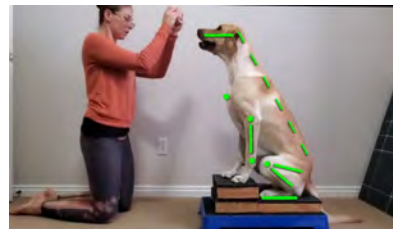
Notes:

Pre-Program Circuit B
3-4 x a week, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Posture Sit: Beginner

30 seconds - 1 min

Repeat x 3

Building to: 1 set for 3 min straight

Appropriate to progress: When your pup is able to maintain proper posture for 3 min

Goal: We're looking for proper posture through the spine, and proper alignment through the rear legs. If 30 seconds is too long for your pup to maintain proper alignment OR continue to adjust into correct alignment (as detailed in the video) you may need sets shorter than 30 seconds. Functional core challenge. Improves posture. Corrects a sloppy Sit. Fosters neuromuscular re-education. Appropriate for pups of all ages.

2. Pivot + Step Up: Beginner

Front foot target about elbow height. Rear foot target ½ hock height.
5 passes (moving to one side and back = 1 pass)

Repeat x 1

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets with 85% accuracy, is able to precisely target, lift onto, and lower off the rear foot targets without stumbling, hopping or losing balance.

Note: Reward for every step.This exercise is not about rushing to get to the next target, but about building value to each individual step to improve coordination.

Goal: Strengthens hip abductors and adductors. Improves rear end awareness, by encouraging slow movement. Builds value to slow precise movement.

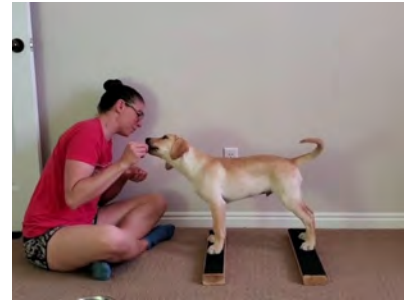3. Square Stand: Foundation

5 reps x 2 sets

Initial goal: 3 seconds before releasing

Ultimate goal: 5 seconds before releasing
Building to: 5 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily targeting the front and rear foot targets, and adjusting into position automatically, with minimal reluctance.

Note: Ideal alignment has the forelimbs and hocks vertically aligned, but this posture can be too challenging right in the beginning. It's ok to shorten the space between the front foot target and rear foot target slightly in the very beginning during the learning phase. This should be adjusted relatively quickly in grown dogs.

Goal: Introduces the concept of front foot targeting plus rear foot targeting simultaneously. Begins to strengthen the postural muscles (stabilizers) and core in neutral alignment to promote proper alignment.

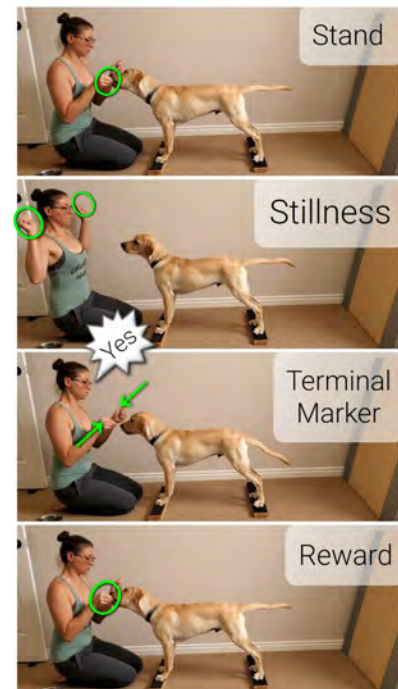4. Teaching Stillness: Beginner

5 reps x 3 sets

Literally begin with asking for a single second only.

Reward BEFORE the dog moves. It is critical to build reward history without overasking. If your dog does happen to move, that means you overasked. No biggie! Just toss a reset cookie and begin again

Building to: 5 seconds one second at a time. Stick with max 5 seconds for the first several sessions until fluency is achieved.

Increase the duration 1-2 seconds at a time

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain stillness for 20 seconds x 3 sets. Release from props between sets

Note: When progressing this exercise… Either ask for duration OR a new piece of equipment OR a new body position. And when making something harder, something else has to be made easier.

Goal: Building value to stillness, and teaching the dog that standing still is a rewarding behavior that PAYS! Prioritize stillness over duration.

Notes:

Circuit 1a
2-3 x a week, alternating with Circuit 1b, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Weight Shifting: Beginner

3 presses x 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat on other side
Release from equipment.
Repeat x 2

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is consistently and happily leaning back into the handler pressure, maintaining foot position, demonstrating a neutral or mostly neutral top line, and can meet max repetition x set requirements.

Note: Pay extra attention to the amount of pressure you're able to apply, and if there's a difference between the sides. Try and note on a scale of 1-10. 1 being almost no pressure. 10 being pressing as hard as you can.

Goal: Building value to the dog leaning back into the handler. Challenges hip / shoulder stabilizers and core muscles (including the psoas) on the side opposite handler pressure.

2. Pivot + Step Up: Intermediate

Front foot target about elbow height. Height of the rear foot target increased to ¾ hock height.

5 Passes
(Dog moving to the right and back to the left = 1 pass)
1 set only

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets, is able to precisely target, lift onto, and lower off the rear foot targets without stumbling, or losing balance.

Goal: Slow controlled movement. Precise targeting with the rear feet. When stepping onto and off of the rear foot target, we are looking for vertical movement more than horizontal movement.
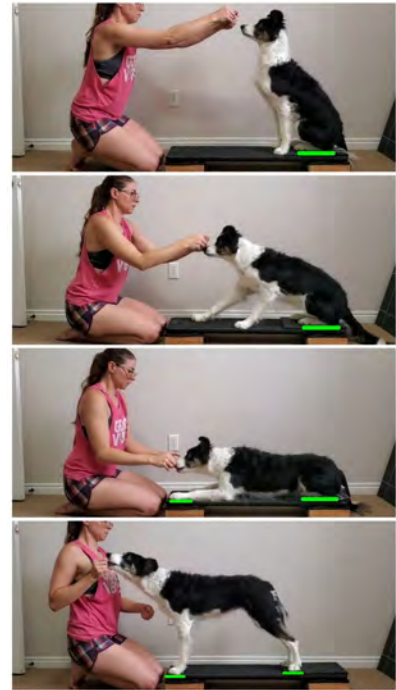
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3. Sit- Walk Forward Down- Stand: Intermediate

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When a pup is through their big growth spurt, and can keep the rear feet staying still 85% accuracy. This is especially challenging in the transition from Stand to Rock Back Sit.

Note: If the spine is getting "squished" on the transition from Sit to Down, your reward placement may be too close to the dog. Conversely, if the rear feet are moving during that transition, your reward placement may be too far away.

Goal: Rear feet staying still throughout. Neutral spine alignment in the Stand, Sit and Down. Strengthens the large movers through the front and rear end and improves proprioception through the rear end.

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4. Backing Up: Beginner

5 reps x 3 sets at 1-3 body lengths

Building to: 3 reps 20-30 feet depending on the size of the dog. Small dogs have a goal closer to 20ft. Large dogs closer to 30ft.

Note: Start with 1-2 body lengths. If the dog is managing well, increase distance by 1-2 body lengths each session.

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog is backing up straight, keeping head up, and stepping/not hopping. Then it is appropriate to increase distance. When the dog is executing for 20-30ft x 3 with 85% accuracy, they can safely progress to the next exercise.

Goal: Definitely focus on not hopping or overreaching with the rear feet. Improves mechanics through the PL. Strengthens gluteals, hamstrings and hip flexors and helps to integrate proper mechanics back into the gait.

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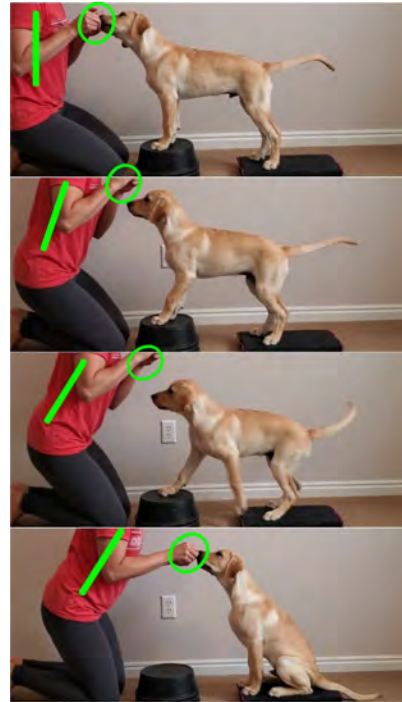1. [Rock Back Sit-Push Forward Stand: Beginner](#)

5 reps x 2 Sets

Building to: 5 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is offering the behavior easily, hitting max reps, and keeping rear feet staying still with 85% accuracy.

Note: The correct movement pattern during the transition from stand to sit is stifle flexing during the transition to sit, and fully flexed before the second front foot comes onto the sitting platform. Notice if your dog is bringing both front feet down and THEN moving into the sit position

Goal: Building value to keeping rear feet still, while transitioning to the stand.
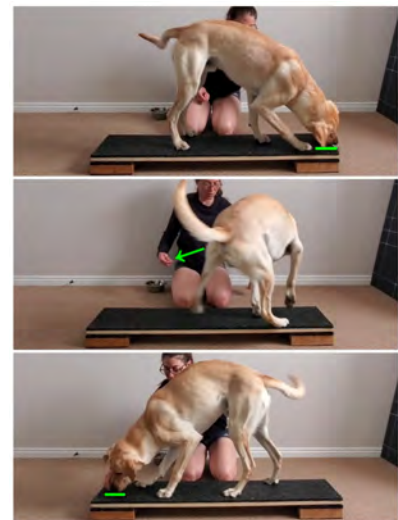
2. [Turning on a Plank: Beginner](#)

A. Phase 1: 5 repetitions in one direction. Releasing off the platform between reps. Repeat going the other direction

 Repeat x 3 sets

B. Phase 2: Link the turns together., 4 cycles through (1 cycle equals turning right & turning left)

Building to: 3 sets of the phase 2 variation.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily keeping all 4 feet on the plank, demonstrating coordination, and somewhat anticipating the cookie will appear at the other end, and moving in that direction.

If a coordination deficit was detected, this exercise can be carried forward and added to the next circuit.

Note: Try and have the new cookie in position before the pup is done eating the first cookie. That makes for more of a reward and less of a lure, ensure the brain is driving the movement -vs- the stomach.
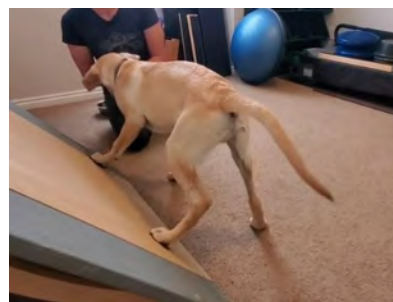
Goal: Teaches body awareness, promotes flexibility, and strengthens the hip and shoulder stabilizers.

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3. Ipsilateral Foot Target/Side Step to Target: Foundation

5 reps on each side
Repeat x 3

Building to: 3-4 side steps moving into the ipsilateral foot target (demonstrated in the video)

5 reps on each side
Repeat for 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily, and independently offering ipsilateral feet simultaneously

Note: Any platform (or 2 platforms) propped against the wall can work for this. A wobble board doesn't have to be used.

In the beginning, don't worry about spinal alignment too much... that will come with the next progression. For now, we just want to build fluency and understanding to the ipsilateral foot target.

Goal: Improves coordination through the ipsilateral chains (connecting same side hip to same side shoulder). Strengthens the hip and shoulder abductor.

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Notes:

Circuit 2a
2-3 x a week, alternating with Circuit 2b, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Shoulder Strength & Stability Series: Beginner

Stillness: 10 seconds
Head Nods Down: 5
Weight Shifting:
3 presses x 3 reps (all on one side)

Repeat presses on other side
Release from equipment

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is keeping all 4 feet still throughout, flexing the shoulder so the humerus is approx. horizontal, is demonstrating an even curve through the spine, and happily resisting the handler's pressure.

Note: NO head nods up here. Keep head low, so the neck and head follow the line of the spine.

Goal: 90° shoulder and elbow flexion (humerus approaching horizontal) during the head nods down. Easily resisting handler pressure during the weight shifting portion.
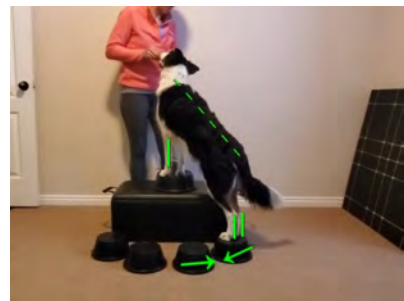
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2. Pivot/ Step to Target: Intermediate

Starts at 0:39 of this video.

Rear foot targets are close together.

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

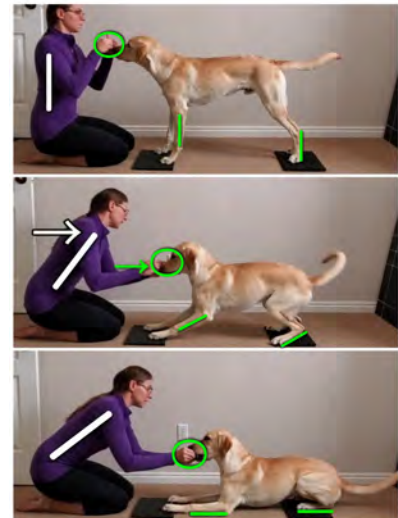3. Fold Back Down Tutorial: Beginner

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to fold back while keeping the forelimb and tarsus synchronized, resulting in the elbow and point of the hock touching down simultaneously. A dog who is touching down with elbows first is not yet strong enough to progress.

Note: Handler motion should be toward the dog's nose vs downward to differentiate between a "Bow" type movement and a Fold Back Down. I think about putting the cookie into the dog's eyeball. Dogs who are going through their big growth spurt may not physically be able to execute this movement pattern due to bone length discrepancy inherent in this time.

Goal: Forelimbs and hocks lowering and lifting in tandem / while staying parallel throughout. Teaches coordinated mechanics between the thoracic limb and pelvic limb.

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4. Plank Tutorial: Beginner

Rear feet elevated to carpus height only.

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is comfortable moving to 85% of full hip extension

Note: ALWAYS release from the counterpose position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Goal: Strengthens the core stabilizers including the iliopsoas. Rear feet should stay still throughout. Even weight bearing through the rear limbs is a priority over maximum range.

Notes:

Circuit 2b
2-3 x a week, alternating with Circuit 2a, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. [Rock Back Sit-Push Forward Stand: Intermediate](#)

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog reaches 85% accuracy at maximum reps, and is moving with both front feet simultaneously during the concentric phase (transition from sit to stand).

Note: Front foot target set at shoulder height (point of the shoulder, not the withers). The concentric phase (transition from sit to stand) will always
"come together" and become more fluent first. It will take time for your pup to control the eccentric phase (slow resisting of gravity in the transition from stand to sit).

Goal: Transitioning from the front feet stepping up onto the front foot target to fully loading into the rear, with front feet moving simultaneously during the concentric phase (transition from sit to stand). Increases strength through the large muscles in the pelvic limb (PL), including the quadriceps, hamstrings, and gluteals.
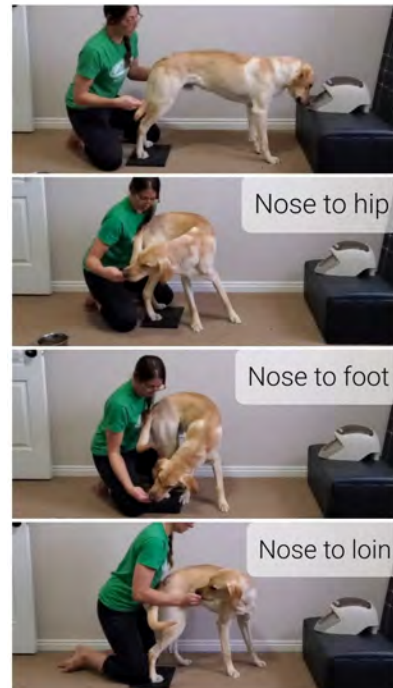
2. Standing Side Bend: Advanced

Nose to Hip: 5 reps
Nose to Rear Foot: 5 reps
Nose to Loin: 5 reps
Repeat on the second side.

Building to: 2 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When symmetry is displayed on both sides, in all 3 variations, and the dog is able to maintain rear end position without much assistance from the handler.

NOTE: Initially, the handler should assist in providing pelvic stability. The dog should assume responsibility for pelvic stability over time. Also, a nose to hand target can be substituted for the cookie at the hip, rear foot and loin if this becomes too calorically expensive. Notice and note the difference between the sides.

Goal: Improves spinal mobility and stability through the whole length of the spine, and addresses right to left muscle imbalance (strength and / or flexibility).

Nose to hip

Nose to foot

Nose to loin

3. Hiccup: Intermediate

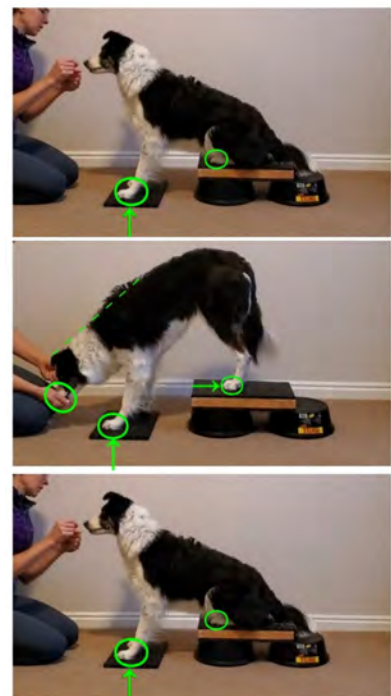Variation 1: Butt Up Stand → Sit ONLY

(Shown in the first portion of this video)

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog demonstrates fluency as defined by a neutral spine, front feet staying still, and the rear feet stepping backward and forward with control (no flinging)

Goal: Improves hamstring mobility, endurance through the shoulder, and teaches an important movement pattern the progressions will build upon.

4. [Ipsilateral Foot Target + Weight Shifting: Beginner](#)

Stillness 10 sec
Weight Shifting: 5 presses
Release from equipment
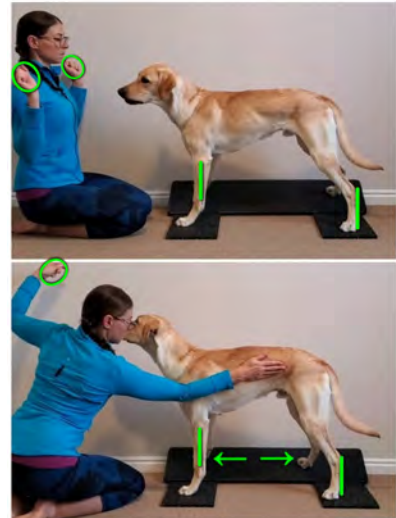Repeat presses for 3 sets total
Repeat on the other side

Building to:
Stillness: 30 seconds
Weight Shifting: 15 presses
1 set only
Repeat on the other side

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain a neutral spine, is able to lean back into the handler pressure easily, and is meeting the maximum repetition requirement.

Note: Stable Surfaces Only. Foot targets positioned such that the standing and targeting legs are displaying a mild amount of abduction. Shoulders level. Pelvis level.

Goal: Neutral spine, with controlled abduction as the dog moves into position. The dog should be able to easily resist handler pressure.

Notes:

Circuit 3a
2-3 x a week, alternating with Circuit 3b, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Weight Shifting: Intermediate

Variation 1: Unstable surface under the **front** feet

a. 5 presses x 3 reps
(all on one side)
b. Repeat pressing on the other shoulder.
c. Release from equipment.
d. Repeat x 2 total

Variation 2: Unstable surface under the **rear** feet

a. 5 presses x 3 reps
(all on one side)
b. Repeat pressing on the other shoulder.
c. Release from equipment.
d. Repeat x 2 total

Building to:
15 presses on one side
15 presses on the other side
Stay on props
Repeat x 3

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is maintaining a neutral spine (no side bending), and resisting with an 8/10 pressure on both sides for max reps.

Note: Pay extra attention to the amount of pressure you're able to apply, and if there's a difference between the sides. Try and note on a scale of 1-10. 1 being almost no pressure. 10 being pressing as hard as you can.

Goal: Challenges hip and shoulder adductors/abductors (including the psoas). Functional core strength. Particularly good for rebalancing the iliopsoas.
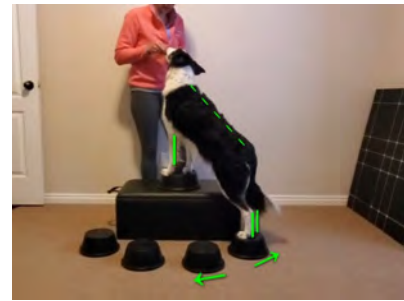
2. [Pivot/Step to Target: Advanced](#)

Starts at 1:42 of this video

Increase the distance between the rear foot targets by 25-50%

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).
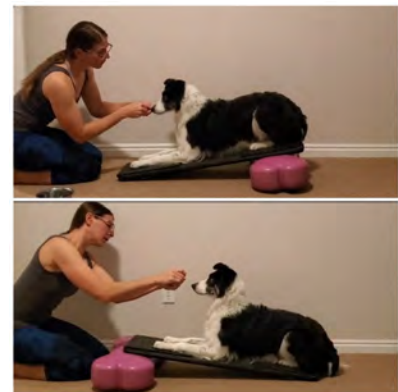
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3. [Fold Back Down Decline/Incline: Intermediate](#)

Incline/ Facing Uphill:
5 reps x 3 sets

Decline/ Facing Downhill:
5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the forelimb and tarsus are moving in tandem with 85% accuracy, and the dog is maintaining a neutral spine.

Note: Facing uphill the rear end is more loaded, while facing downhill the front is more loaded. We can use this shift of weight to help regulate the challenge level. It's important to note which direction produces the smoother movement in the individual dog, and begin the exercise with that variation.

Goal: Focus is on the synchronized movement of the limbs, and maintaining a neutral spine throughout. Functional core strength that specifically targets the serratus ventralis, epaxials, obliques and iliopsoas, along with the latissimus.

4. [Plank: Intermediate](#)

Increases the height of the rear feet to elbow height

5 reps x 3 Sets

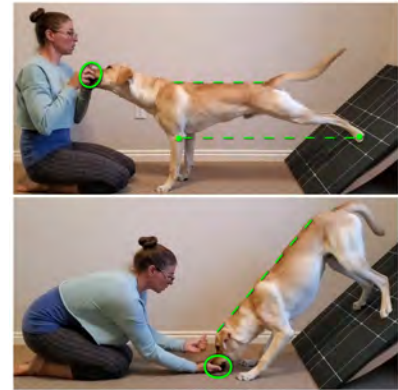**Building to:**
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute pose and counterpose with fluidity and understanding, keeping the rear feet still 85% of the time, to maximum repetitions.

Note: ALWAYS release from the counterpose position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Goal: Increases the load through the core muscles and the iliopsoas, and begins to introduce full range hip extension.

Notes:

Circuit 3b
2-3 x a week, alternating with Circuit 3a, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. [Power Up Prep: Advanced](#)

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3

Appropriate to Progress: When both front feet are moving simultaneously during the transition from Sit to Stand (concentric phase), and the transition from Stand to Sit (eccentric phase) is slow and controlled in 50% of the repetitions. .

Note: Using placement of reward, vertically above the dog's head can help encourage the dog to lower slowly to the sit. (Peanut Butter spoon may be helpful)

Goal: Both front feet moving in tandem during the concentric phase. Starting to see some slow reps in the transition from stand to sit in the eccentric phase. Functional core challenge. Prepares for the plyometric progression.

2. [Hiccup: Advanced](#)

Variation 2: Butt Up Stand→ Sit→Hiccup

(Shown in the second portion of this video)

3 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 8 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is "hopping" both front feet up onto the sitting platform simultaneously, and is able to hold [Posture Sit](#) principles with 85% accuracy.

Note: This is a very challenging core exercise and reps should be increased very slowly to avoid a grade 1 strain.

Goal: Smooth transition of the front feet up onto the sitting platform, while keeping the rear legs in alignment. Functional core strength.
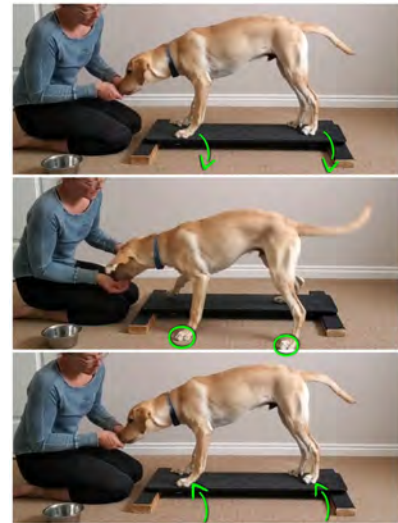
3. Ipsilateral Step Up: Beginner

5 reps on each side x 2 sets

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: when the dog becomes fluent, as defined by stepping off the platform and onto the platform with ipsilateral legs synchronized, with 85% accuracy… so 4 out of 5x or better.

Note: This is the baseline movement that many exercises are built upon. Taking the time to ensure fluency/understanding will pay off in the long term.

Goal: Teaching synchronized movement through ipsilateral legs. Targets the muscles along the medial aspect of the shoulder and hip og the grounded legs, including the psoas. Keeping these muscles strong is an important component in avoiding MSI.

4. Controlled Cone Wrap: Intermediate

5 single reps to the right
5 single reps to the left
Rest
Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to: Multi wrap (2 and then 3 wraps per rep)
3 repetitions of the multi wrap
Repeat going the other direction
Rest
Repeat for 3 sets total

Note: This is to be executed SLOWLY. For dogs trained to wrap a cone quickly, a reward may have to be used/tossed on the ground every ¼ wrap for a time until understanding is achieved. Then the reward can be offered every ½ wrap, and finally for a full wrap.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog's unique compensation pattern is replaced by correct movement / muscle recruitment for a triple wrap at maximum repetitions.

Goal: The intent of this exercise is to notice any asymmetry in the movement pattern, or the **individual pup's unique compensations**, and start to use neuromuscular reeducation to refine/correct the movement dysfunction. Notice if the dog is skipping steps or hopping, or executing a "teardrop shape" -vs- a round shape, and use the mark and reward to help build value to proper mechanics.

Notes:

Circuit 4a
2-3 x a week, alternating with Circuit 4b, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Shoulder Strength & Stability Series: Intermediate

Increase the height of the rear foot target to elbow height or a 30° spine angle and add instability to front feet.
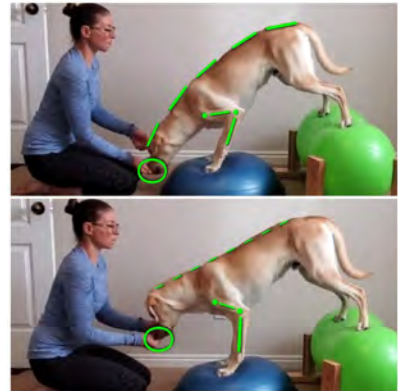
Stillness: 10 seconds
Head Nods Down: 5
Weight Shifting:
3 presses for 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat presses on other side
Release from equipment

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is keeping all 4 feet still throughout, flexing the shoulder so the humerus is approx. horizontal, is demonstrating an even curve through the spine, and happily resisting the handler's pressure.

Note: NO head nods up here. Keep head low, so the neck and head follow the line of the spine. Watch for carpal hyperflexion.
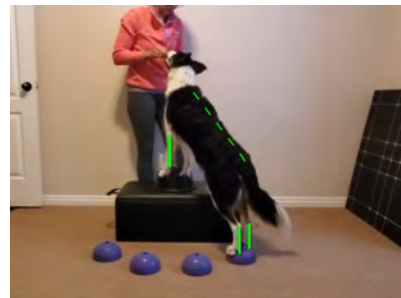
Goal: Humerus horizontal or slightly below during the head nods down. Easily resisting handler pressure during the weight shifting portion.

---

2. Pivot/Step to Target: Expert

Starts at 2:08 of this video

Substituting unstable PawPods for the stable foot targets.

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

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3. Wheelbarrow: Advanced

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is reaching full hip extension and maintaining a neutral spine (NO SPINE EXTENSION), and able to maintain alignment to maximum repetitions.

NOTE: ALWAYS release from the sit position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Progression of the Plank exercise. Butt Up Stand may be needed as a prep for dogs who struggle with the sitting position.

Goal: Targets the alternating diagonal muscle chains in the core while moving from short to long lever position.

4. [Fold Back Down- Split Surface: Advanced](#)

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with 85% accuracy, limbs moving in tandem, neutral spine, elbows moving to horizontal but not below.

Note: Spacing between the targets should be such that...
1. front feet are at the very *back* edge of the front foot target (no carpus on the platform)
2. Rear feet are at the very *front* edge of the rear foot target
3. Any stable foot targets can be used. Feed buckets are not required

Goal: Strengthens the shoulder, core and hip stabilizers in a lengthened lever position. Promotes a high level of hip and shoulder stability. Functional core strength.

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5. [Intro to Cavaletti (Part 3): Intermediate](#)

Progression 1:
3 passes x 3 sets

Building to:
Progression 2:
5 passes x 3 sets

Building to:
Progression 3:
10 passes x 3 sets

(down and back=1 pass)

Appropriate to progress: ONLY add more passes when 85% fluency is achieved. This includes focus away from the handler / independent execution, no ticking / knocking the poles and

entering the poles with an appropriate amount of speed control. Adding too many repetitions too quickly will result in degradation of form from mental and/or physical fatigue.

Goal: Consistent independent execution. Introduces the beginning of plyometric exercise in a controlled manner to reduce overtaxing the system.

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Notes:

Circuit 4b
2-3 x a week, alternating with Circuit 4a, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency
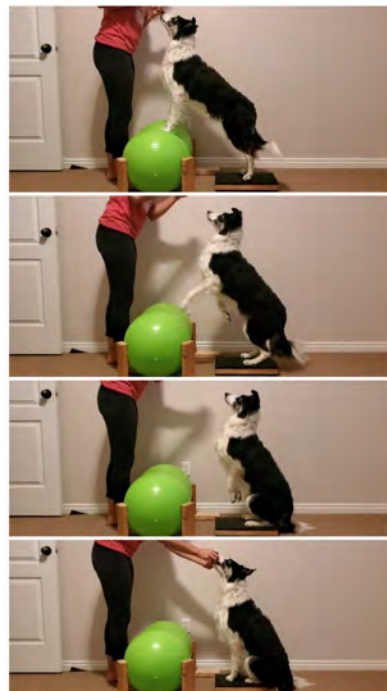
1. [Power-Up: Expert](#)

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute 85% of the repetitions slowly during the eccentric phase

Note: Slow controlled return to the sit position is the main focus, and the dog's fluency in executing this slow movement is the main thing that differentiates this variation from the Power-Up Prep variation.

Goal: Slow controlled eccentric. Functional core strength. Specifically targets the quadriceps eccentrically, and fosters better balance, core control and body awareness.

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2. [Hiccup: Expert](#)

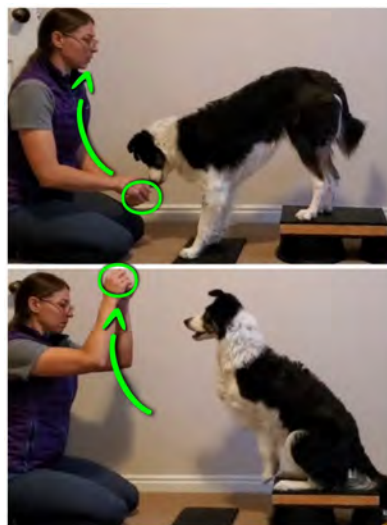Variation 3: Stand→Hiccup
Variation 1 can be used as a warm up.
(Shown in the third portion of this video)

3 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 8 reps x 3 sets

Note: This is a very challenging exercise due to the complex/integrated nature of the movement pattern. Deviation from the dog's standard execution should be seen as fatigue, not disobedience or lack of understanding

Goal: Apex core strengthening exercise. Controlled fluid movement is the goal.

3. [Ipsilateral Step Up: Intermediate](#)

5 reps on each side x 3 reps

Note: There are two speeds shown in this video.

> **Learning Speed:** A reward is delivered while the free legs are on the ground, as well as on the Sitting Platforms.
>
> **Fluent Speed:** Free legs touching down is marked, but the reward is delivered once all 4 feet return to the Sitting Platforms. This increase in speed transitions the exercise to a more plyometric exercise, where the working muscles stay engaged throughout.

Building to: Fluent Speed 10 reps on each side x 2 sets

This variation uses a separate front and rear foot target to help refine foot placement and improve top line alignment. Foot targets should be about carpus height, or slightly higher.

Appropriate to progress: When the free legs are mostly synchronized, and the dog is executing to max reps with 85% accuracy.

Goal: Mostly synchronized movement, and a neutral spine in the stand. Targets the muscles along the medial and lateral aspect of the shoulder and hip, including the psoas.

4. [Controlled Cone Wrap: Advanced](#)

Initially start with the progression detailed in the video working

5 single reps to the right
5 single reps to the left
Rest
Repeat x 3

Work each variation to fluency before progressing

1. Single Wrap
2. Double Wrap
3. Triple Wrap
4. Distance

Building to: Adding distance to the cone, one body length at a time, building to 25 ft.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is maintaining a tight turn at speed + maximum distance.

NOTE: Focus in on the planting of the outside TL. The placement of the limb/foot and neck should be close to the cone on all wraps, to create a round/circular dog path -vs- a teardrop shaped dog path. Marking the correct execution is critical.
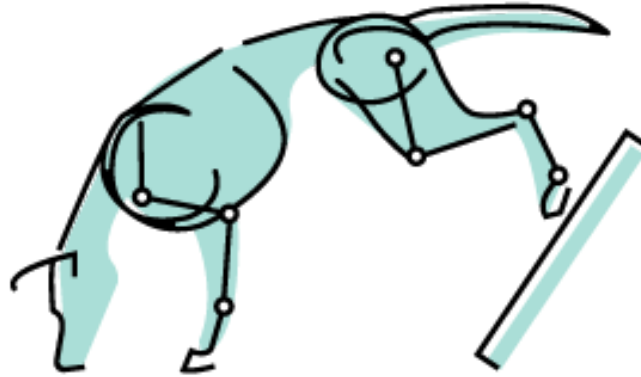
Goal: Tight bend through the body, and intentional footwork.

This exercise is an accurate simulation of the kinds of forces that a dog is likely to meet "in real life". So testing the joint stabilizers and biomechanics here is a critical step in determining if these mechanics will hold up under real life conditions, or if more work is still needed.

This is also a sport specific progression intended to mimic the demands of an advanced weave pole entry, where the approach is from the pole 12 side, and the dog's path is parallel to the poles before having to wrap tightly into the poles, executing a 180° or 270° change in direction.

This also simulates the beginning of a flyball box turn, and/or other quick changes of direction needed in many sports.

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CANINE CONDITIONING COACH.COM

Other Programs Available

CCC Puppy Program
CCC Beginner Program
CCC Strong Dog Program
CCC Sport Dog Program
CCC Sloppy Sitters Mini-Program
CCC Post Spay Mini-Program
CCC Postnatal Mini-Program
CCC Post TPLO Mini Program

Postnatal Mini-Program

All Circuits

Some humans are totally fine immediately after giving birth and are able to return to their previous activities without missing a beat… But that is not the norm. The vast majority of humans need some help returning their body to its previous condition. Your girl deserves the same care!

We can help your girl's body return to its previous condition by implementing a gradual loading process, starting with short lever, stable, closed kinetic chain exercises that encourage the deepest abdominal muscle to contract, the stabilizing muscles that cross the hip, and sacrum to re-engage, giving the soft tissue (tendon, ligament, and myofascial system) a chance to return to their pre-pregnancy length and tensile strength. Once the appropriate musculature regains tone, the lever is lengthened, instability is added and the challenge is increased.

The Principle of Reversibility, a human physiology principle, states that the body begins adapting to disuse as soon as 1 week. Since your girl has been managing different physical demands for several months now, it's important to use a mindful approach when returning to activity. This increases the likelihood things will go smoothly, and decreases her risk of injury.

Your girl deserves the strongest, most stable, resilient body after her months off… This is how you can help that become a reality.

Table of Contents

This is a **dynamic** table of contents. When clicked, the listings below will take you directly to that Page, Circuit or Exercise. Pretty nifty! Also, this document is formatted to allow you to search for a word or phrase. Use the shortcut "command + F" on a Mac or "control + F" on a PC to open the search box.

MindMap » A visual representation

This MindMap is a visual representation of the path you'll be taking through the circuit.

You'll begin with Circuit 1a & 1b. You'll be alternating between the exercises contained in the two circuits. Depending on your individual schedule, and how well your girl is handling the exercises physically and mentally, you could implement each circuit once or twice a week (twice a week is recommended) for 4 workouts per week total.

This protocol will likely take 4-5 months to work through to fluency.

It is likely the beginning circuits (Circuit 1a & 1b, etc) will take longer to work through than the following circuits, due to the inherent learning curve. These are the most important exercises in your program, and lay the foundation for all exercises to come. If these are taught to fluency, and mastered, the remaining circuits will progress much more quickly. Fast is slow and smooth is fast!

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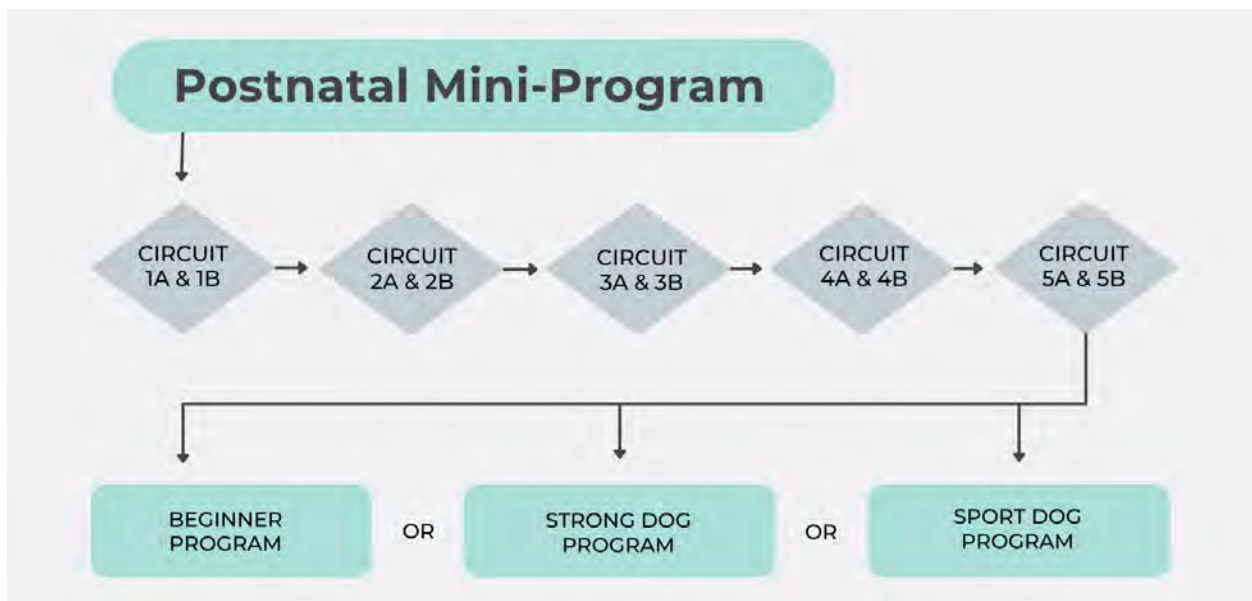
Equipment needed for this program

➔ 2-4 Sitting Platforms

➔ Standing Platform

➔ Plyo Box, Klimb or other stable elevated surface (about the height of the point of the shoulder)

➔ Cato Board, Wobble Board or large square platform

➔ 4 Rubber Feed Bowls or 4 stable foot targets

➔ 4 PawPods (TotoFit, Flexiness or BOSU are my preferred brands)

➔ 2 Propel Air Platforms, 2 FitBones or 2 Discs

➔ 1 Low unstable prop (Wedge, Disc, Foam Pad, etc.)

➔ 6-10 pole cavaletti set

➔ 2 traffic cones or other similar pylon

➔ Manners Minder or Second handler to deliver reward (one exercise)

➔ Peanut + Holder (Optional)

How to measure for Platforms

Here's a graphic to help you measure for your sitting and standing platforms if you don't already have those.

Sitting Platform: Width, is the measurement between the point of the hocks (shown in the top portion of the photo). Length is 1.5-2x the width.

Standing Platform: Width is the measurement between the point of the hocks (the same as the Sitting Platform). Length is the measurement shown in the bottom portion of the attached photo, plus a little bit extra. For a medium-large size dog 3-4 inches extra in the front, and 3-4 inches extra in the rear is sufficient. Tiny dogs need less "extra space". Giant dogs need a bit more.

Foot Targets: Width is the measurement between the point of the hocks (the same as the Sitting Platform). Length is about half the width measurement.

For more specific instructions, I wrote a 3 part blog series that covers the difference between the various types of platforms, how to measure for each, and how to build them yourself. You can see these on my website.

Progression Tips & Considerations

1. When implementing a formal conditioning program, we're implementing movements that impact the body in a few different ways.
    a. Increasing the **strength** of a muscle concentrically and eccentrically, defined by the ability to move to end range while loaded and maintain 85% accuracy.
    b. Improving the **endurance** of the muscle, defined by the amount of repetitions or duration an exercise can be performed while still maintaining 85% proper alignment.
    c. Increasing the **flexibility** of a muscle.
    d. Improving **body awareness** of the dog.

2. We progress an exercise in one of two ways...
    a. **Building strength & endurance:** Asking for more repetitions / longer duration before resting. (a through c above)
    b. **Challenging coordination:** Asking a dog for more precision movement, challenging posture, increasing balance demands and/or increasing the complexity of an exercise. (d above)

3. We measure the readiness of the dog to progress by assessing **fluency**, which is a measurement of how consistently the dog is able to correctly execute when meeting the challenge of maximum repetitions x sets (defined for each exercise).

    A dog is considered "fluent" and ready to progress within an exercise (adding repetitions or duration), or progress to the next exercise variation when…
    a. **Maximum repetitions** x sets has been reached
    b. **85% accuracy** is maintained throughout
    c. **Arousal level is maintained** (no significant increase or decrease in arousal)

4. Some dogs will need many sessions of a specific exercise to meet the required strength/flexibility or coordination benchmarks before progressing to the next level. In other exercises, only one or two sessions may be necessary before progressing. Recording, and assessing the video of your exercise protocol can reveal valuable information, and help you determine when it is appropriate to progress.

5. **How to build repetitions:** A typical conservative strength / endurance progression schedule would be...

>   5 reps x 3 sets
>   7 reps, 7 reps, 5 reps
>   10 reps, 7 reps, 7 reps
>   10 reps, 10 reps, 7 reps
>   10 reps x 3 sets

So when building reps this can be a helpful guide. There's no downside to progressing conservatively, aside from the fact that it takes more time. Conversely, progressing too quickly can lead to frustration, a loss of precision, and incorrect muscle recruitment.

NOTE: Change in arousal level, increase or decrease, is the first indicator of mental and/or physical fatigue. Taking a short break (30 seconds to 1 min) with a cookie scatter, or down-stay can help manage arousal levels.

6. **Moving from one circuit to the next**
   Not all exercises within a circuit will be progressed at the same time. But as a general guide, I try not to straddle more than 2 circuits at the same time.
   a. **Example:** If my dog has reached fluency in 3 out of 4 exercises in Circuit 1, I would progress to Circuit 2, and also continue to implement the slow to develop exercise from Circuit 1. But I WOULD NOT progress to the exercises in Circuit 3 until the exercise from Circuit 1 was fluent.
   b. If we progress only the skills the dog is naturally good at, and neglect the skills they struggle with, we will end up running into a **"bottleneck"** as the circuits progress. This could be a skills bottleneck, strength/endurance bottleneck or a flexibility bottleneck. So the exercises the dog struggles with the most are actually the most important to focus on!

      NOTE: Puppies with growing bodies may need to return to previous progressions of an exercise when experiencing growth spurts. Past understanding of where their body parts are in space may not be applicable when the legs are suddenly several inches longer!! Patience pays off during these growing times!

7. Static **before** Dynamic
   Isolated **before** Integrated
   Stable **before** Unstable
   Form **drives** Function

Postnatal Specific Guidelines

We know from human physical therapy principles that muscle, tendon and ligament immediately start adapting to disuse, becoming weaker... This is called the **Principle of Reversibility**, and this change happens as soon as 1 week. Since your girl has been managing different demands for several months now, it's important to use a mindful approach when returning her to activity. This increases the likelihood things will go smoothly, and decreases her risk of injury.

We also know that it takes intentional application of load in order to help the soft tissue in the body re-strengthen and be properly prepared to meet the forces applied in everyday life. Lastly, we know that implementing a strategy where physical therapy is "done to you" is only successful in a very limited way. At some point, the human undergoing physical therapy has to train their own brain and body to fire the hypoactive muscle fibers... And train their own eyes/body to recognize/implement proper alignment and movement strategies. Until the patient themselves is making the conscious decision to implement proper form, success will be variable at best.

We can implement a similar strategy with our pups by using platforms of different sizes, being precise with our marker timing, and adjusting placement of reward to encourage and engrain proper posture/movement mechanics.

Lastly, the hormone **Relaxin** which shows up in measurable amounts around 4 weeks post LH surge. Not only does Relaxin "relax" the musculature in the abdominal wall, allowing the belly to expand to accommodate the litter, it actually impacts the soft tissue in the entire body… Muscle, ligament, tendon and fascia. This leaves the lumbar spine, SI joint, and stifle particularly vulnerable. Relaxin also breaks down collagen, and prevents it from synthesizing, leaving your girl more vulnerable to sprain/strain type injuries… especially if load or forces are increased abruptly.

And **Relaxin levels don't return to normal levels in your girl's body until 4-9 weeks post whelp** depending on when weaning takes place. So your girl is more vulnerable until then.

1. **Exit Props Carefully**
   When using a "reset cookie" it's critical that your girl doesn't run and dive to find the cookie. I find using an "off cookie" and then tossing a few reset cookies within 1 body length of the dog is a better approach. Less distance between the cookie and dog equals less speed, and less speed equals less force to be absorbed by lax shoulders and pasterns.

2. **Stable Surfaces**

Make sure the equipment you use is absolutely not going to flip. A fall type injury now, could be catastrophic. The hormonal changes your girl has undergone during pregnancy have resulted in laxity in the ligaments throughout her entire body. Nobody wants a TPLO right now if you can avoid it. I use the rubber feed bowls with Hot Rod, my BC because she is exceptionally mindful, and I am 100% confident she will not be crazy. Wooden platforms, garden pavers or other completely stable surfaces might be a better choice for your pup.

3. **Focus on Form**

Alignment is critical. If you notice a weakness or dip in the topline, It's likely things have been progressed too quickly for your girl. Gently tapping the abdomen, can help your girl reconnect to muscles that have been overstretched, and should help correct topline alignment. If that's not helping, it's likely something is off. Shoot me a little video, and I can help make some suggestions.

4. **Definitely walk**.

On leash or a long line/flexi walk/trot combo is really nice for mamas. This can be started at week 3, or after you have clearance from your vet. I liked using the "loop method", which includes walking around 1 block (or area) several times… That way if my girl started to get tired, I could stop and wasn't too far from home. So making several smaller loops vs one big loop. Once I was confident Hot Rod could handle a set duration, I switched to a single loop, which Hot Rod much preferred.

5. **Slower is Better**

Please remember your girl has been through a lot, in her body and mind. She's likely tired, a bit hormonal, and feeling funny in her body. Joint laxity post whelp is a real thing. This is caused by the hormone relaxin. Some girls are more affected by this hormone than others… Just like some human women are more sensitive to hormone changes than others. Slow and steady. It's a trap to progress too quickly.

6. **Definitely take notes!!**

Keeping track of reps x sets, how your girl handled the exercise, note where she was amazing AND where she struggled. This will provide an objective record of your progress. I guarantee there will be days where you will over-do, get overwhelmed, and misremember your progress. Having notes to review is invaluable, especially if you encounter a setback. Take an extra minute to record each session as it's happening. Include the date, reps x sets, and if there was anything remarkable either positive or negative. It doesn't have to be complicated.

Circuit 1a & 1b can be started as early as **week 3** post whelp, or after sutures are removed post cesarean, as long as your girl is feeling ok, and has been cleared by your vet to begin a slow return to activity (and assuming **you** have enough sleep and brain power to be training). But there's no rush. Waiting is perfectly fine as well.

Circuit 1a
2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 1b, for 2 weeks or until Fluency

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1. Front Foot Target: Foundation

0:20 of this video

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: An enthusiastic front foot target. We are looking for the dog to demonstrate understanding more than executing a high level of repetitions.

Appropriate to progress: Stay with this exercise until the dog is able to execute happily 10/10 times over 2 sets..

Note: Skimping on this step will likely lead to difficulty in the future. Notice how placement of the reset cookie, placement of reward and handler position influence the dog and increase the likelihood of success.

Goal: Front feet on target. Alignment and posture adjustments will come later as the exercises progress.

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2. Rear Foot Targeting: Foundation

A. Walking forward method 0:44 of this video (left column)

5 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is easily / consistently navigating the prop, and stopping with the front feet off the target and rear feet on.

B. Transitioning to walking backward method 1:22 of this video (right column)

1-2 steps backward
5 reps x 3 sets
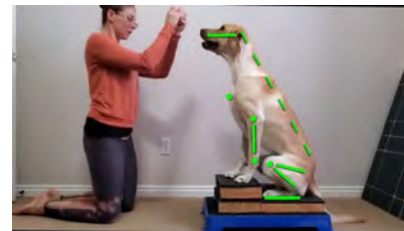
Building to: 3-4 steps backward 5 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: when the dog is happily and consistently stepping back onto the target without deviating or bending the spine

Goal: Building value to automatically stepping backward/reaching backward with the rear feet.

---

3. Posture Sit: Beginner

30 seconds - 1 min

Repeat x 3

Building to: 1 set for 3 min straight

Appropriate to progress: When your pup is able to maintain proper posture for 3 min

Goal: We're looking for proper posture through the spine, and proper alignment through the rear legs. If 30 seconds is too long for your pup to maintain proper alignment OR continue to adjust into correct alignment (as detailed in the video) you may need sets shorter than 30 seconds. Functional core challenge. Improves posture. Corrects a sloppy Sit. Fosters neuromuscular re-education. Appropriate for pups of all ages.
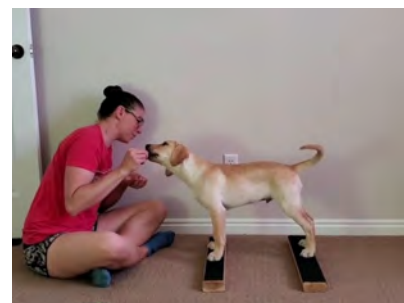
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4. Square Stand: Foundation

5 reps x 2 sets

Initial goal: 3 seconds before releasing

Ultimate goal: 5 seconds before releasing
Building to: 5 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily targeting the front and rear foot targets, and adjusting into position automatically, with minimal reluctance.

Note: Ideal alignment has the forelimbs and hocks vertically aligned, but this posture can be too challenging right in the beginning. It's ok to shorten the space between the front foot target and rear foot target slightly in the very beginning during the learning phase. This should be adjusted relatively quickly in grown dogs.

Goal: Introduces the concept of front foot targeting plus rear foot targeting simultaneously. Begins to strengthen the postural muscles (stabilizers) and core in neutral alignment to promote proper alignment.

---

5. [Teaching Stillness: Beginner](#)

5 reps x 3 sets

Literally begin with asking for a single second only.

Reward BEFORE the dog moves. It is critical to build reward history without overasking. If your dog does happen to move, that means you overasked. No biggie! Just toss a reset cookie and begin again

Building to: 5 seconds one second at a time. Stick with max 5 seconds for the first several sessions until fluency is achieved.

Increase the duration 1-2 seconds at a time

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain stillness for 20 seconds x 3 sets. Release from props between sets

Note: When progressing this exercise… Either ask for duration OR a new piece of equipment OR a new body position. And when making something harder, something else has to be made easier.

Goal: Building value to stillness, and teaching the dog that standing still is a rewarding behavior that PAYS! Prioritize stillness over duration.

Notes:

Circuit 1b
2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 1a, for 2 weeks or until Fluency

1. Front Foot Target to Elevated Perch: Foundation

2:18 of this video

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: An enthusiastic front foot target. We are looking for the dog to demonstrate understanding more than executing a high level of repetitions.

Appropriate to progress: Stay with this exercise until the dog is able to execute happily 10/10 times.

Front foot target should be slightly less than elbow height.

Note: Skimping on this step will likely lead to difficulty in the future. Notice how placement of the reset cookie, placement of reward and handler position influence the dog and increase the likelihood of success.

Goal: This exercise lays the foundation for many exercises to follow. Teaches body awareness and targeting skills. Shifts weight into rear by elevating the front feet.

2. Pivot: Foundation

2:48 of this video

5 passes (Stepping to the right approx. 3 steps and back =1 pass)

Reward for each step.

Building to: 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily moving in both directions and responding to minimal / not exaggerated handler motion.

**Note:** Front feet elevated about ½ elbow height

Goal: Teaches rear end awareness, and builds value for each individual step to prevent rushing. Strengthens the gluteals, hamstrings and quadriceps by raising the height of the front feet and shifting weight into the rear. Sidestepping also strengthens the outer hip and inner thigh muscles (abductors and adductors).

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3. Posture Sit: Beginner

(This is repeated because it is so important)

30 seconds - 1 min

Repeat x 3
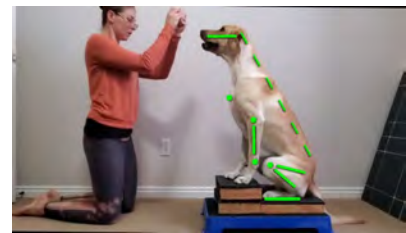
Building to: 1 set for 3 min straight

Appropriate to progress: When your pup is able to maintain proper posture for 3 min

Goal: We're looking for proper posture through the spine, and proper alignment through the rear legs. If 30 seconds is too long for your pup to maintain proper alignment OR continue to adjust into correct alignment (as detailed in the video) you may need sets shorter than 30 seconds. Functional core challenge. Improves posture. Corrects a sloppy Sit. Fosters neuromuscular re-education. Appropriate for pups of all ages.

---

4. Ipsilateral Foot Target/Side Step to Target: Foundation

5 reps on each side
Repeat x 3

Building to: 3-4 side steps moving into the ipsilateral foot target (demonstrated in the video)

5 reps on each side
Repeat for 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is happily, and independently offering ipsilateral feet simultaneously

Note: Any platform (or 2 platforms) propped against the wall can work for this. A wobble board doesn't have to be used.

In the beginning, don't worry about spinal alignment too much… that will come with the next progression. For now, we just want to build fluency and understanding to the ipsilateral foot target.

Goal: Improves coordination through the ipsilateral chains (connecting same side hip to same side shoulder). Strengthens the hip and shoulder abductor.

Notes:

Circuit 2a
2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 2b, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. [Head Nods: Beginner](#)

Up: 3
Down: 3
Right: 3
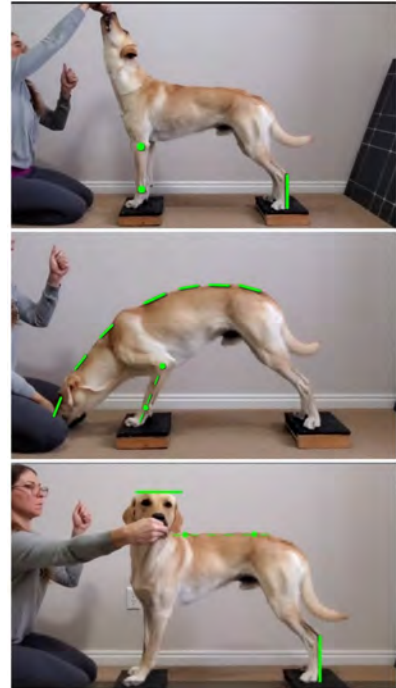Left: 3

Repeat for 1 set only

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to keep all 4 feet still, and move to the end range, without repositioning or losing balance. And is able to achieve 85% precision for 3 sets total.

Note: Because we are asking for maximum range of motion, any change in behavior or arousal should be seen as fatigue not disobedience. Resting off the props for 30 seconds to 1 min is usually sufficient.

Lastly, not all dogs will have the available range demonstrated in the video, age, breed, confidence, etc will all play a part in how far the individual pup can move. Working within your pup's available range, and deepening slowly (if appropriate) is important.

Goal: Tests the dog's ability to keep feet still while moving the head / neck. Highlights coordination deficit between the sides. Strengthens the hip and shoulder stabilizers against micro movements, and improves mobility through the neck and shoulder.
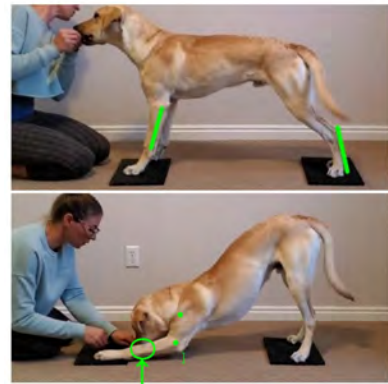
2. Bow Tutorial: Beginner

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is not confusing the Bow motion with the Fold Back Down, and is keeping all 4 feet still with 85% accuracy.

Note: Dog MUST start in a slightly overstretched stand to allow space for the shoulder to extend and the scapula to rotate properly. So props should be placed such that they encourage this.

Goal: Improves scapular mobility, and shoulder extension. Mobilizes and strengthens (eccentrically) the musculature on the caudal aspect of the shoulder and improves flexibility through the hamstring (AROM).

3. Pivot + Step Up: Beginner

Front foot target about elbow height. Rear foot target ½ hock height.
5 passes (moving to one side and back = 1 pass)

Repeat x 1

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog reaches fluency for 3 sets with 85% accuracy, is able to precisely target, lift onto, and lower off the rear foot targets without stumbling, hopping or losing balance.

Note: Reward for every step. This exercise is not about rushing to get to the next target, but about building value to each individual step to improve coordination.

Goal: Strengthens hip abductors and adductors. Improves rear end awareness, by encouraging slow movement. Builds value to slow precise movement.

4. [Backing Up: Beginner](#)

5 reps x 3 sets at 1-3 body lengths

Building to: 3 reps 20-30 feet depending on the size of the dog. Small dogs have a goal closer to 20ft. Large dogs closer to 30ft.

Note: Start with 1-2 body lengths. If the dog is managing well, increase distance by 1-2 body lengths each session.

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog is backing up straight, keeping head up, and stepping/not hopping. Then it is appropriate to increase distance. When the dog is executing for 20-30ft x 3 with 85% accuracy, they can safely progress to the next exercise.

Goal: Definitely focus on not hopping or overreaching with the rear feet. Improves mechanics through the PL. Strengthens gluteals, hamstrings and hip flexors and helps to integrate proper mechanics back into the gait.

Notes:

Circuit 2b
2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 2a, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Rock Back Sit-Push Forward Stand: Beginner
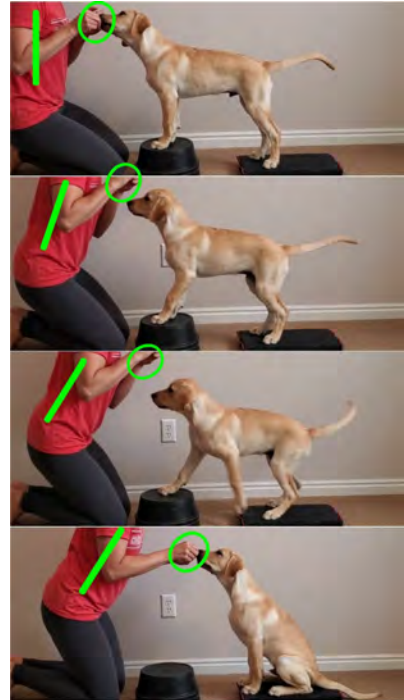
5 reps x 2 Sets

Building to: 5 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is offering the behavior easily, hitting max reps, and keeping rear feet staying still with 85% accuracy.

Note: The correct movement pattern during the transition from stand to sit is stifle flexing during the transition to sit, and fully flexed before the second front foot comes onto the sitting platform. Notice if your dog is bringing both front feet down and THEN moving into the sit position

Goal: Building value to keeping rear feet still, while transitioning to the stand.

2. Shoulder Strength & Stability Series: Beginner

Stillness: 10 seconds
Head Nods Down: 5
Weight Shifting:
3 presses x 3 reps (all on one side)

Repeat presses on other side
Release from equipment

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is keeping all 4 feet still throughout, flexing the shoulder so the humerus is approx. horizontal, is demonstrating an even curve through the spine, and happily resisting the handler's pressure.

Note: NO head nods up here. Keep head low, so the neck and head follow the line of the spine.

Goal: 90° shoulder and elbow flexion (humerus approaching horizontal) during the head nods down. Easily resisting handler pressure during the weight shifting portion.
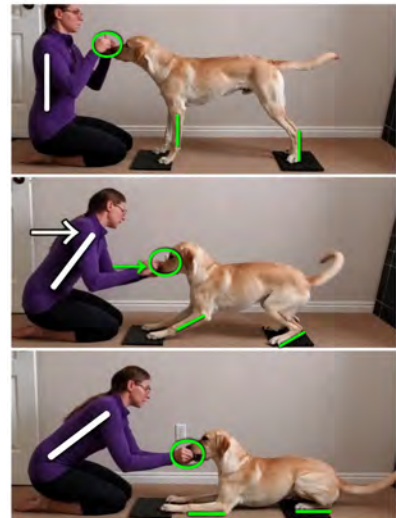
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3. Fold Back Down Tutorial: Beginner

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to fold back while keeping the forelimb and tarsus synchronized, resulting in the elbow and point of the hock touching down simultaneously. A dog who is touching down with elbows first is not yet strong enough to progress.

Note: Handler motion should be toward the dog's nose vs downward to differentiate between a "Bow" type movement and a Fold Back Down. I think about putting the cookie into the dog's eyeball. Dogs who are going through their big growth spurt may not physically be able to execute this movement pattern due to bone length discrepancy inherent in this time.

Goal: Forelimbs and hocks lowering and lifting in tandem / while staying parallel throughout. Teaches coordinated mechanics between the thoracic limb and pelvic limb.

4. [Standing Side Bend: Advanced](#)

Nose to Hip: 5 reps
Nose to Rear Foot: 5 reps
Nose to Loin: 5 reps
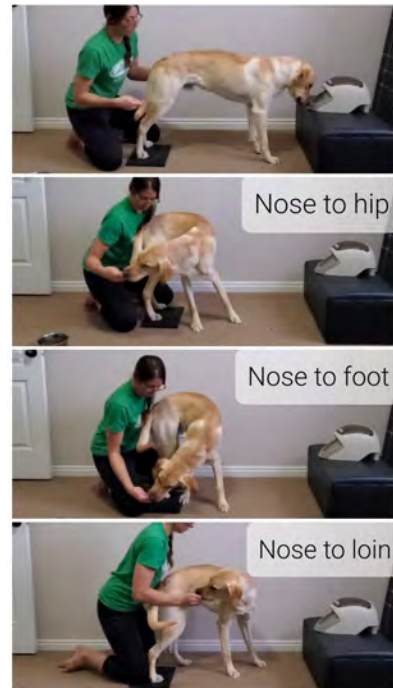Repeat on the second side.

Building to: 2 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When symmetry is displayed on both sides, in all 3 variations, and the dog is able to maintain rear end position without much assistance from the handler.

NOTE: Initially, the handler should assist in providing pelvic stability. The dog should assume responsibility for pelvic stability over time. Also, a nose to hand target can be substituted for the cookie at the hip, rear foot and loin if this becomes too calorically expensive. Notice and note the difference between the sides.

Goal: Improves spinal mobility and stability through the whole length of the spine, and addresses right to left muscle imbalance (strength and / or flexibility).

Notes:

Circuit 3a
2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 3b, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Weight Shifting: Beginner

3 presses x 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat on other side
Release from equipment.
Repeat x 2

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is consistently and happily leaning back into the handler pressure, maintaining foot position, demonstrating a neutral or mostly neutral top line, and can meet max repetition x set requirements.

Note: Pay extra attention to the amount of pressure you're able to apply, and if there's a difference between the sides. Try and note on a scale of 1-10. 1 being almost no pressure. 10 being pressing as hard as you can.

Goal: Building value to the dog leaning back into the handler. Challenges hip and shoulder adductors/abductors and core muscles (including the psoas) on the side opposite handler pressure.

2. Bow-Stretch: Intermediate

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog is able to execute with proper form, while keeping all 4 feet still with 85% accuracy. This Includes shoulder behind the elbow and ischial tuberosity behind the rear foot during the bow phase and a neutral spine while extending the hip during the stretch phase.
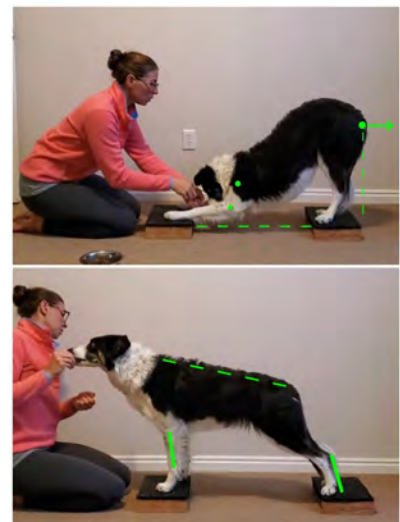
Note: Dog MUST start in a slightly overstretched stand to allow space for the shoulder to extend and the scapula to rotate properly. This is detailed in the video

Goal: Improves scapular mobility, shoulder extension and hamstring mobility during the bow phase. Challenges the core and hip flexors (including the iliopsoas) during the stretch phase.

---

3. Pivot/ Step to Target: Intermediate

Starts at 0:39 of this video.

Rear foot targets are close together.

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

4. Plank Tutorial: Beginner

Rear feet elevated to carpus height only.

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is comfortable moving to 85% of full hip extension

Note: ALWAYS release from the counterpose position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Goal: Strengthens the core stabilizers including the iliopsoas. Rear feet should stay still throughout. Even weight bearing through the rear limbs is a priority over maximum range.

Notes:

Circuit 3b
2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 3a, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Rock Back Sit-Push Forward Stand: Intermediate

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to Progress: When the dog reaches 85% accuracy at maximum reps, and is moving with both front feet simultaneously during the concentric phase (transition from sit to stand).

Note: Front foot target set at shoulder height (point of the shoulder, not the withers). The concentric phase (transition from sit to stand) will always
"come together" and become more fluent first. It will take time for your pup to control the eccentric phase (slow resisting of gravity in the transition from stand to sit).

Goal: Transitioning from the front feet stepping up onto the front foot target to fully loading into the rear, with front feet moving simultaneously during the concentric phase (transition from sit to stand). Increases strength through the large muscles in the pelvic limb (PL), including the quadriceps, hamstrings, and gluteals.

2. Shoulder Strength & Stability Series: Intermediate

Increase the height of the rear foot target to elbow height or a 30° spine angle and add instability to front feet.
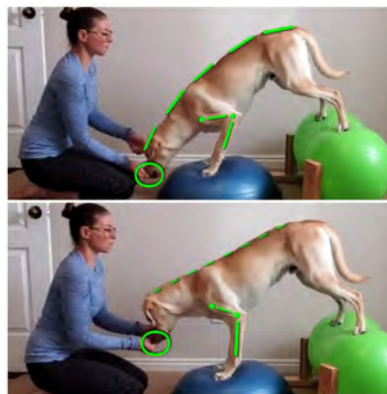
Stillness: 10 seconds
Head Nods Down: 5
Weight Shifting:
3 presses for 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat presses on other side
Release from equipment

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is keeping all 4 feet still throughout, flexing the shoulder so the humerus is approx. horizontal, is demonstrating an even curve through the spine, and happily resisting the handler's pressure.

Note: NO head nods up here. Keep head low, so the neck and head follow the line of the spine. Watch for carpal hyperflexion.
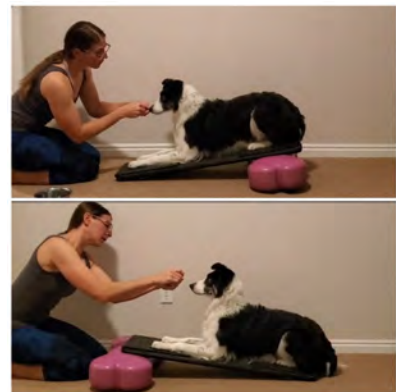
Goal: Humerus horizontal or slightly below during the head nods down. Easily resisting handler pressure during the weight shifting portion.

---

3. Fold Back Down Decline/Incline: Intermediate

Incline/ Facing Uphill:
5 reps x 3 sets

Decline/ Facing Downhill:
5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the forelimb and tarsus are moving in tandem with 85% accuracy, and the dog is maintaining a neutral spine.

Note: Facing uphill the rear end is more loaded, while facing downhill the front is more loaded. We can use this shift of weight to help regulate the challenge level. It's important to note which direction produces the smoother movement in the individual dog, and begin the exercise with that variation.

Goal: Focus is on the synchronized movement of the limbs, and maintaining a neutral spine throughout. Functional core strength that specifically targets the serratus ventralis, epaxials, obliques and iliopsoas, along with the latissimus.

4. <u>Controlled Cone Wrap: Intermediate</u>

5 single reps to the right
5 single reps to the left
Rest
Repeat for 3 sets total

Building to: Multi wrap (2 and then 3 wraps per rep)
3 repetitions of the multi wrap
Repeat going the other direction
Rest
Repeat for 3 sets total

Note: This is to be executed SLOWLY. For dogs trained to wrap a cone quickly, a reward may have to be used/tossed on the ground every ¼ wrap for a time until understanding is achieved. Then the reward can be offered every ½ wrap, and finally for a full wrap.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog's unique compensation pattern is replaced by correct movement / muscle recruitment for a triple wrap at maximum repetitions.

Goal: The intent of this exercise is to notice any asymmetry in the movement pattern, or the **individual pup's unique compensations**, and start to use neuromuscular reeducation to refine/correct the movement dysfunction. Notice if the dog is skipping steps or hopping, or executing a "teardrop shape" -vs- a round shape, and use the mark and reward to help build value to proper mechanics.

Notes:

Circuit 4a
2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 4b, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. [Weight Shifting: Intermediate](#)

Variation 1: Unstable surface under the **front** feet

a. 5 presses x 3 reps
(all on one side)
b. Repeat pressing on the other shoulder.
c. Release from equipment.
d. Repeat x 2 total

Variation 2: Unstable surface under the **rear** feet

a. 5 presses x 3 reps
(all on one side)
b. Repeat pressing on the other shoulder.
c. Release from equipment.
d. Repeat x 2 total

Building to:
15 presses on one side
15 presses on the other side
Stay on props
Repeat x 3

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is maintaining a neutral spine (no side bending), and resisting with an 8/10 pressure on both sides for max reps.

Note: Pay extra attention to the amount of pressure you're able to apply, and if there's a difference between the sides. Try and note on a scale of 1-10. 1 being almost no pressure. 10 being pressing as hard as you can.

Goal: Challenges hip and shoulder adductors/abductors (including the psoas). Functional core strength. Particularly good for rebalancing the iliopsoas.

2. Deep Bow: Advanced

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to move to the end range without repositioning the front feet or removing one foot from the front foot target with 85% accuracy.

Note: Placement of reward is BELOW the height of the carpus, That's what makes this a Deep Bow. Nose facing downward, as shown in this photo. Dog MUST start in an overstretched stand to allow space for the shoulder to extend and the scapula to rotate properly.

Goal: Continues to improve mobility through the shoulder, hip flexor and hamstring.

---

3. Pivot/Step to Target: Advanced

Starts at 1:42 of this video

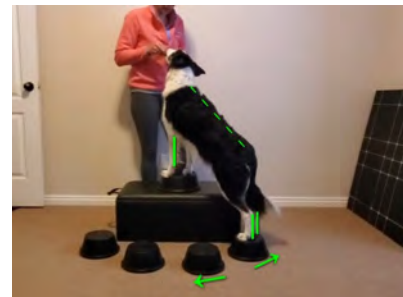Increase the distance between the rear foot targets by 25-50%

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

4. [Plank: Intermediate](#)

Increases the height of the rear feet to elbow height

5 reps x 3 Sets

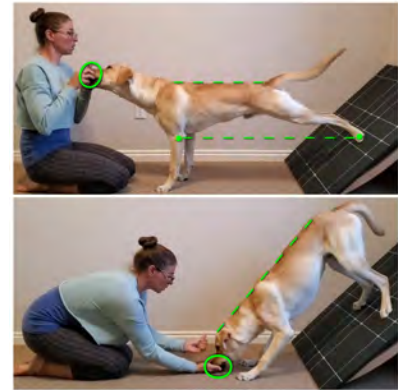**Building to:**
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute pose and counterpose with fluidity and understanding, keeping the rear feet still 85% of the time, to maximum repetitions.

Note: ALWAYS release from the counterpose position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Goal: Increases the load through the core muscles and the iliopsoas, and begins to introduce full range hip extension.

Notes:

Circuit 4b
2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 4a, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency
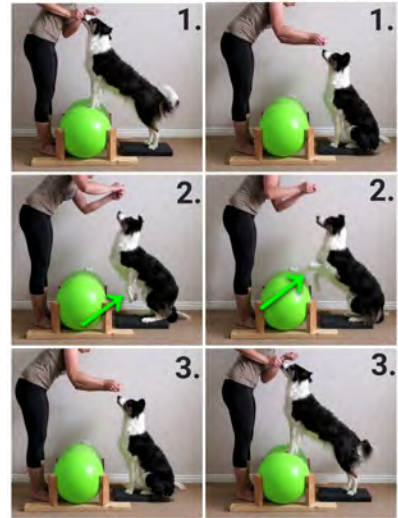
1. Power Up Prep: Advanced

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3

Appropriate to Progress: When both front feet are moving simultaneously during the transition from Sit to Stand (concentric phase), and the transition from Stand to Sit (eccentric phase) is slow and controlled in 50% of the repetitions. .

Note: Using placement of reward, vertically above the dog's head can help encourage the dog to lower slowly to the sit. (Peanut Butter spoon may be helpful)

Goal: Both front feet moving in tandem during the concentric phase. Starting to see some slow reps in the transition from stand to sit in the eccentric phase. Functional core challenge. Prepares for the plyometric progression.

2. Hop Sit-Tutorial: Intermediate

5 reps x 3 sets of the Hop Sit only

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Note: Once the dog is able to execute 7-10 reps of the Hop Sit, it's fair to incorporate the Hop Stand, assuming the hop Stand is fluent. This is shown at 3:23 in the video.

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to maintain balance with 85% consistency, and no longer "going over the handlebars".

Goal: Keeping front feet still throughout. This exercise also specifically targets the shoulder extensors eccentrically as they work hard to decelerate, and stop the dog from "going over the handlebars". Functional core strength.

---

3. Fold Back Down- Split Surface: Advanced

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with 85% accuracy, limbs moving in tandem, neutral spine, elbows moving to horizontal but not below.

Note: Spacing between the targets should be such that…
1. front feet are at the very *back* edge of the front foot target (no carpus on the platform)
2. Rear feet are at the very *front* edge of the rear foot target
3. Any stable foot targets can be used. Feed buckets are not required or appropriate for all dogs.

Goal: Strengthens the shoulder, core and hip stabilizers in a lengthened lever position. Promotes a high level of hip and shoulder stability. Functional core strength.

---

4. Intro to Cavaletti (Part 3): Intermediate

Progression 1:
3 passes x 3 sets

Building to:
Progression 2:
5 passes x 3 sets

Building to:
Progression 3:
10 passes x 3 sets
(down and back=1 pass)

Appropriate to progress: ONLY add more passes when 85% fluency is achieved. This includes focus away from the handler / independent execution, no ticking / knocking the poles and entering the poles with an appropriate amount of speed control. Adding too many repetitions too quickly will result in degradation of form from mental and/or physical fatigue.

Goal: Consistent independent execution. Introduces the beginning of plyometric exercise in a controlled manner to reduce overtaxing the system.

Notes:

Circuit 5a
2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 5b, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency

1. Weight Shifting: Advanced

3 presses for 5 reps (all on one side)
Repeat on other side
Release from equipment.
Repeat x3

Building to:
15 presses on one side
15 presses on the other side
Stay on props
Repeat x 3

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is maintaining a neutral spine (no side bending), and resisting with an 8/10 pressure on both sides for max reps.

Note: Be very mindful during the release of pressure. Because we are integrating 2 unstable surfaces, the dog is at an increased risk of falling upon release of handler pressure.

Goal: Significant stability challenge for the core, shoulder and hip, targeting both the diagonal and ipsilateral chains.

---

2. Bow Split Unstable Surface: Expert

Unstable surface under **FRONT FEET** only.

5 reps x 3 Sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 Sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with proper form, while keeping all 4 feet still with 85% accuracy. Prop stability should be confidently maintained.

Note: Rear feet equally elevated as the front feet, on a stable surface.

Dog MUST start in an overstretched stand. With the addition of instability also comes a 10-15% loss in range. This is to be expected.

Goal: Specifically targets the shoulder stabilizers against the rolling motion of the props at the eccentric end range where muscles are the weakest.

---

3. [Pivot/Step to Target: Expert](#)

Starts at 2:08 of this video

Substituting unstable PawPods for the stable foot targets.

4 passes (moving across the targets AND back=1 pass)

Building to: 3 sets total

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute with intentional foot placement, coordinated movement, no loss of balance. Arousal level should be maintained.

Note: Precision is the goal with this exercise. Each step should be controlled, and rewarded individually.

Goal: Slow controlled movement that targets the hip abductors and adductors (including the iliopsoas).

---

4. [Wheelbarrow: Advanced](#)

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is reaching full hip extension and maintaining a neutral spine (NO SPINE EXTENSION), and able to maintain alignment to maximum repetitions.

NOTE: ALWAYS release from the sit position. This is critical to avoid a sprain/strain type injury to the psoas.

Progression of the Plank exercise. [Butt Up Stand](#) may be needed as a prep for dogs who struggle with the sitting position.

Goal: Targets the alternating diagonal muscle chains in the core while moving from short to long lever position.

Notes:

Circuit 5b
2 x a week, alternating with Circuit 5a, for 2-4 weeks or until Fluency
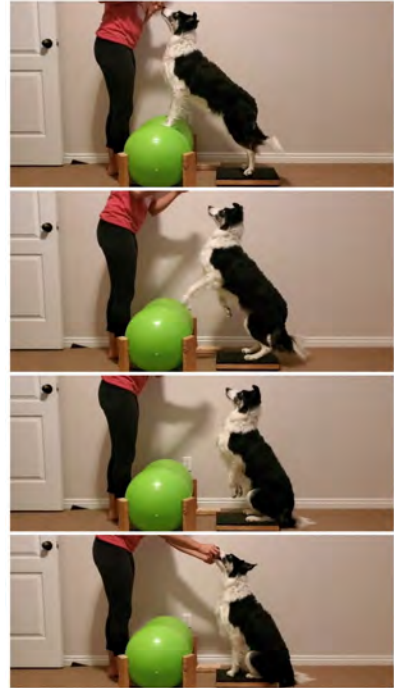
1. Power-Up: Expert

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to execute 85% of the repetitions slowly during the eccentric phase

Note: Slow controlled return to the sit position is the main focus, and the dog's fluency in executing this slow movement is the main thing that differentiates this variation from the Power-Up Prep variation.

Goal: Slow controlled eccentric. Functional core strength. Specifically targets the quadriceps eccentrically, and fosters better balance, core control and body awareness.



2. Hop Back Stand Tutorial: Intermediate

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to:
10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the front feet stay still with 85% accuracy, vertical alignment of the forelimb, and the rear feet are not getting "caught" on the sitting platform

Note: Once the dog is able to execute 7-10 reps hopping back vs stepping back, it's fair to combine with the Hop Sit motion. But the reward criteria is for the Hop Stand ONLY

Goal: Forward loading into the shoulder for shoulder strengthening that mimics impact (landing phase of a jump, or impact phase of a box turn).
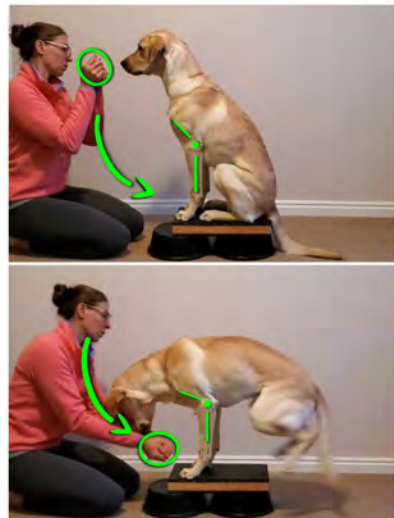
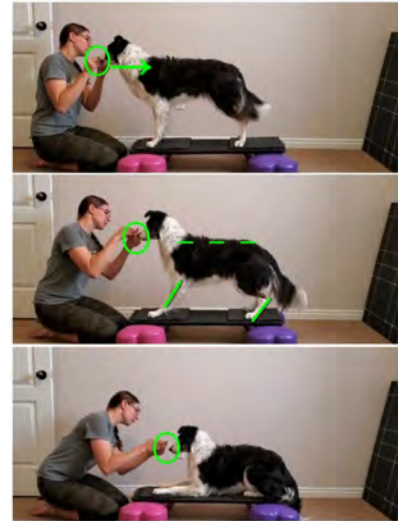### 3. [Fold Back Down- Stable Surface Unstable Base: Advanced](#)

5 reps x 3 sets

Building to: 10 reps x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: When the dog is able to confidently execute with a neutral spine, keeping all 4 feet still, and moving forelimbs and tarsus in tandem with 85% accuracy.

Note: This step introduces instability to the equation while still maintaining a stable surface. This allows the dog's stabilizers to get stronger without adding the further challenge of having a squishy surface under foot.

Goal: Challenges the core and joint stabilizers, while maintaining a stable surface.

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4. [Cavaletti Circles: Advanced](#)

5 passes x 3 sets

Building to: 10 passes x 3 sets

Appropriate to progress: ONLY add more passes when 85% fluency is achieved. This includes focus away from the handler / independent execution, no knocking poles or double stepping, and entering the poles with an appropriate amount of speed control.
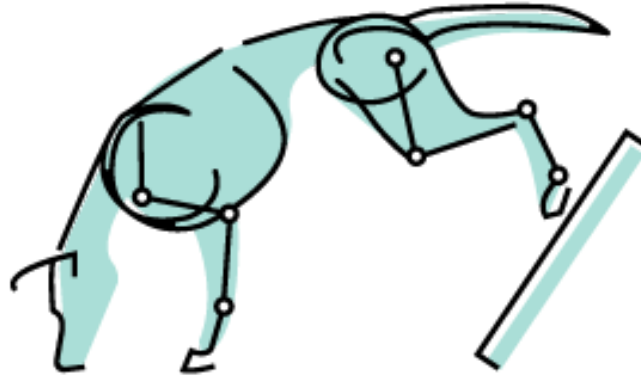
Note:
1. Spacing between the cones on the *inside* of the curve should be slightly less than the height of the withers (or 2x elbow height), and fan out evenly.
2. The dog can then adjust their proximity to the cones, in order to find their striding/ideal spacing.
3. Poles are 1 inch or less off the ground as is typical with extension cavaletti.

Goal: Applies lateral/centrifugal forces in motion to build strength and endurance through the medial and lateral limb stabilizers through the PL and TL.

Notes:

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CANINE CONDITIONING COACH.COM

CCC Puppy Program
CCC Beginner Program
CCC Strong Dog Program
CCC Sport Dog Program
CCC Senior Dog Program
CCC Sloppy Sitters Mini-Program
CCC Post Spay Mini-Program
CCC Post TPLO Mini Program

CANINE CONDITIONING COACH

Sport Dog Program
Customizable
Warm-Up / Cool Down

A note from Anna Lee:

I have tried to provide for you an evidence-based warm-up, of the same quality we would implement with a high level human athlete, while also taking into consideration the constraints of the trial environment.

This warm-up / cool down should be customized for your sport and the needs of your dog following the instructions provided.

The only equipment you will need for this warm-up is 2 sitting platforms, and a chair or footstool.

Duration

The magic number with regards to how long the warm-up should be is about 8-10 min start to finish. This includes trotting time to bring the body up to temperature, executing the warm up exercises, and using any sport specific warm-up equipment available (like the warm-up jump in agility). Keeping the duration short also ensures we're not executing too many repetitions (this is a warm-up not a workout), and that our dogs aren't going into the ring with a completely full belly.

S.A.I.D. Principle

When building your sport specific warm up, we want to incorporate what we know about the SAID principle. In order to have a positive impact on performance, the movements selected must mimic the movement patterns included in the sport.

Since dog sports are performed on stable footing, we want to warm up on stable surfaces as well if we hope to recreate demands similar to what the dog is going to be experiencing in the ring.

Temperature increase

Part of the warm up process is bringing the dog's body from a resting temperature to a working temperature. In human athletes, this is usually determined by when the athlete starts to just break a sweat. But since dog's don't sweat, we can use their breathing pattern as a measure of internal temperature. Once a dog is starting to breathe with their mouth open, that generally indicates the internal temperature is high enough to ensure vasodilation / and increased blood flow to the muscles.

Warm Up: How to Start

Trotting until body temp increases
2-4 min

Choose 1 Global Warm-Up
Abduction / Adduction

Choose 1 Global Warm-Up
Flexion / Extension

Global Warm-Up:
Side Step to Target

Reps: 5-7 steps to target / Sets: 2
Repeat to other direction

Targets: Hip & shoulder abductors / adductors, lateral hip rotators, elbow stabilizers.

S.A.I.D: Lateral direction change

NOTE: Contralateral limbs will lift when taking successive steps.

Global Warm-Up: Pivot

**Reps: Stepping 180° to left & right
Sets: 5**

Targets: Hip abductors / adductors, medial shoulder stabilizers, elbow stabilizers.

S.A.I.D: Lateral direction change

NOTE: Try to minimize hopping.

Global Warm-Up: Backing Up

Reps: 10-15 steps to target / Sets: 2

Targets: Hip & shoulder flexors / extensors, hip & shoulder satbilizers.

S.A.I.D: Forward motion, collection, rear end awareness

NOTE: Minimize hopping or shuffling. Head position and spine neutral throughout.

Global Warm-Up: Tugging

Reps: 30-45 seconds / Sets: 2
Slowly allow the dog to tug away from you, then slowly pull the dog back in.

Targets: Hip flexors & hip extensors, cervical stabilizers & jaw muscles, shoulder extensors, digital flexors.

S.A.I.D: Collection, weight shift backward, end-range hip flexion

NOTE: horizontal spine. Weight shift backward. No thrashing or lateral head movement.

Next choose 1 exercise from each of the following categories

Rear End

Core & Iliopsoas

Front End

Side Body

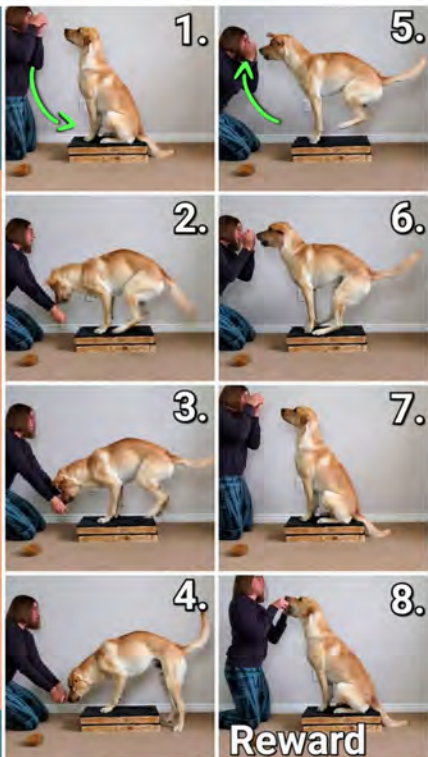# Rear End Warm-Up: Hop Sit Sprints

(Pause in Sit)

Reps: 10 / Sets:1

Targets: Hamstrings, quads, gastrocnemius & stifle stabilizers. Rear digits and metatarsus.

S.A.I.D: Explosive forward motion

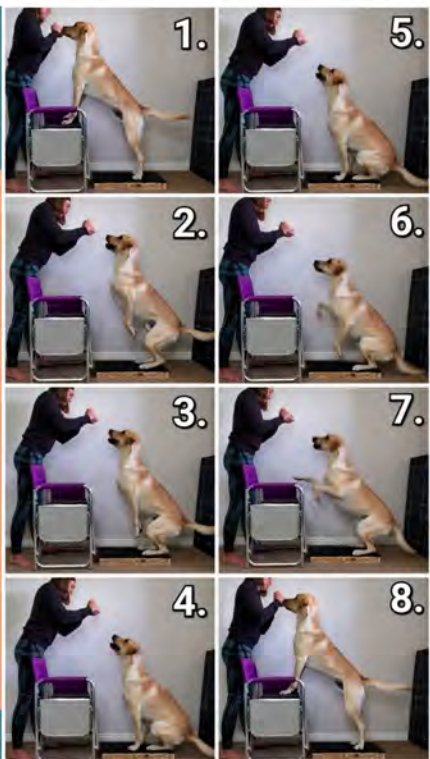NOTE: Rear feet impact ground simultaneously. Immediate return to sit.

Rear End Warm-Up: Power Up

Reps: 10 / Sets:1

Targets: Quads, hamstrings, iliopsoas, sartorius, gastrocnemius, digital flexors.

S.A.I.D: Explosive forward motion, jumping, obstacle ascent.

NOTE: Slow eccentric. Powerful concentric. Handler must stabilize chair or step stool.

Rear End Warm-Up:
Rock Back Sit: Modification

Reps: 10 / Sets: 1

Targets: Iliopsoas, sartorius, abdominals. Biceps, supraspinatus, scapular stabilizers.

S.A.I.D: End-range hip extension, running in extension, weight shift to the rear.

NOTE: No spine extension. Stifles should flex and extend in tandem.

Prop Setup

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.

Rear End Warm-Up:
Tuck Sit + Front Feet ↑

Reps: 10 / Sets:1

Targets: Quads, hamstrings, iliopsoas, spine extensors, stifle stabilizers.

S.A.I.D: Vertical jumping, precise rear foot placement,

NOTE: Square pelvic limb alignment is essential. Handler must atabilize the chair or foot stool.

Core/Iliopsoas Warm-Up: Plank

Reps: 7 1 Rep=Hip extension +3 pulses
Sets: 1

Targets: Iliopsoas, sartorius, lumbar epaxials, shoulder & elbow stabilizers.

S.A.I.D: End-range hip extension, running / jumping in extension

NOTE: Dog MUST be released from the counterpose position to avoid iliopsoas strain.

Core/Iliopsoas Warm-Up: Burpees

Reps: 10 / Sets: 1

Targets: Serratus ventralis, latissimus, abdominals, iliopsoas concentrically, shoulder & elbow stabilizers.

S.A.I.D: Collection, deceleration, weight shift to the rear.

NOTE: Best choice if you're short on time, and need to cut corners. It happens sometimes.

Core/Iliopsoas Warm-Up: Hiccup

Reps: 10 / Sets:1

Targets: Abdominals, iliopsoas, gluteals, stifle stabilizers. Shoulder & elbow extensors.

S.A.I.D: Weight shift off forehand, collection, vertical jumping.

NOTE: Stifle should be fully flexed before front feet touch down.

Front End Warm-Up: Deep Bow

Reps: 10 / Sets: 1

Targets: ALL shoulder muscles. Lengthens back muscles & hamstrings. Engages core muscles concentrically & eccentrically.

S.A.I.D: Running / jumping in extension. Spine extension.

NOTE: Dog MUST start in an overstretched stand on order to have enough space to fully extend the shoulder.

Front End Warm-Up: Fold Back Down

Reps: 10 / Sets: 1

Targets: ALL shoulder stabilizers. Latissimus, triceps, serratus ventralis. Biceps & supraspinatus eccentrically.

S.A.I.D: Explosive forward motion. Weight shift to rear.

NOTE: Antebrachium and metatarsus must move in tandem.

Front End Warm-Up: Shoulder Strength Series

Head Nods Down: 7 / Sets:1
Weight Shifting Presses: 7 / Sets: 1
Repeat Weight Shifting on other side

Targets: Biceps & supraspinatus. Medial & lateral shoulder stabilizers.

S.A.I.D: Jump landing, impact with the front end, deceleration, resisting lateral forces.

NOTE: Humerus should approach horizontal during the Head Nods Down.

Side Body Warm-Up: Weight Shifting

Stand

Stillness

Press

Release

Reps: 5 / Rep = 5 presses / Sets:1
Repeat on other side

Targets: Hip & shoulder abductors on the side opposite pressure, and the abdominals, & iliopsoas bilaterally.

S.A.I.D: Balance, resisting lateral forces, turning.

NOTE: Placement of reward should be such to promote a neutral spine.

Side Body Warm-Up: Head Nods

Reps: 5 vertical / 5 horizontal / Sets: 2

Targets: Spine & shoulder mobility. Core, elbow, and stifle stability

S.A.I.D: Tight turns, lateral neck flexion, turning while jumping, keeping feet still.

NOTE: Placement of reward should be such to promote a full range of motion without foot movement.

Side Body Warm-Up: Standing Side Bend

Reps: 5 / Nose to hip, rear foot, & loin
Repeat to the other side.

Targets: Cervical, thoracic and lumbar spine mobility to the end-range, shoulder mobility.

S.A.I.D: Tight turning, maximum lateral spine flexion

NOTE: A Treat n Train or human assistant will be needed for this exercise.

Cool Down: How to Start

Walking until breathing returns to normal / mouth closed / dog can 'sniff'

Choose 1 or 2
aROM Spine

Choose 1 or 2
aROM Shoulder / Hip

aROM Spine: Head Nods

Reps: 5 vertical / 5 horizontal / Sets: 2

Mobilizes: Brachiocephalicus, trapezius, supraspinatus, biceps, epaxials, latissimus, obliques.

S.A.I.D: Jump landing, cervical spine extension, quick turning, direction change.

NOTE: Placement of reward should be such to promote a full range of motion without foot movement.

aROM Spine: Standing Side Bend

Neutral

Nose to Hip

Nose to Foot

Nose to Loin

Reps: 5 / Nose to hip, rear foot, & loin
Repeat to the other side.

Mobilizes: Lateral aspect of the cervical, thoracic and lumbar spine, QL and origin of iliopsoas.

S.A.I.D: Tight turning, direction changes at speed. Any falling on course.

NOTE: A Treat n Train or human assistant will be needed for this exercise.

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aROM Shoulder / Hip: Deep Bow

Reps: 10 / Sets: 1

Mobilizes: ALL shoulder muscles, back muscles, sartorius & hamstrings.

S.A.I.D: Jump landing, rapid acceleration / deceleration, upright shoulder angulation.

NOTE: Dog MUST start in an overstretched stand on order to have enough space to fully extend the shoulder.

aROM Shoulder / Hip: Plank

Reps: 7 1 Rep=Hip extension +3 pulses
Sets: 1

Mobilizes: iliopsoas, sartorius, lumbar epaxials, biceps and supraspinatus.

S.A.I.D: End-range hip extension, running / jumping in extension, tight iliopsoas.

NOTE: Dog MUST be released from the counterpose position to avoid iliopsoas strain.

A note about cooling down:

Try to keep your dog walking until breathing returns to normal. This can be slightly delayed if running dogs back to back. Avoid crating a hot dog. Instead, have a friend hold the leash or use an x-pen.

aROM is important, and can be really helpful in minimizing muscle soreness and stiffness.

If cooling down multiple dogs, it's 100% fine to walk out dogs together. Then, put one dog in a controlled position while implementing aROM, and switch.

aROM vs pROM:

When participating in high impact sports, we always want to use active range of motion to stretch the dog's body as part of the warm-up and cool down.

Several human studies have shown that passive stretching pre-event does not reduce injury risk... but instead results in decreased muscle force, contraction velocity and the ability to store elastic energy, for up to 48 hours. So stick with active stretching

How & Where to Cheat

1. It's never ok to take a cold dog out of a crate and into the ring. But trials can be unpredictable at times. So sometimes you have to cut corners. At the VERY LEAST increase the dog's body temperature by trotting the dog or jogging with the dog alongside you.

2. It's a MUST to incorporate changes of direction. Forward / Backward, Side to Side, and Side bending. This can be done by trotting in a figure 8 pattern / using a spin cue, Side Stepping and Backing up.

3. A few select aROM exercises like Bow, Standing Side Bend, Fold Back Down, and Plank can even be performed ringside. Remember to keep reps low, and move through the range your pup is able to execute with proper alignment. This is a warm-up not a workout.

4. You *can* split your warm-up if necessary. So you can trot your dog to increase body temp (before your walk through), and then implement the remaining portions after a short break. Some is better than none.

Programs Available

Puppy Program
Beginner Program
Strong Dog Program
Sport Dog Program
Senior Dog Program
Sloppy Sitters Mini-Program
Post Spay Mini-Program
Postnatal Mini-Program
Post TPLO Mini-Program