

Spring Into Fitness

WHILE STAYING SAFE **AND** HEALTHY

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Maggie is a sweet Golden Retriever who was really excited to begin daily runs with her owner this spring. Her owner was starting a "Spring Fever" fitness and exercise regimen, and knew that Maggie could stand to lose more than just a couple of pounds too! Maggie was enthusiastic but struggled towards the end of the jog, panting heavily and slowing down quite a bit. Gradually Maggie, although still excited about the experience of jogging with her owner, started slowing down even further and even began to show a slight limp in one of her back legs after jogging. After seeing her veterinarian, Maggie was diagnosed with a ligament injury in her knee and referred to a veterinary orthopedic specialist.

Unfortunately, Maggie's Spring Fever story is a common one. As we head into spring, many people (and their pets) are excited to get outside and focus on developing a healthy lifestyle through exercise. Fitness is a great goal but it's very important to build an exercise regimen that will protect your pet from injury. One of the best ways to achieve a healthy fitness goal is through an individualized program specific for your pet's needs. For us humans, a controlled environment like a gym or a specialized routine with a personal trainer is ideal. For our pets, much the same is true! While it's generally more of a concern in summer, springtime in Houston can be hot, and our pets are much more affected by heat and outdoor exercise than the

average person. An indoor, monitored environment is the best place for our pets to get in shape, especially those pets that are just beginning their fitness initiative. A physical therapist specializing in animal rehabilitation can develop a plan for your pet, taking into account current fitness level, age, and other health concerns. When pets are overweight, their entire bodies experience increased



stress, contributing to orthopedic injuries like Maggie's, plus accelerated progression of any arthritis they already have.

Unhealthy pets can also be affected by problems like heart disease, diabetes, skin problems, and can even lead to the premature death of the pet. After completing a thorough initial evaluation, a physical therapist specializing in animal rehabilitation will create a customized individual program designed to meet each pet's individual needs. For out of shape dogs focusing on weight loss, for example, exercise in a water treadmill system allows the physical therapist to modulate the intensity of the patient's

work-out through water height and the speed of the treadmill belt. The buoyancy of the water also protects patient's joints against excessive concussive forces generated by excess body weight while resisting movements for strengthening. Appropriate water temperature aids in effective cooling; the added benefit of being indoors is enjoying the air conditioning! Each individual patient's needs and the goals for therapy determine how each of these variables are employed.

In addition to cardiovascular exercise in the underwater treadmill, the physical therapist can incorporate additional exercises to address all facets of wellness and fitness, including therapeutic exercise for strengthening, balance training, and coordination activities. Dogs with orthopedic issues, such as osteoarthritis or joint diseases, experience particular benefits from these activities; dogs without orthopedic disorders can attenuate their risk of developing them. Stretching, massage, and physical modalities (including LASER, ultrasound, and electrical stimulation) may be employed for dogs with additional needs as well.

Spring is a great time to begin a habit of healthiness for both you and your pet, but it's important to work through a veterinary professional when starting out with your pet to avoid injuries like Maggie's. If you would like to learn more about health and your pet, check with your veterinarian, or consider a referral to a physical therapist specializing in animal rehabilitation - your pet will thank you!