

# Strength Foundations

A free mini-resource for dog owners beginning their conditioning journey.

## What it is

Strength training in dogs develops the ability to produce controlled force through their muscles. Scientifically, strength work uses isometric contractions (static holds) and isotonic contractions (dynamic movement) to build muscle fibre recruitment, joint stability, and neuromuscular coordination.

Static strength builds stability and postural control. Dynamic strength builds controlled and functional movement. Strength is simply your dog learning to use their muscles in a steady, controlled way.

- Static strength = holding a position with good form.
- Dynamic strength = transitioning between positions with good form.

Both help your dog move safely, confidently, and efficiently.

## Why it matters

For puppies it builds early stability, supports joint alignment and helps them learn controlled movement without impact. Strength training should not start until 9 months of age, but skills can be built from 16 weeks. That means you can practice these positions and transitions, but with very low durations, reps and sets. We recommend no more than 3s of duration in static holds, 3 reps of dynamic exercises, and max 2 sets.

For adults it improves stability, joint support, better posture and movement patterns, coordination and reduces the risk of injury.

For seniors it maintains muscle mass, supports joint comfort and helps prevent slips and mobility decline.

For sport dogs, strength training helps maintain strong, stable joints for repeated jumping, weaving and turning. It supports better postural control, cleaner deceleration and more balanced hind-end engagement, helping reduce compensatory loading and improve overall movement efficiency.



# Example Exercises

## **Square Stand (Static)**

A neutral, balanced stand with even weight distribution.

Start with:

- Up to 3 seconds (until form is correct)
- 2-3 reps
- 1-2 sets
- Goal: stillness, alignment, fully body strengthening, paws should not move.

## **Back Paws On (Static)**

Rear paws on a stable platform that is around the height of your dog's hock, front paws on the floor.

Start with:

- Up to 3 seconds (until form is correct)
- 2-3 reps
- 1-2 sets
- Goal: stillness, alignment, strengthens shoulders and core, paws should not move.

## **Rockback Sit → Step-to-Stand (Dynamic)**

Dog rocks weight back into a controlled sit, then steps forward into a balanced stand.

Start with:

- 2-3 reps
- 1-2 sets
- Goal: slow, clean movement without dropping rear, popping up or shuffling back paws, focusses on hind end strengthening.

## **Press-Ups (Dynamic)**

Dog moves from a stand into a play bow position, then pushes back up into a stand.

Start with:

- 1-3 reps
- 1-2 sets
- Goal: slow, clean movement without dropping rear, popping up or shuffling back paws, focusses on shoulder strengthening and stability in the rear.



# Safe progressions & Common Mistakes

## Static exercises

Before your dog can hold correct form, keep the stand and back paws on very short — no more than 3 seconds. This prevents them from practising poor posture.

Once they can consistently hold correct form:

- Add 1–2 seconds every 1–3 sessions
- If they wobble or lose form, reduce duration and build more slowly
- Some dogs progress every session, others every few — both are normal
- If there is no progress after 3 weeks, seek guidance from a professional

Important:

Do not add balance equipment until your dog can hold any static position correct for 30 seconds on solid ground, unless instructed to do so by a rehab professional. When you introduce equipment, halve the duration and rebuild gradually.

## Dynamic exercises

Repetitions & Sets

- Start with 2–3 full reps
- 1–2 sets
- Prioritise quality over quantity
- Stop before your dog tires — form must remain consistent
- Gradually add 1 rep every 1–3 sessions
- When introducing another set, you may need to reduce reps per set to maintain quality

## Additional safe progressions

- Pair dynamic exercises into mini-sequences (e.g., rockback sit → step-to-stand followed by a press up and repeat)
- Increase duration for static holds gradually
- Keep everything stable — no wobble boards or unstable surfaces until your dog is ready

## Common mistakes & myths

- Going too fast — strength adaptations need slow, controlled movement
- Too many reps — dogs fatigue quickly; sloppy reps build poor patterns
- Using unstable equipment too early — wobble often strengthens existing compensation patterns
- Adding height too early — height too early can increase strain, not strength
- Thinking strength = power — power is explosive, fast movements, whereas strength is slow and controlled
- Over-exciting the dog before starting — calm dogs produce cleaner, safer reps

