



# McINTYRE

CANINE REHABILITATION

## Effective Canine Conditioning Exercises Using Only a Stool



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## THE STOOL : A SIMPLE TOOL FOR CHALLENGING YOUR DOG'S FITNESS

Prior to starting any physical conditioning program with your dog, you should always consult your veterinarian or canine health care professional to make sure that exercise is safe and appropriate for your dog. They will determine if your dog has any physical limitations or health conditions that could be aggravated by exercise.

Ensure you properly warm-up and cool down your dog prior to participating in any canine conditioning exercise. It is always best to complete your conditioning program after your dog has been warmed-up for 5-10 minutes (e.g. after a walk around the neighbourhood or light play in the backyard). If you have any questions about how to best build a warm up and cool down routine for your canine companion check out our latest E Book – Warm Up and Cool Down of the Canine Athlete – an Evidenced-Based Approach to Improving Performance and Preventing Injury.

([http://www.mcrehabilitation.com/store/p22/Warm\\_Up\\_and\\_Cool\\_Down\\_of\\_the\\_Canine\\_Athlete%3A\\_An\\_EvidenceBased\\_Approach\\_to\\_Improving\\_Performance\\_and\\_Preventing\\_Injury.html](http://www.mcrehabilitation.com/store/p22/Warm_Up_and_Cool_Down_of_the_Canine_Athlete%3A_An_EvidenceBased_Approach_to_Improving_Performance_and_Preventing_Injury.html))

### Why a stool?

**Versatile:** stools can easily be used to perform a wide range of exercises, either on their own or paired with other pieces of equipment. They are also easy to transport and light weight.

**Safe:** the stool is a safe way to learn many of the basics of canine conditioning exercises before advancing to more unstable objects and surfaces.

**Affordable:** a \$10-\$20 investment that really pays off! You can get a lot of bang for your buck with this practical, low cost piece of equipment.



### What equipment do I need?

- You will need a rubberized stool with anti-slip grip on the top. This is very important as some stools can have a smooth top and be slippery which increases the fall risk to your dog (slipping off of it during an exercise) which can either cause injury or scare them. The size of the stool you will use will depend on the size of your dog.
- Make sure you purchase a stool that is wide enough and sturdy enough to safely hold the weight of your dog and won't easily tip.
- Stools can usually be purchased at Walmart, Canadian Tire, Home Depot, Dollar store for \$10-\$20 CAD
- Alternatives to using a stool include a wooden platform, a small wash bucket, or flower pot

### What equipment do I need?

- Before you start to use the stool, make sure you place the stool on flooring that will not let it slide (e.g. carpet, rubber matting, grass, area rug, turf)
- This will prevent your dog from sliding the stool along the slippery surface.
- You (the handler) will be standing in front of the stool for all of the exercises
- Effective canine conditioning exercise using only a stool



Effective canine conditioning exercises using only a stool



# GETTING STARTED

## Introducing the stool

- If your dog has never touched/worked with a stool before, it's important to spend as much time as needed to allow your dog to get comfortable with the stool (e.g. not be scared of it) before starting to train the conditioning exercises.
- Allow your dog to walk around the stool, sniff or touch it, and be sure to click/reward these interactions- it doesn't matter what they do at this stage, as long as they are happy and interested in the stool's presence.
- Continue to use lots of positive reinforcements (such as cookies and praise) and try starting a play session near the stool to help them realize it's "no big deal"
- If your dog is unsure/scared of the stool, don't pick them up and place them on it. Getting on the stool needs to be their choice and their choice alone. Never force your dog to work on the stool. Instead be motivating and reward them for their interactions with it and let them progress at their own speed.



# TRAINING SET UP

## 1. WHERE TO REWARD YOUR DOG

Your reward placement (where you deliver the reward/cookies) will be determined by one main factor – what is the focus of the exercise? If you want to focus on strengthening your dog's front legs, their back feet would be elevated and you would reward with the cookie down low (head below spine); if you want to focus on strengthening your dog's back legs, their front feet would be elevated and you would reward with the cookie up high (head above spine).

**Example:** If you are completing an exercise that focusses on the dog's back legs (front feet would be elevated), if the reward is too low or pulled forward, your dog will shift their weight forward which a) may cause them to roach their back and b) change the focus of the exercise.

## 3. KNOW WHEN YOUR DOG NEEDS A BREAK

- The following are signs of fatigue indicating that your dog might need a break from the exercise:
- They are unable to hold proper posture on the equipment (e.g. roaching their back, knees/elbows kick out, feet splayed, wider stance)
- Yawning
- Excessive panting
- Walking away from you or the exercise
- Seems distracted and less focused

## 2. WHERE YOU SHOULD STAND/SIT

- Your position can affect your dog's posture and which muscles they are using during the exercise
- If you're further away from your dog, they will shift their weight forward; if you're closer to your dog, they will shift their weight backwards
- This method of moving in and out of your dog's space can be very helpful to help shift the dogs weight forwards or backwards, depending on which muscles you want to work.

## 4. KNOW WHEN YOUR DOG NEEDS A BREAK

- When you first start to introduce these exercises to your dog you're not "conditioning them". You're training yourself and your dog how to properly complete the exercise and engage the appropriate muscles. Once the dog understands the exercises you can begin to incorporate reps/sets
- Start each exercise with 5-8 reps for 2 sets; 3x a week. For any exercise that involves duration (e.g. sitting on a stool) you want to build up the dog's endurance and sitting time. Begin with a 5 second hold and slowly increase. The number of repetitions and sets will be based initially on your dog's current level of fitness. Always watch for signs of fatigue.

## EXERCISE 1,2, AND 3



### EXERCISE 1: FRONT FEET TARGET

**Goal:** our dog places both front feet on top of the stool.

**Starting position:** you, the handler, stands by the stool, toss a treat away from the stool.

**Training:** as your dog comes back and places both their front feet on the stool, click and reward with a treat. Toss a treat away and repeat the process. As your dog begins to understand that you want them to put their front feet on the stool, ask them to hold the position for a longer period of time (e.g. 10 seconds).

**Benefits:** strengthens back end, hips, and core muscles.



### EXERCISE 2: BACK FEET TARGET

**Goal:** your dog places both back feet on top of the stool

**Starting position:** similar to the first exercise, you will stand further back from the stool to allow your dog to come over it. Toss a treat away from the stool.

**Training:** as your dog comes back to the stool, lure them up and over the stool and have them stop with both back feet touching the stool, make sure you stand back far enough from the stool to give them enough room to come over the stool and be able to place their front feet on the ground. Toss a treat away and repeat the process. Begin to increase the length of time the dog holds their position on the stool. Reward low.

**Benefits:** strengthens shoulder, improves weight- shifting skills, and body awareness.



### EXERCISE 3: COOKIE STRETCHES

**Goal:** your dog bends from side to side with their front feet remaining stationary on the stool.

**Starting position:** your dog starts with their front feet on the stool in a standing position.

**Training:** with either a treat or hand touch, ask your dog to bend their neck and touch their muzzle towards their shoulder. You can use one hand under their belly to support them and to ensure they don't move their front feet.

As they start to understand this exercise, you can ask them to hold this position longer(5-10 seconds).

**Benefits:** stretches and strengthens their neck and upper back, core strengthening, neck flexibility, back end weight shifting.

**Note:** you may find your dog bends better one way than another. This is quite typical as most dogs have preferred side to turn to. Continue to work both sides evenly.



## EXERCISE 4 AND 5

### EXERCISE 4: SITTING ON THE STOOL

**Stool selection:** find a stool that your dog can just barely sit on. This will encourage a proper sitting position and limit your dog's ability to fall into a lazy sit position.

**Goal:** your dog will maintain their sit on a stool for 1 minute.

**Position:** have your dog sit on the stool with their head in a natural position to help them use their core muscles. Their back feet and knees should be pointing forward, straight back, and their front feet should be stacked underneath their shoulder (no sloppy sits).

**Training:** have your dog sit on the stool and use either a stay or wait command to have them hold their sit. Start with a 5 seconds wait, release your dog to a cookie, and repeat. Slowly increase the time.

**Benefits:** strengthens back end, inner and outer thigh muscles, and core muscles.



### EXERCISE 5: SIT TO STAND

**Goal:** your dog's front feet should remain relatively stationary on the stool through the exercise while they go into a tuck sit position and then kick back their hind feet into the standing position.

**Starting position:** have your dog place their front feet on the stool while standing.

**Training:** from the starting position (front feet on the stool), ask your dog to sit (back feet should tuck forward while front feet remain on the stool). Then ask your dog to stand. When your dog stands, they should kick their legs back behind them. Make sure your dog moves their back feet all the way back so they are standing in a natural standing position.

**Benefits:** strengthens hip flexors, hamstrings and glute muscles, improves weight shifting to the back end, hip range of motion, and strengthens core muscles.

### BONUS EXERCISE: HIGH FIVE!

**Goal:** dog stands on the stool with front feet elevated. Ask your dog to shake paw. Repeat both side.

**Pre-requisite behavior:** shaking a paw on the ground in the standing position.

**Training:** have your dog stand on the stool with their front feet. Ask your dog to shake/wave their paw. Alternate back and forth between left and right paw. If they can successfully complete 5 reps on each paw, ask your dog for a shake/wave and hold their paw (lightly) to sustain the position. Start with a 2-3 seconds hold and progress to 5 seconds.

**Benefits:** strengthens back, neck, shoulder and core muscles, back end weight shifting and strengthening, and improves body awareness.





## IN CLOSING

I hope you have found this free e-book a useful tool in developing your at-home canine conditioning program, with one of my favourite pieces of equipment- a stool.

I created this e-book because I am passionate about approaches to canine conditioning that are simple, effective, inexpensive, and evidence-based.

As you have read throughout this e-book, the stool is a wonderful addition to your dog's home gym.

I'd love to hear about your experience in trying these exercises- connect with us through social media and share some photos of your dog trying these exercise!

Carolyn McIntyre,PT



### CONNECT WITH US!



McIntyre Canine Rehabilitation



McIntyre\_Canine\_Rehabilitation



carolyn@mcrehabilitation.ca



www.mcrehabilitation.com

#### About Carolyn:

Carolyn is the owner and CEO of McIntyre Canine Rehabilitation (MCR), a mobile rehabilitation company out of Guelph, ON, Canada. We specialize in helping the canine athlete reach superior physical performance through improved power, strength, stamina, turning ability, body awareness and flexibility while minimizing injury and increasing longevity in their sport. MCR focusses on preventive measures to ensure your canine athletes performs at their best and minimizes their time on the sidelines. Carolyn holds a Masters of Science in Physiotherapy and has a degree in canine rehabilitation – diploma in canine rehabilitation (c) through the Canadian Physiotherapy Association.

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