

Carole Bryant, Naturopath

(ATMS & HATO accredited)

- nutrition • herbal medicine • homoeopathy • flower essences • iridology • craniosacral therapy
- NAET allergy elimination technique • massage • manipulative muscle therapy • kinesiology • reflexology
- Theta Healing • Thought Field therapy • reiki • Neuro-Linguistic programming
- plus for pets:* • Tellington TTouch (Companion Animals) practitioner • canine craniosacral therapy
- behavioural dog trainer • Tellington TTouch (Horses) practitioner-in-training

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CANINE SPORTS INJURIES

Which canine sports can cause injuries in dogs?

Agility/Jumpers, fly ball, herding, sledding, plus obedience training/trialing (jumping, heeling with the head held at an unnatural angle etc) and even playing in the back yard can all cause injuries.

How do these injuries occur?

Common injuries are from dogs twisting and turning too quickly, running into obstacles (or dogs running into each other in play). However, I believe one of the biggest causes of injuries is lack of fitness – overweight dogs jumping; unfit dogs training or competing in agility/jumpers events. Dogs that are expected to take part in strenuous athletic activities such as agility require a high level of fitness and conditioning to avoid injury. Prevention is by far the best option

The other major factor in injuries is poor conformation (poor physical construction).

Repetitive strain type activities, such as a dog that obsessively chases a ball or Frisbee, also put a significant strain on the dog's system.

What are the most common injuries and why do these injuries occur?

The most common injuries are to the musculoskeletal system such as necks, backs, shoulders, legs and feet. These are generally due to too much strain being placed on muscles, joints etc. Conformation also plays a part – a dog that is poorly constructed is much more likely to suffer an injury. For example a dog with very straight shoulders and pasterns lacks the shock absorbency of a dog that has good construction – repeated jumping will cause excessive jarring and is likely to result in injury.

When taking part in sports (or leisure activities) with dogs, it is important to be aware of their physical limitations. Dogs that are very heavy in front, for example, are also at risk of front leg and shoulder injuries because their weight is distributed unevenly, making it difficult for them to use themselves in an efficient way.

Dogs that have less than perfect hips are also at risk of injury. Hip dysplasia can vary from very mild to severe and occurs in both purebred and crossbred dogs. Hip dysplasia also occurs in small dogs. The belief that hip dysplasia is confined only to large purebred dogs is

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..... natural health care for people, pets & livestock

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most definitely a myth! Conformation faults such as long backs and poor angulation of the fore and hindquarters also place a dog at a greater risk of injury.

Some breeds are simply unsuited to some tasks. For example asking a very long backed breed such as a Dachshund to do a lot of jumping would almost certainly result in injury.

Add overweight and lack of fitness to poor or inappropriate construction for a particular task and you have an injury just waiting to happen.

Another factor that places an animal at risk is poor balance and co-ordination – dogs with poor spacial awareness are at much greater risk of injury as they are unable to use themselves efficiently.

A frequently overlooked cause of problems is head injury. A blow to the head can upset the delicate balance of the cranial bones and the whole cranial system. Injuries to the cranial system can have far reaching effects throughout the body – both physical and behavioural.

Temperament also plays a part in injury. A highly excitable, over the top dog is more prone to injury as it is likely to be careless about how it carries out its tasks.

Can natural therapies to assist the healing and rehabilitation process?

Appropriate nutrition, supplementation and bodywork can greatly assist and speed up the healing process. If an animal requires surgery, natural therapies can provide support both before surgery and during the healing process.

Appropriate diet and nutritional supplements, herbs and homoeopathic remedies can all help support the animal as it heals. Natural therapists don't consider that they provide the healing but rather see it as a matter of giving the body what it needs to heal itself.

Bodywork, whether massage, craniosacral therapy, Tellington TTouch, Bowen therapy, acupuncture, chiropractic etc can all help keep the body functioning optimally by relieving muscle tension and assisting normal movement patterns. Be sure to always use a qualified therapist.

Can natural therapies help to prevent canine sports injuries?

A strong, fit body is far less likely to be injured than a body with poor muscular and/or skeletal development. Good diet, appropriate supplements, regular appropriate exercise and

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specific conditioning for the work the dog will be performing all add up to helping the dog develop a strong, fit body that is capable of doing the work it is asked to do.

The old saying “you are what you eat” applies equally to animals as to humans. In my opinion good nutrition is the foundation of good health. Good nutrition encourages a strong, healthy body that is less susceptible to injury or illness. In the event of injury, good nutrition (and appropriate supplements) can provide the body with the substances it needs to repair itself.

So how can you keep your canine athlete healthy and free of injury?

Choose a physically and mentally sound dog with appropriate conformation, movement and temperament for the task/s you have in mind; feed a healthy diet (I’m a strong believer in natural, raw food diets for dogs) with appropriate supplementation as needed; ensure that your dog is fit (regular exercise) and well conditioned (through training and appropriate specific exercise for the particular task/s you have in mind). Have your dog checked and worked on regularly by an experienced canine bodywork specialist to maintain normal function. In the event of injury seek appropriate care to help your dog regain his/her health and fitness as quickly as possible - small injuries that are ignored have a nasty habit of coming back later as much bigger problems. With care, your canine athlete can remain fit and healthy into old age.

My 13 ½ yo German Shepherd has competed in a variety of disciplines during her career (including obedience, agility/jumpers, tracking, herding and endurance) and remains fit and healthy and able to fully enjoy her retirement.

Carole Bryant©