



The best time to stretch your pet is after exercise.

**TOP TIP**  
 PETS recommends consulting your vet or an industry professional before starting any new stretching regime.

# Bend and stretch

There are many different types of therapies and treatments available for your dog today, and one of the most interesting we've come across would have to be doggy stretching. **PETS** speaks to **Tim** from Both Ends of the Lead to find out more about this fascinating practice

**When your muscles are feeling tight and sore, haven't you felt better after a stretch? If we feel better after we stretch, surely our dogs would too?**

When a muscle is exercised, it contracts, and often after exercise it can remain in a shortened state (if you do not stretch it). If your muscles stay in a shortened state, this can lead to tension in the muscle and become a potential injury waiting to happen.

Learning to stretch your dog correctly can help reduce the risk of injury and help it move better. It will also have a positive effect on minimising the risk of degenerative conditions.

Some of the most common reasons why dogs have muscle injuries are overuse, inappropriate exercise routines for their age and ability, and not warming up, cooling down or stretching.

The most effective and safest time to stretch your dog is generally after exercise, when their muscles are warm and more pliable.

It is not advisable to stretch your dog when its muscles are not warmed up. A simple way to warm up your dog is with some gentle walking for at least five minutes before you increase the intensity of its exercise.

Once your dog is warmed up or finished its activity, you are ready to stretch it.

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**STRETCH BENEFITS**  
 Stretching can benefit your dog in a number of ways:

-  Help reduce muscular tension and discomfort
-  Enhance movement quality and mobility
-  Improve flexibility levels
-  Reduce the risk of injury
-  Potentially slow down degenerative changes
-  Give you extra bonding time with your dog.

There is a wide range of stretches you can apply to all of your dog's major muscles to help them move and function at their optimal level.

**Stretchtime**

Make sure your dog is relaxed and lying down and that you are relaxed too. If your dog is not used to being stretched, spend a few minutes giving it a gentle massage or stroke it to help it relax and get more used to the idea of being stretched.

It is important to make sure that whichever of your dog's limbs you are stretching, it is correctly aligned. When you are holding the limb, take a few seconds to gently lead into the stretch, and only stretch as far as your dog is comfortable. If your dog shows signs of discomfort, such as pulling the limb away, stop stretching immediately.

Aim to hold each stretch for between 20 and 30 seconds. You may need to build up to this if your dog is not used to being stretched.

Always perform the stretch on both sides of the body, unless your dog is injured on one side.

**Handle with care**

It is important to remember that stretching is not suitable for all dogs all of the time. If your dog is less than 18 months of age or has an acute injury or some degenerative conditions, then stretching would not be appropriate.

It is important to always check with your vet first if a stretching program is suitable for your dog.

The good news is that stretching is something you can learn to do for yourself, and it's a great way to help keep our dogs healthy and moving well. Initially, learning some gentle stretches from a canine health professional to ensure you are doing them correctly is a good starting point; from there, the sky's the limit. **P**



Tim, dog stretching expert, shown here with dog Buddy.



Stretching helps your dog remain in prime condition.

Tim Norris is a canine manual therapist living in Sydney, specialising in canine myofunctional therapy, laser acupuncture, Bowen therapy and Onnetsu heat therapy. He spent more than 15 years working with people in the area of health and wellbeing before working with dogs. His business, Both Ends of the Lead, offers a range of wellbeing services for dogs and owners. To find out more information, visit [bothendsofthelead.com.au](http://bothendsofthelead.com.au) and [facebook.com/BothEndsOfTheLead](https://www.facebook.com/BothEndsOfTheLead)

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