

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Hi there, I have a question for you. What is your dog's current fitness program look like? If you're like most people you're going to say, "Oh, it's kind of non-existent." Or maybe you say, "Well, we go for a couple of walks every day." which by the way, that's awesome. But that isn't the full extent of what I'm talking about by fitness. Or you say, "Yeah, on weekends we throw a ball, or we let them catch a flying disc."

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That's an exertion of energy, but it could be potentially injurious unless you're dealing with a dog who has regular fitness during the week. More on that later. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And today I'm going to show you how easy it could be for you to demonstrate your love for your dog by investing in a fitness program that could lead to extending his life, more importantly, adding fullness to that life.

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Now, if you're sitting there thinking, "Well, Susan, I don't do those dog sports like you do. I don't need to listen to this." Please do not turn away. Think about this. It's not just professional hockey players and professional gymnast or professional tennis players that go to gyms, right? Of course not. Every day folk like us go to gyms.

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And the same is true about canine fitness. Every single dog on the planet would benefit by having an owner who invested the time into doing fitness with their dog. And here's the real kicker. It doesn't really take that much time, plus it doesn't hurt you at all when your dog does the fitness. How awesome is that?

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Today I'm going to share with you why it's so important that we have a fitness program for all dogs of all ages. What that looks like, what's involved, and how easy is it to get started? I'm also going to share some insight from the fitness coach I'm using with my puppy This!.

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Over the last few months, I've been sharing videos on social media of some of the exercises that I've been doing with This!. And I've got comments with people saying, "I'd love to know more about this. Could you possibly do a podcast episode about it?" Here I am, fitness for your dog. Now the why is obvious because we know people who are fit actually live on average 10% longer than the people who are unfit.

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Now, how awesome would that be to have our dogs for an extra year? Not only that, it would be the fullness of those years. So, a really unfit dog, I'm not just saying a fat dog, but a dog who's just unfit. They're going to be in more pain. They're going to not enjoy life into their elder years the way a fit dog does.



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For example, my 14-year-old dog Feature, she has zero limitations on what she does. She participates in every event that all my other dogs do. The third big reason why this is so important is because dog fitness is just dog training. It's spending some time with your dog building up a behavior using reinforcement.

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So, the dog is getting fit, but the bonus of this is you're building your relationship, and that's going to impact other behaviors like him listening when you ask. So, it's just an extra bonus of keeping your dog in shape. Now it really doesn't take that long at all. If you invest 5 to 15 minutes, two to three days a week, that is a phenomenal fitness program.

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But you know, if you do one session of just a couple of minutes, it's a start, and I'm going to share with you how you can get started here today. Now you might be saying, "Oh Susan, I take my dog for long walks, and we hike on weekends. Isn't that enough?" There's a principle in fitness called adaptation.

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And if you work the same exercises all the time, your body adapts, they don't improve. And if you're starting with a dog who maybe is a little unbalanced in one leg versus the other, to begin with, you are actually contributing to that imbalance, which down the road leaves a dog vulnerable for an injury.

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And with our dogs, things like cruciate or shoulder problems are common because unfit dogs chasing after a bouncing ball could lead to exerting their body in a way that the body isn't prepared for. And those kinds of surgeries can cost 3 to \$10,000 and months and months of rehab. So, keeping your dog fit, using a fitness program is a way to help prevent that from happening.

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Of course, there are no guarantees but wouldn't it be great if we all did the best we could to never have that happen to our dogs? You know, I started doing fitness with my dogs years ago when I started doing sports. But back then, there was no direction. So, I used some of the exercises I used as an athlete myself, but today there are so many experts that do nothing but canine fitness. So, I defer to them.

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So, my puppy This! has been working with Carolyn McIntyre, who actually is a physical therapist. She has a master's degree in physical therapy, has her own human physical therapy clinic, but then took a course in working with dogs. And since then, she has grown a great reputation, has traveled with the Canadian team, has designed fitness programs for the Canadian team.

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And she keeps things super simple. I'll share with you what that looks like later on today. What does fitness look like? The first consideration is your dog's weight. So many people are walking around with an overweight dog and a lot of you don't actually realize it. Because you think, "Oh, he looks okay." Most dogs are overweight. Most people think my dogs are underweight.



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Going to a Veterinarian who has worked with canine athletes is a great place to get an evaluation. Now every year, I take my dogs to Dr. Sherman Canapp and Dr. Debra Canapp down in Maryland. Of course, during the pandemic, we haven't gone there. But I go there every year to get a fitness evaluation. Dr. Canapps, they see athletes all the time.

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But with so many dogs playing dog sports, your local Veterinarian will probably have a really good idea of how fit your dog is. The second thing is soundness. Soundness is different than fitness. Does the dog have a slight limp, or is there an imbalance like one of their hind thighs is a lot thicker than the other one? That imbalance shows where that fitness should be focused on.

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And the third consideration is age-appropriate exercises. So, we can be doing fitness with our puppies. We can do it with our middle-aged dogs. We could do it with our geriatric dogs, but the exercises need to be tampered to be age-appropriate. You might've surfed the internet and found a couple of exercises and you're working on your dog's fitness at home.

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But what if you did only bicep curls in the gym every day? You would be developing an imbalance in your arms, and that imbalance leaves your body open for an injury. That's why it's great that you're doing something that you're attempting something. But it's really important that it be structured. So, the four areas that I focus on when I'm doing fitness with my dog, number one is strength.

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And that's strength of the limbs, front limbs, back limbs. Strength of the core. Strength of the dog's top line. Strength of their neck. It's flexibility in all those areas. It's balance. It's how able will the dog adapt when they're put on unstable surfaces and its proprioception. How aware is the dog of where to put their feet at any time? Those four areas considering all the areas of a dog's body is what makes a fitness program.

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Now today there are all kinds of fancy fitness equipment you could get for your dog. And trust me, I probably have every single one of them. And I use almost every single one of them. Many of these are inflated. Inflated discs, inflated doughnuts, inflated balls. And that's the sexy side of dog fitness. But when you're working with an unstable surface, you're actually adding your dog's stabilizer muscles, which are little, tiny muscles into that fitness equation. Which is great when it's appropriate, but we need to build up our dog's main muscles, those big muscles, before we start focusing on adding the stabilizer muscles to that.

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So lucky for you guys, it's super easy to get started with your dog's fitness, because we want to work on a stable surface—something like your living room floor. If you're going to use equipment, you just want to use a target for your dog's feet. So that could be something like a blue foam cushion. That would be the first step I would use for an unstable surface. Or just a square piece of wood, a two by four with a yoga mat covering it. Anytime you're using a target, you want it to be a non-slip surface.



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So, if you go to my YouTube video called [perch work \(pivots and spins\)](#), it's a great way to get started on how to get your dog to target their feet on a piece of equipment. But guess what, fitness starts without equipment. So, this is what you can do today to get started.

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You're going to ask your dog to sit, take a video of this, and now you're going to be really critical. Does the dog have their front feet level with each other when they sit naturally? Do they have one foot out in front? Are their back feet splayed outside of their body, which is pushing their thighs in towards the core? Or do they have really tight abductors so they can get their back feet right under their body?

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A simple sit, work on building duration. Can that dog hold a sit for 10 seconds? 30 seconds? Can they, while they're in their sit, look over their one shoulder or the other? A simple sit is a great strength-building exercise. [Sit](#), down, and [stand](#), three easy behaviors.

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But what you can do to make it more complex for fitness is get your dog to target their front feet on one of your little pieces of equipment and then ask them to stand or sit or down without those front feet coming off. That engages a whole different group of muscles. Now you can do the opposite, get them to target their back feet onto that little piece of equipment and do a sit, a down, and a stand without them moving those back feet.

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It's things like that that is a great and easy way to start. But if you're saying, "Oh Susan, you know, you said you have a fitness coach." And I don't know if I feel comfortable jumping into this all on my own. Well, I thought of that. So, I asked This!'s fitness coach Carolyn. I said, "You have a great fitness program, the one that I'm a member of. It's called *From the Ground Up*. I'd like to offer that to my podcast listeners."

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And she said, "Well Susan, it's not open for registration now." And I said, "You know, here's the thing about not. It could be easily turned into; it is open for registration now. Right?" Okay. So, I convinced her of that. And then I said, "My podcast listeners are super nice people, Carolyn. How about if we offered them a discount?" and she said, "Susan, I've never offered a discount."

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And I said, "What if I offered a discount? What if I took it on myself to do that?" So, what we're doing is I'm going to give you the link to Carolyn's program *From the Ground Up*. It covers not just sit, down, stand, but it covers a whole progression of amazing fitness exercises that you could do with your dog.

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And it doesn't matter if you ever want to do a dog sport. It doesn't matter if you have a puppy or an adult dog. It doesn't matter if you have a dog you've been doing fitness with but you may not have been going about it the right way. It will work for all dogs. And I'll put the link to that course *From the Ground Up* in the show notes or in the description of the video here on YouTube.





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And when you register, put in the discount code Susan20, you get yourself a discount just because you're a podcast listener. Hey, if you love fitness and you're watching this on YouTube and you're interested in doing more with your dog do me a favor, hit that like button and then jump over to Carolyn's website and check out *From the Ground Up*.

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That's it for today. I'll see you next time on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[YouTube Video: Susan Garrett's Perch Work Dog Tricks \(Pivots and Spins\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 85: Understanding Your Dog's Sit: LWT](#)

[Blog Video: How to Train Your Dog to Stand on Cue](#)

Note: The discount code mentioned in this episode is no longer available.



About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her “Clicker Dogs” website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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