

R & R

Doggie R & R by Marilyn Anderson

You arrive home after a long, stressful workday, and as your faithful dog friend greets you with a bow, a wag, a stretch, a yawn, you think to yourself: "What a great life you've got, Buddy. I'd sure like to trade places with you!" Think again.

Even if you have a "couch potato" dog and find yourself wishing you had it so "good", in your mind a small voice tells you that this kind of life is neither mentally nor physically healthy. Exercise-whatever suits your dog and you-can eliminate boredom, finicky eating habits, obsessive behaviors, and a host of other problems. Stress affects dogs just as it affects humans: it needs an outlet, and when there is no outlet a dog is quite capable of coming up with creatively canine ways to deal with it.

In training circles, there is a saying "a tired dog is a good dog." But the dog who sleeps all the time is most likely bored and under-stimulated. Furthermore, if dogs got the daily workout that their minds and bodies need, we'd hear far fewer complaints about behaviors such as non-stop barking, destructiveness, obsessive chewing or licking, and hyperactivity. All dogs need exercise. "Problem" dogs often need more activity than their guardian is willing to provide. Try explaining to a dog why you won't get up early enough for a good long walk, why you are just too tired when you get home from work, why you are too busy to play, or why you just can't fit obedience training into your schedule or join other dogs at the park. It is not fair to expect the dog you adopted as a Companion to lead a solitary life. When you get out into the world with your companion and exercise, you both feel better for it!

With schedules that require being away from home from early morning to early evening, reliable dog walkers are a blessing in great demand. Mid-day exercise and companionship are a great boon to home-alone dogs and removes some of the guilt

created by unreasonable schedules. This seemingly simple solution may, however, disguise a whole new problem-dogs whose only social activity and exercise are provided by someone other than his or her guardian. A quick potty trip before leaving for work in the morning is a poor substitute for a 20-minute walk. After a challenging day at work, providing your dog with playtime outside is a great way to unwind and bond with your dog. Getting out and about with our dogs renews our spirits and our bodies too, and a walk before bedtime is a relaxing and healthy way to end the day. [Dogs are individuals too-some need more potty or out time than others, especially as they age, but none need less than three times a day at reasonable intervals. Ed.]

At doggie day care facilities, your social animal can spend the whole day in the company of other dogs, alternating play and rest. (It is really true: a tired do is a good dog!) Just remember that, even with the wonderful services available to busy dog lovers, your dog is still your chosen four-legged companion and needs you in his or her life. So…starting today, make a promise to your dog. You don't have to become a jogger or register for agility classes (although both are worth a try). Resist the temptation to be a weekend athlete. A "give it all you've got" workout would not be a wise choice for either of you. Just set aside some time very day for a very special friend who gives you love, loyalty, and companionship every day. And although it is true that to err is human, to forgive, Canine, payback time is now! All you need is a leash and a couple of plastic bags.