



WATER BABIES

Summer Safety Tips

by Ann Brightman

When I was a kid, we used to take our two dogs for walks in the woods on warm summer evenings. One of our favorite stopping-off points was a bend in the creek where the water streamed slowly by and the dogs loved to plunge in to fetch sticks and have a bit of a paddle. Going by the happy expressions on their faces when they emerged dripping and refreshed and spraying us with drops of water as they shook themselves, it was the highlight of their whole

Sharing water activities with your canine companion is a wonderful bonding experience, as long as you keep in mind that, as with children, you must consider a pet's safety and comfort. While many dogs take to the water like ducks, especially retrievers, spaniels and similar breeds, others are a bit timid at first and may need some help getting used to this new experience. These 10 tips will ensure that you and your best friend can splash out in worry-free fun, whether you're wading in a stream, going boating or visiting the beach or a lake cottage.

1 Before starting any new activity with your dog, it's a smart idea to first make sure he's in good health. If you're in any doubt as to his fitness, have him checked by a vet.

2 If it will be Rover's introduction to the water, start slowly and be patient, especially if he's still a pup. Don't assume he'll automatically know how to swim. Choose a warm day and a shallow body of water, with a gently sloping beach or bank that's easy for the dog to navigate. Let him approach the water's edge and investigate it in his own time. Never splash him or force him to enter the water before he's ready.

3 Once caution has turned to curiosity, try enticing him into the water by entering it yourself and calling him—perhaps attracting him with a treat or by tossing a toy a short distance into the water (not so deep that his paws can't reach the bottom). Gradually, he should feel more confident, especially if he sees you having fun, and will venture further into the water.

4 Take your time while introducing your dog to boating. Keep in mind that he's used to surfaces that are stationary and stable, so it might take him a little while to get used to a tilting and moving craft. Let him get acquainted with the boat while it's still tied up, whether it's a canoe, kayak or yacht. Keep his first boat trips short and watch him for any signs of motion sickness.

5 Even if a dog is a seasoned swimmer, it's a good idea to equip him with a canine life jacket or personal flotation device while you're out on a boat. Accidents can happen, and cold, deep, choppy water can challenge even the strongest swimmer. A life jacket is a must if your dog isn't a good swimmer; not only while he's on a boat, but also when he's playing in water that gets progressively deeper. Make sure the device fits properly and allow him a chance to get used to wearing and swimming with the life jacket before taking him out over deep water.

6 Whether on a boat or the beach, ensure that the dog has access to good quality, fresh drinking water; maybe bring your own from home.

7 Make sure he has shade. Boat surfaces and beach sand can become extremely hot during sun-filled summer days, which are hard on unprotected paws; a dog's sensitive nose and ears can get sunburned from excessive exposure, as well.

8 When swimming in the ocean, be aware of strong tides. Sea lice and jellyfish are other risks to watch out for. Jellyfish can sting a curious dog, causing extreme pain and swelling, while sea lice are microscopic organisms that can cause intense itching. It's a good idea to rinse your dog (and yourself) with fresh water after swimming in the ocean.

9 The biggest rule of thumb as far as safety goes is to always supervise your dog around any body of water, just as you would a child. If you have a pool, teach him how to get out of it and don't leave behind enticing toys still

floating in the water. Remember that swimming is vigorous exercise and a dog can tire quickly, especially if he's older.

10 A dog may need help getting out of the water, especially when swimming off of a boat or dock, as well as in a pool. A boating harness is a good solution; available in several sizes, it's designed for optimum mobility and should include a sturdy upright handle on the back of it to help you lift a pet out of the water.

Water activities can hugely enrich a dog's life experience, not to mention your mutual bond of friendship. As long as you keep his safety in mind, the fun you share will give you many happy memories to look back on for years to come.

Ann Brightman is the managing editor of Animal Wellness Magazine, from which this is reprinted with permission ©2009 (AnimalWellnessMagazine.com).



POOL CATS

Paddling Classes Can Keep Them Safe

by Mary Ellen

Yes, cats can swim. This is good to know if your home features a resident pet and a swimming pool. While most cats are not in love with a dip in the water—neither would you be if you had to dry your nose-to-toes fur using a tiny pink tongue—what would happen if a favorite feline fell in? If curiosity or circumstance caused her to take the plunge, could she make it to the edge and safely pull herself out of the pool?

Our family has taken seriously the task of teaching our five cats how to swim, and always proceeded with loving care and patience. We've experienced considerable success by following these steps. Remember that the "swim class" is designed to teach your cat what to do if she finds herself accidentally in the water.

We trim the cat's toenails a few days before their swim class. Then, holding your cat firmly and calmly against your midriff as the two of you wade into the shallow end of the

pool, keep her secure until you feel her relax in the water. Soothingly speak to her in a loving manner, gently caressing her body, and watch her face until her expression calms. We hold the cat in our arms until her legs and paws begin to move in the water—showing that she is trying to "run" away. We've found that the more a feline moves in the water, the more familiar she becomes with the feel of it on her limbs and with the motion of swimming.

When she's ready, gently release your cat into the water and stay by her side as she "runs," or kitty paddles, to the pool's edge; then let her pull herself out, so that she knows she can do it. Note that if the water level is too low in a pool, a cat can drown in it, so either raise the level of the water or put a small ladder into the pool so she knows where to climb out.

It is magical watching cats smoothly glide forward with their head held high. Some like the experience better than others; if a feline fur-ees out, she may be better suited as a permanent landlubber. Also, a cat that's used to having a bath may be a better candidate for adjusting to a paddle in the pool.

Wet cat fur, especially longhaired fur, retains water (along with pool chemicals), so our family finishes each kitty-paddling swim class by rinsing and gently towel-drying our pet with an absorbent microfiber cloth. Then she air dries in the sun.

Mary Ellen is a pet newspaper columnist who shares the stories and tips she discovers in her online newsletter at AngelScribe.com. She's taught felines to ride in a bike or stroller and walk on a leash, but her swimming lessons have made the biggest splash (You Tube tinyurl.com/6jy2rap). Reach her at AngelScribe@msn.com.

Note: This article was written as advice for pet safety. Swim classes were conducted in a series of safe steps in structured kitty-paddle classes by a trusted family member, so the cats would not feel afraid. This article is not intended to encourage others to test to see if their cats can swim.