

## Walking on a loose leash

Walking on a loose leash is perhaps the easiest behaviour for your puppy to offer, but the hardest for you to maintain.

A word of warning- once you start to walk your puppy, if he does start to pull,  
FIX IT NOW

BECAUSE IT IS REALLY HARD TO CURE IF YOU LEAVE IT TIL LATER.

While he is a cute 12wk puppy he can't pull that hard, but if he happens to grow to be a 30 kg dog that pulls on the leash, you won't enjoy walking him any more and it will become a chore, which means he won't get taken for walks as often and you both miss out on the pleasure. If he is a little dog it is still unpleasant, and the choking sounds he will make straining at his collar won't be pleasant either.

The reason that it is really hard to cure is because  
WALKING IS A SELF REWARDING BEHAVIOUR.  
you can ignore his pulling but he will still be rewarded as the walk is rewarding.

### Teaching loose leash walking

Does your puppy follow you around the yard now, sticking close to your feet? If so then he already walks on a loose leash, you just haven't attached it yet!

While he's offering this behaviour, that is walking next to you, put a name on it and reward him for it. Remember rewarded behaviours are more likely to happen again. Say "close" take a few steps and praise and reward. Repeat often. Practise giving little tit-bits while he is walking next to you.

Treating while continuing to walk is a tricky motor skill, especially if you have a small puppy. It is a very beneficial skill if you can master it. Practise this first without your puppy. Once you have mastered this minus puppy, then have some treats in your pocket whilst in the yard, and if your puppy happens to come over and start to follow you, reward him. Do this often. While he is following already say 'close' then treat. You will be putting the word cue on what he is doing already. You will also be making walking close to you very rewarding, which is as it should be.

All that is left then after this practise is to attach the leash. Your job then is to do exactly the same as you were doing with no leash. So if he stops,

**YOU DO NOT PULL ON THE LEASH.**

pat your leg and call him and reward him when he gets there, say "close" and off you go again, and remember to reward him when he goes too. Do this in your yard for a while with no distractions, until he is fairly reliable. Then progress to a new area, eg inside. then your front yard, then in front of your neighbours house. Build up the distractions slowly, and only progress when he is reliable at each level.

Remember your leash is only there for emergencies,  
IT IS NOT TO BE USED TO GUIDE HIM OR DRAG HIM.  
JUST BECAUSE WE CAN DRAG HIM DOESN'T MEAN WE SHOULD.

If you follow these simple rules, you shouldn't have a problem with your dog walking happily beside you on a loose leash. Then you both can enjoy lots of long leisurely walks through the park together.

### **Trouble shooting**

What to do if he won't follow you -

Firstly, make extra sure that YOU are not using the leash to keep him in position. Does he follow at home with no leash? Good, then go back to that stage but progress more slowly through the steps above, it may be that you have gone too far too fast.

What to do if he pulls-

**OF MAJOR IMPORTANCE**

**DO NOT PULL BACK**

**DO NOT JUST HANG ON**

**DO NOT CONTINUE WITH THE WALK WHILE YOUR PUPPY IS PULLING**

Your options are

Stop – If he is pulling you forward, just stop walking. He will be pulling as he is keen to go for a walk, so a little negative punishment here. Take away the walk. It shouldn't take him long to work out that if he pulls, his walk stops. As soon as he turns to check out why you are not going anywhere, praise him, as soon as the lead goes slack, say 'good boy lets go' and start walking again. Basically when he pulls you stop, when he is not pulling you go. Sort of a red light, green light. You will be rewarding his not pulling by continuing the walk, and extinguishing his pulling merely by stopping the walk. You do need to be a little careful where you stop here, if you stop right next to a great smell and he can strain and reach it, then sniffing that great smell will be rewarding his pressure on the leash

If he pulls a little already, but is not too bad, try turning around and going the other way as soon as he starts to pull – so puppy has to notice where you are going, and not just drag you along where he wants to go. Every time he starts to pull, say nothing just head in the opposite direction. Your lead will probably go tight until he notices and catches up, but you should not yank him round abruptly. This could damage his neck, as can check chains. As soon as he notices that you have changed direction and he heads towards you, lots of praise. He doesn't need to be in the ideal position before you praise, praise him as he is approaching the correct position. This will give him his praise as soon as the lead goes slack, while he is thinking about catching up to you, he can then have his treat when he has caught up and is in the correct position. This will doubly enforce that he is rewarded for noticing your change of direction, and again for walking correctly.

For entrenched pullers, using a lure or a target and going back and re-training is the only way to unlearn this bad habit. Which means going back to the backyard and starting all over again taking only a few steps at a time. This is a long and tedious process, so it is much easier to fix now before it becomes a very rewarded bad habit. It also means while you are re-training, no more walks outside during the retraining process, as if he has opportunity to pull in the meantime, the re-training will take lots longer.