

New information on the routines of competition-level agility dogs in Finland

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A dataset comprising nearly 750 Finnish agility dogs collected by researchers at the University of Helsinki reveals that there are differences in training and competing between different dog skill

categories and sizes. Most of the dogs practiced agility once or twice a week. Typically, the time spent on active training was a little under 20 minutes per week.

Dogs at the highest competitive level trained less per week than dogs competing in the lower categories. The researchers speculate that the reason for this is that maintaining the skill level of more experienced dogs requires less training, whereas less advanced dogs require more repetition to acquire new skills.

The higher the level of competing dogs, the more frequently they participated in competitions and the faster they completed the courses. As the skill category went up, so did the share of faultless runs.

"The dogs typically completed two agility runs per month, with the [average speed](#) of over 4 m/s," says doctoral researcher Leena Inkilä from the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Helsinki.

In Finland, competing agility dogs are divided into five height categories. In competitions, the jump height in proportion to a dog's height at the withers (the area above the shoulders) increases according to height category. This was also reflected in the jump heights used in training. Higher jumps can cause greater strain on the musculoskeletal system in larger dogs. In addition, the speed of the dogs was greater in the larger categories.

Attention to agility dogs' walking routines and musculoskeletal care

Almost all of the dogs involved in the study were warmed up before agility runs and cooled down afterwards, usually for roughly 10 to 20 minutes. More than 60% of the dogs received musculoskeletal care at

least once every three months, with massage and physiotherapy the most commonly used therapies.

"The typical amount of daily walking was 90 minutes, which is significantly higher than in North American agility dogs surveyed in 2014. Most of the dogs also took part in exercises that improved strength, speed, endurance or body control. However, only a small share of the dogs completed such training at low [frequencies], less often than twice a week, and the exercises were not usually planned by a professional. Therefore, these exercises may not effectively prevent injuries," Inkilä notes.

While agility is a popular canine sport in both Finland and other countries, extensive surveys of related routines have not previously been conducted.

Data on the routines of Finnish agility dogs during one injury-free year of actively participating in agility were collected in a survey conducted by the Petbone and FaunaFysio research groups active at the University of Helsinki. The analyses carried out in the study were based on the dog's height at the shoulders and competition category. In addition, the researchers analyzed in separate groups of dogs that participated in major national and international competitions.

More information: Leena Inkilä et al, Part I of Finnish Agility Dog Survey: Training and Management of Competition-Level Agility Dogs, *Animals* (2022). [DOI: 10.3390/ani12020212](https://doi.org/10.3390/ani12020212)

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