



BLOG REPRINT

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Tellington TTouch® and the Athletic Dog: Building Body Awareness

Guest Blog: Marnie Montgomery from Joyful Dog, LLC.

Our four-footed friends are often surprisingly unaware of where they're placing their paws and in particular, their back ends. Coffee-table catastrophes give witness to this, so today we look at the application of Tellington TTouch techniques to help dogs improve their proprioception, or body awareness.

This is the first of three guest blogs I'll be writing about TTouch: a thoughtful combination of touches, body wraps, and movement, which contributes to balance at both ends of the leash. With its potential to affect positive changes in stress levels and to enhance communication, focus and connection, TTouch is a wonderful suite of tools for the athletic dog and his person.

Get your dog race-ready by using TTouch to connect him more effectively with his body.



Basic Circle technique.
Photo by Faith Barton

Begin With a Basic Touch

Starting with a place that he likes (often this is a shoulder), gently move your dog's skin in a circle-and-a-quarter, a signature touch developed by Linda Tellington-Jones, the founder of TTouch. Complete this motion, pressing only as firmly as necessary to move the skin. Take from one to three seconds to complete the circle-and-a-quarter. Lightly slide your hand over the skin to another place where he enjoys touch and make another circle-and-a-quarter. As your dog begins to relax into the

rhythm, move to a part of his body that he may find a little more challenging, such as the hind end and then immediately return to a place that he loves. Lift your hand from his body after every few touches to give your dog the choice to continue or to stop. If he decides to move away, that's fine. A single touch has an effect, and if he learns that he has a choice, his trust in you will deepen.



Lift technique. Photo by
Marnie Montgomery,
Joyful Dog, LLC.

Add a Gentle Lift

Next, place your hand gently around an area of a front or back leg that he is comfortable with and move your hand upwards, lifting the skin ever so slightly, taking at least a full second and up to three seconds to complete.

Remembering to breathe, release the skin back down, move your hand away, and give your dog a moment to think about it. If he seems comfortable, move to another leg and do the same. Often your dog will choose that moment to readjust his paw placement in order to balance his weight more evenly over his four paws.

Breathe and Enhance Breath

Finally, place your hand gently on your dog's shoulder and with soft flexible fingertips, move your hand in a zigzag pattern down his torso to his hips. You may notice him taking a deeper breath, or doing a bit of a "shake off" (as if shaking off water) as he settles a little more fully into his body.



ZigZag touch technique.
Photo by Faith Barton

Remember to breathe easily and deeply as you do any of these touches.

Before and After

Doing these simple TTouch touches before a race can help your dog's performance as he becomes more aware of his whole body. Touches after the race can facilitate

recovery from exercise, as you remind your dog to move in balance.

Tips for Success

If your dog tends to move away from your touch, try lightening the pressure, slowing down the pace or both. Help him to feel secure by placing your free hand in a comforting place on his body as you perform the touch with your other hand.

If he moves away from you before you engage in touch, look at your own body posture. Are you leaning over him? Are you reaching into his space rather than inviting him into yours? Our own body awareness is an important part of working with our dogs in this way.

To learn more about TTouch and its founder, visit www.ttouch.com and www.ttouch.ca.



Photo by
Marnie Montgomery,
Joyful Dog, LLC.

Marnie Montgomery, CPDT-KA, is the owner and lead trainer of Joyful Dog, LLC which offers TTouch® and training privately and in group lessons, in Loudoun, Fairfax and Montgomery Counties. Marnie is a certified TTouch practitioner, a Pat Miller Certified Trainer and a member of the Pet Professional Guild and the Association of Professional Dog Trainers. Marnie's goal, and the mission of Joyful Dog, is to help you create a happy life with your canine best friend. To learn more about Marnie and Joyful Dog, visit www.joyfuldogllc.com, or find her on Facebook or Twitter.

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