

# Guide to Australian Cattle Dog exercise – with suggestions

June 12, 2022 by [dabark11](#)

The Australian Cattle Dog, also known as the Blue Heeler or Red Heeler depending on coat color, is an extremely active working dog. They are also known to a lesser degree as the Australian Heeler or Queensland Heeler.

Originally bred to herd cattle on massive Australian cattle stations they can work all day and are also highly intelligent.

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## How much exercise does an Australian Cattle Dog need

**A healthy adult Blue Heeler will be up for as much exercise and activity as you can give them. The minimum they require is 1 to 2 hours daily but more is better. Being highly intelligent the Blue Heeler also needs a lot of mental stimulation and enrichment to keep their minds entertained.**

The volume and type of exercise your Australian Cattle Dog requires every day will depend on several factors. It is important to take into account your Blue Heelers' age and health when determining the amount and type of exercise to provide your dog. Exercise for a puppy or older senior dog is quite different from that needed for a healthy adult dog in its prime.

Not providing sufficient exercise for your Blue Heeler can potentially lead to behavior issues such as [nuisance barking](#), [digging](#), and [destructive behavior](#). It can also result in a [Blue Heeler that is hyper](#) all the time. In some cases, the frustration may also result in [aggressive behavior](#). Adequate exercise will also help in their obedience, mental health, and overall happiness and well-being.

Lacking sufficient release of pent-up energy and mental stimulation can also result in a [Blue Heeler that follows you everywhere](#). This is known as velcro dog syndrome.

If your Blue Heeler is going to be left home a lot it is crucial that they are getting plenty of exercise. A Blue Heeler with excessive pent-up energy that is [left alone](#) can create real problems. The last thing you want is to come home that looks like a bomb went off.

## How to exercise an Australian Cattle Dog puppy

The exercise needs and type of exercise you provide a Blue Heeler puppy are different from that of an adult dog. Their bones, joints, and muscles are growing and developing. It is important to avoid excessive exercise especially high impact or repetition activity that may cause injury to the growth plates.

It may seem they have unlimited energy but it is in short bursts. They will spend a lot of their time sleeping. Growing takes a lot of energy and rest is crucial. A very young puppy will not have the stamina for too much exercise, but the quantity can be increased as they get older little by little.

A good guideline for puppy exercise is to provide 5 minutes of exercise per month of age twice a day. For a 4-month-old puppy 2 sessions of 20 minutes are sufficient.

### Types of exercise for a puppy

**Walks on leash** – a puppy that is under three months old probably would not have had all its vaccinations so shouldn't be walked in public. Once they are fully vaccinated and your vet has given the ok you can start to take your puppy for short informal walks.

These walks do not need to be too long or strenuous. **The best guideline is to give them around 5 minutes of walking per month of age.** For example, a four-month-old puppy will only need a 20-minute casual walk at most.

There are many benefits to these walks such as teaching them to walk on a leash, building confidence, learning social skills, providing mental stimulation, and quality bonding time.

**Socializing with other puppies or friendly adult dogs.** – Providing your puppy with the opportunity to play with other puppies and adult dogs is a great way to teach them the social skills they will need when interacting with other animals and people. It is also an excellent energy burner. More on [socializing a Blue Heeler with other dogs](#) here.

**Playing with age-appropriate toys.** Provide your puppy with a good selection of safe toys. Toys are a great way to occupy and tire them both physically and mentally. This can include playing by themselves or a fun game with you that provides bonding time. For recommended [Blue Heeler puppy toys](#) see here.

**Mental stimulation and enrichment.** Providing mental activities is a great way to develop their brains and is very tiring for them. One of the best ways to provide your puppy with mental enrichment is learning. Teach their commands or even simple tricks. It is also a great training opportunity to teach them the rules and boundaries and to be obedient. For more on [enrichment for Blue heelers](#) see here.

## How to exercise a senior older Australian Cattle Dog

As your Blue Heeler gets older you may notice a difference in their energy levels. A Blue Heeler is considered a senior from about 7 or 8 years old. However, at this age, they will still be energetic and you may only notice a small reduction in energy levels.

The life expectancy of a Blue Heeler is 10 to 13 years however it is not uncommon for them to live much longer. They tend to be still very active when they reach their golden years even though their body may not be as willing.

It is important to keep them active as they age to keep their joints and muscles mobile. However, it is just as important to keep the balance and not overdo it as it may result in injury or soreness. Inactivity can also lead to weight gain and risk of health issues like diabetes, heart disease, and arthritis. Blue Heelers are also a breed that can be prone to both elbow and hip dysplasia as they age.

Tailor their exercise to a level they can comfortably achieve and if you have any concerns or questions, consult your vet.

Recommended exercises for a senior dog can include:

- **Regular walks.** It is important to continue with regular walks but they may need to be shorter. If they are showing signs of fatigue you should end the walk. Try to walk on soft even terrain such as grass.
- **Swimming.** Swimming or even walking in water is an excellent low-impact activity for older dogs. Allow them plenty of rest time as swimming can be a very strenuous exercise. [Use a lifejacket](#) to provide extra buoyancy and save energy.
- **Mental stimulation and enrichment.** It is good to keep their brains active to keep them mentally sharp. More on [Blue Heeler enrichment](#) here.
- **Muscle-strengthening exercise.** As your dog ages, it may show signs of losing muscle mass. It is important to keep their muscles strong to support their joints and tendons. See below for strength exercises.

## Exercise for an overweight Australian Cattle Dog

Australian Cattle Dogs are very active dogs that are in their element working all day. Many Blue Heelers that are kept as pets simply don't get the exercise they need. As a result, many Blue Heelers can be prone to being overweight or even obese.

If your Blue Heeler is overweight or even obese it is best to give them less exercise than you would a typical Blue Heeler. This may seem to be counterintuitive but this is to reduce the stress on their joints and tendons and heart and lungs due to the extra body weight.

It takes a lot of exercise to burn just a few hundred calories. The key to weight loss for your Blue Heeler is a calorie deficit. that is reduce calories consumed.

For a [full guide to weight loss for an Australian Cattle Dog](#) see here.

# Types of exercise for an Australian Cattle Dog

There are generally four main types or categories of exercise you should provide your Blue Heeler daily. They are –

## Regular Walks

It is essential that your Blue Heeler gets regular walks, preferably once or twice a day. Regular shorter walks are much better than a big long walk after many days of no activity. Ideally, the minimum should be 45 to 60 minutes daily. If you are walking your Blue Heeler on a leash It is a good idea to teach them loose leash walking so they aren't pulling you along. See here for a [guide to loose leash walking a Blue Heeler](#).

Being high-energy working dogs they have a good level of endurance so a walk around the block on a leash will not tire them that much. However, there are numerous other benefits such as mental stimulation, social stimulation, training opportunities, and bonding time.

If your Blue Heeler comes on command, walks at the park off the leash are better. If trained Blue Heelers are generally very obedient. For more on [recall training for a Blue Heeler](#) see here. Alternatively, you can use a long line to allow them more freedom while maintaining control.

You can add extra resistance to the walk by using a weighted vest or [dog backpack](#). It is recommended that no more than 10% of their body weight be added.

This is more than sufficient to tire them and strengthen their muscles without putting excessive stress on them. Other ways of increasing the resistance on the walk are to walk on sand or in water, and by including uphill sections or stairs on the route.

## Energy burning activities

Blue Heelers are high energy, have a high level of endurance, and have a good level of cardio fitness. In addition to regular walks, you need to provide energy-burning games and activities. See below for suggestions and ideas. The right toys can be a great way to provide exercise and burn energy for your Blue Heeler. See here for [recommended Blue Heeler toys](#).

## Strength and muscle-building exercise

It is essential to keep your dog's muscles in peak condition. This aids in preventing injury and supporting their joints and tendons. Exercise that works the muscles is also an excellent way of burning fat helping to prevent them from becoming overweight or obese. See below for strength exercises.

## Enrichment and mental stimulation

Blue Heelers are really intelligent, good problem solvers, and fast learners. It is important to occupy their mind as much as their bodies. If they are left to get bored they can often look for ways to occupy and challenge themselves. This can manifest itself in unwanted behavior problems.

For a full guide to [mental stimulation and enrichment for a Blue heeler](#) see here.

## Suggested energy-burning activities and exercises

In addition to the daily walk, it is important to provide other energy-burning and muscle-strengthening exercises to your Blue Heeler's overall exercise routine. Here are some recommended ideas you can do with your dog.

### Herding Balls

One of the best ways to exercise a herding breed like the Australian Cattle dog is to provide activities that simulate the job they were bred to do. This not only provides physical exercise but taps into their instinctive intelligence providing enrichment for them.

Chances are you don't have access to livestock for them to herd but using a herding ball is the next best thing. Herding dogs were bred to chase and control moving objects. Teaching your herding dog to play herding games will actually reduce their desire to herd people and other dogs as herding breeds often do.

Herding balls is an actual dog sport called [Treiball](#). For the purposes of exercise at home, there are a couple of herding balls I recommend. Because many herding breeds will nip the ball you need a ball that is strong. They will puncture or ruin a softer ball in no time.

See here for [recommended herding balls for Blue Heelers](#).

## Flirt pole

A flirt pole, often also called a flirt stick, is a pole with a bungee-type rope with a lure or toy attached to the end. To use it, you move the toy along the ground in different directions as your dog tries to chase it. This game caters to a dog's natural chase and prey instinct.

There are numerous benefits to using a flirt pole in your dog's exercise routine.

- It Burns a lot of energy in a short time. Ten minutes of flirt pole exercise is enough to tire any dog fast.
- Takes limited effort on your part while your dog gets a solid workout.
- It is a good muscle conditioning and strengthening exercise. The rapid movement and change of direction work the core and the entire body.
- A flirt pole is an excellent training tool for teaching your dog impulse control and response to commands such as "leave it".
- It is enriching for your dog catering to their natural chase and prey instinct.
- A great way to train calmness into a dog. It teaches the dog's brain to go to high arousal and come back down to a calm state. Works well for dogs that are reactive.

Every high-energy dog should do flirt pole exercise. View [Flirt Poles on Amazon](#) here.

## Running with your Blue Heeler

The faster and further your dog travels the more energy it will burn. Running with your dog is great motivation for you and allows them to burn pent-up energy. If you don't want to run with your dog you can cycle or skateboard with them.

To learn more about conditioning your [Blue Heeler for running and other tips](#) see here.

## Hiking with your Blue Heeler

Blue Heelers love the outdoors and can be good hiking companions. Hikes of under 10 miles (16 km) are best. Even though Blue Heelers are only a medium-sized breed they are strong enough to carry some of the gear. However, just don't overload them.

Be aware of the weather and temperature if you take your Blue Heeler hiking. Blue Heelers are tolerant of both warmer and cooler weather but it is still important to take precautions. Ensure that you keep them hydrated.

For a [full guide to hiking with an Australian Cattle Dog](#) see here.

## Fetch

A game of fetch with your dog is an excellent energy burner and an opportunity for quality bonding time. If your dog is ball mad that is ideal, however, you can use a favorite toy or stick if that is what they like. I like to use a [Kong toy](#). Due to the unique shape, the bounce is unpredictable and keeps them guessing.

Most Australian Cattle Dogs will take to playing fetch straight away. If they are not natural retrievers it may take a little training at first.

The bigger the area you play in the more opportunity there is for a good workout. Use a ball launcher to get maximum distance.

View [ball launchers for dogs](#) on Amazon here.

## Automatic Ball Launcher

Playing fetch with a Blue Heeler can be a never-ending game. As many times you throw the ball they will bring it back and wait for the next throw. You will want to give up long before the dog. A great option is to use an automatic ball launcher.

These will not only play fetch with your dog but also provides a mental stimulation challenge for added enrichment. Blue Heelers are highly trainable as long as you focus their attention and will learn to use this quickly.

The best automatic ball launcher I recommend is the [IFetch Too](#). This uses balls that are the size of regulation tennis balls, which is convenient because you can easily replace them when the original balls wear out.

It can shoot balls up to 40 feet, This is one of the longest distances offered by any automatic ball thrower for dogs. It also comes with a rechargeable battery. You won't have to invest in new batteries all the time.

View the [IFetch Too](#) on Amazon.

## Frisbee

A game of frisbee toss is another great energy burner like fetch, but with an added skill challenge. Australian Cattle Dogs are agile and look spectacular playing this. To teach your dog to play Frisbee you can start by rolling it along the ground. They will automatically grab it in their mouths.

You can then advance to tossing it in the air towards them. Gradually increase the distance and height until they master the skill. It pays to use a durable frisbee like the [Kong Flyer](#) to prevent them from destroying it and spoiling the game.

## Agility

Dog agility is an official dog sport. However, you don't need to enter official competitions or a club for your dog to get the benefits of this activity.

You can set up an agility or obstacle course in your own backyard. You can build it yourself or use items from around the home. You can also get inexpensive agility equipment.

View [dog agility equipment](#) on Amazon.

Alternatively, you can do Urban Agility. This is where you get your dog to perform obstacles while out on a walk. Having your dog do obstacles is not just a physical activity. It also provides a mental challenge. Just take care to ensure that the activity is safe and within their ability.

You can use the surroundings to provide obstacles for your dog to run around, jump over or on to or crawl under. For example, jumping on and off a park bench or walking along a low wall.

## Play with other dogs

Provide the opportunity for your Blue Heeler to play and socialize with other dogs whenever possible. This will burn energy and improve their social skills. Most Blue Heelers are good with other dogs as long as they have been well socialized. For more on [Blue Heelers and other dogs](#) see here.

Blue Heelers have a strong herding instinct and can sometimes try to herd other dogs. Some dogs may find this annoying so be aware of this.

Alternatively, you can take your dog to doggie daycare. It is important to do your research beforehand as not all dogs are suitable for doggie daycare, and vice versa.

## Play with toys

Playing with toys either by themselves or with you can be an excellent way for your dog to burn some energy. Interactive and puzzle toys are also an effective way to provide mental stimulation and enrichment.

See here for [recommended toys for Blue Heelers](#).

## Dog sports

Consider enrolling your dog in a local dog sports club. You can enter as a serious competitor or simply for fun. Different breeds excel at different dog sports but due to their athletic ability, Blue Heelers are generally good at most dog sports. Options can include flyball, agility, rally obedience, agility, protection sports, dock diving, and herding trials.

## Sprints/short-intensity running

Short full-speed running will not only increase their cardio fitness but will strengthen the muscles of their shoulders and legs. Probably the simplest way to do this is to use a ball chucker or frisbee for them to chase after.

## Swimming

Most Blue Heelers are excellent swimmers. If your dog does swim it is a great exercise for cardio and building muscle. Swimming provides resistance as they move their limbs through the water.

It works and provides resistance to the whole body especially the front end which doesn't get as much work from just walking. As your dog's body is supported by the water it takes the weight off of their joints and bones and is low impact.

For a [full guide to swimming exercise for your Blue Heeler](#) see here.

## Muscle building and strengthening exercise

These activities and exercises are ideal for working your dog's muscles and building strength. Flirt pole exercise and swimming as mentioned above are also great strength-building exercises.

This type of exercise for an Australian Cattle Dog is not about building massive muscles. It is more aimed at keeping the muscles strong and providing functional strength. It also aids in burning excess calories and maintaining hormone balance.

## Weight Pull

It is probably one of the best muscle conditioning and building exercise for your dog. They don't have to pull massive weights to get a benefit from this exercise. It is important not to overdo it, especially when they are new to the activity.

Gradually increase the weight or resistance over time. You can use anything you can think of as the weight. This can include car tires, heavy chains, weights, or a trolley with weight on it. Resistance can be also increased by pulling the weight over a longer distance.

It is **crucial that you use a proper weight-pulling harness** to prevent injury. A correct harness will distribute the weight evenly over your dog's body.

View [Weight Pulling Harnesses](#) on Amazon.

## Tug of war

Most dogs love a good game of tug of war and it is a great exercise for building muscle, particularly the rear end. Have your Blue Heeler crouch back as much as possible to get the most benefit.

Some dog trainers are opposed to tug of war as they think it encourages dominant behavior in dogs. This is not strictly true. Just ensure that it is a controlled game and they leave the toy on command. Even if they win the game, as long as they bring the toy back to you it is fine.

If they do become possessive of the toy, it is best to end the game.

## Spring Pole

A spring pole is a bungee rope attached to a tree branch or beam with a spring at the top. At the other end is a lure or toy for your dog to grip on to. It is like playing tug of war by themselves but will give a more thorough workout.

This is a great compound exercise that will work the neck, the core, back, and upper hind legs.

View [Spring Poles](#) on Amazon here.

## Stair Exercise

Walking upstairs for a dog is an excellent strengthening exercise. It works the legs, shoulders, hips, and lower back muscles, and also the core. It is not suitable for all dogs such as dogs with back issues.

As your Blue Heeler goes up the stairs they place their entire body weight as they go from one step to the next. As they descend the stairs, they have to control the descent which involves negative contraction of the muscles.

There are two ways to perform stair exercise.

1. Have them run up as fast as they can. This can be done by throwing a ball up the stairs. Make sure that the descent is controlled to avoid injury or accidents. This is a great energy burner.
2. Have them walk up and down the stairs slowly and controlled. This is much safer and also a better strengthening exercise.

## 2 Legged walk

To do two-legged walking, lift your dog's front legs off the ground. You should then walk backward over a short distance. Then lift their rear end up, with you walking forwards, and have them walk on their front legs like a wheelbarrow.

Keep it to a short distance and no longer than 30 seconds a repetition. If your dog isn't keen on being held up by the front legs or rear end, don't force them as you don't want to cause an injury if they are struggling.

## Squats

If your dog can sit on command they can do dog squats. Stand in front of your dog and have them sit and then stand again. Ensure they keep their body

straight so both legs get equal tension placed upon them. Start with a low number of reps and then increase the number of reps and sets over time.

## Walking backward

Have your dog walk backward for a short distance. This focuses on strengthening the hip extensor muscle. Walking backward is not a natural movement for a dog and may take some practice. Start off in a narrow hallway or enclosed space so they can't turn. Walk forward so they have to back out.

## Can you over-exercise your dog?

Yes, you can give your Australian Cattle Dog too much exercise. Blue Heelers have a huge capacity for physical activity and work. However, dogs often don't know their own limits and will keep going. It is important that you be aware of the signs of over-exercising your dog.

Precautions should also be taken when exercising your Blue Heeler in hot weather. For [hot weather tips for Blue Heelers](#) see here.

If you find yourself questioning whether you are overworking your dog you probably are. Signs to keep a lookout for include:

- Your dog is exhausted after exercise and seems to be slow to recover
- They fall behind on walks when they would normally be racing ahead
- Extreme thirst
- Excessive panting during and after exercise
- Signs that they are sore such as lameness, limping, or stiffness
- They are reluctant to exercise or continue.
- They seem overly tired and are sleeping more than usual.

If you have any concerns, consult your vet. It may be over-exercise or there could be another medical issue you are not aware of.

## When to limit your dog's exercise

There are times when you may need to limit or modify your Blue Heeler's exercise volume. This can be due to age or a medical reason. These times include:

**Stage of life.** Exercise requirements for a puppy (under 12 months old) or senior dog (7 years plus) will be different from those of a healthy adult dog in their prime.

**After Illness, Injury, or Surgery.** If your dog is recovering from surgery, an illness, or injury, exercise should be carefully monitored. It is important to adhere to your vet's instructions at this time.

**After Desexing.** The volume of exercise will need to be reduced while recovering from spaying or neutering. The amount of time needed will vary on whether they are male or female. The surgery to desex a female is more complex and may require a longer recovery time. Your vet will inform you of what is best.

**Pregnancy.** Exercise for a pregnant dog will depend upon how far along they are in the pregnancy. Light exercise will help maintain muscle, keep their organs functioning efficiently, and help prevent boredom. Your pregnant dog will let you know if they are wanting to go for walks or not. Speak to your vet for their recommendations.

## Signs your dog is not getting enough exercise

Often it is obvious that your dog is not getting enough exercise. They will have excessive pent-up energy, may start developing behavior issues, and will not settle. This can lead to hyperactive behavior.

You may start to see behaviors that reflect boredom such as nuisance barking, digging, destructive and chewing behavior, and not being obedient. They may also start to gain weight even if they are eating the same amount.

For a dog that is left home alone regularly, it is crucial that they receive sufficient exercise. The last thing you want is to come home to a house that has been destroyed.

Try increasing the daily exercise gradually to see if there is an improvement. Avoid the urge to take them for an excessive exercise session running them to exhaustion. This can cause more harm than good. Exercise should be regular and consistent.

## Summary – Australian Cattle Dog exercise needs

The Australian Cattle Dog is a very high-energy working breed and requires a lot of daily exercise. **It is recommended that you give your Blue Heeler 1 to 2 hours of exercise and physical activity daily but they will not say no to more.**

They are also [highly intelligent](#) and require plenty of mental stimulation and enrichment to occupy their minds. The exercise needs of a Blue Heeler puppy (under 12 months) or an older senior dog (7 years or older) are different from those of a healthy adult dog.

Failure to provide sufficient exercise and mental stimulation for your Blue Heeler can result in them developing behavior issues. Learn more about [Blue Heeler behavior problems](#) here.