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We all know it's important to stay fit and flexible to enjoy life to its fullest. There's no shortage of advice online, from yoga tips to core exercises to ensure full range of motion and give you cat-like balance.

But have you considered an Irish wolfhound? These obliging giants are not only enthusiastic trainers, but they offer unique opportunities to enhance your personal fitness program, challenge your equilibrium and boost your ability to speak colorfully like a sailor. Some ideas to shake up your fitness routine:

- **Walk your hound through known squirrel territory.**

Wolfhounds are normally gentle on the leash. They know they can rip your arm off lurching ahead. They need your arm for back scratches and shoveling them food. They take it easy on you. Except with squirrels. Squirrels' chittering, twitching and scampering are irresistible triggers to a wolfhound's prey drive. Gentlemen, start your engines.

In this exercise, expect abrupt shifts in speed, direction and possibly time zones. Squirrels have no plan. They're erratic and evil, agents of chaos. Leased to a wolfhound, you'll experience stretching, elevated cardio and you may briefly fly when your hound goes up a tree. And so do you. Stay loose. Tuck and roll on the way down.

- **Walk TWO wolfhounds.**

For maximum stretching for all your limbs, torso and internal organs, try a leisurely stroll leashed to two wolfhounds at once. Individually, they're excellent leash-walkers. They don't tug, they frequently stop and sniff and they're gentle companions. They're also rugged individualists. Walk two and one will amble to the bushes while the other wants to move on. Feel the burn. And hope one doesn't goad the other into racing. In this exercise, you'll want to avoid squirrel country. Cats. Bright leaves or loud noises. Wear track shoes and as much padding as you can lash on without inhibiting your legs. You'll need them shortly.

- **Snack on chips or crackers in the same room as your hound(s).**

A workout for balance and reflexes. Stretching will also come into play, usually by the second chip. Wolfhounds are polite. The second they heard you crunch, they came out of what you thought was a comatose state on the couch and there they are, sitting patiently beside you for their share. A sitting wolfhound is four feet tall. More when there's food to be had. Note the long, muscular neck. The hypnotic eyes. The foot-long tongue winding around your wrist. Did I mention you need to be standing for this exercise? How tall are you? Not tall enough, you've probably discovered. How many chips CAN a wolfhound eat? Well, how many do you *have*?

Now stretching comes into play as you leeeean back out of their reach, which is when you learn that your wolfhound is apparently made of Silly Putty. How long IS that spine? Was he hiding spare links in his pocket? If you have two wolfhounds, this is when you feel the second one right behind you. That snorfling sound is him or her, head down in the bag of chips you were holding away from their partner in crime. Test your reflexes. See if you can snatch the bag away from one while avoiding the other. Never mind trying to count hounds. It only seems like you suddenly have ten. Keep bobbing and weaving until the sack is empty. It's a brief exercise.

- **Bonus balance exercise:**

Try sitting on the same couch as your wolfhound. You've been told they're not territorial. So why is it their mass is pushing you to the last two inches on the edge? It's not glacial creep. You'll get a great glute workout, not to mention your calves and arches as you push back. But be generous. Take back too much couch turf and your hound will retaliate. The Green Cloud of Doom isn't a martial arts expression. It's a full-blown gas attack. Your hound probably had too many chips. Practice your shallow breathing as you skitter away.