



Dec. 27, 2017

Sure, that may be the sound of the ice floes cracking out there, or it could just be your joints popping in the cold. Either way, flinch no more. You have a wolfhound to walk! And the odds are, he gets *frisky* in the cold.

You, on the other hand, may feel as lively as a frozen cod. You probably have about the same complexion, too. Buck up. It's only 90 days (or thereabouts) until spring. And there's more good news: [Studies](#) have clearly shown that living with dogs cuts your chances of dying of heart problems by 33 percent.

(The studies are silent on your odds of your surviving skiing across the ice sheets behind a giant dog, being slammed into a snowbank and no one finding you until the spring thaw.)

The rule of thumb for a large adult sporting dog is that they need up to 90 minutes of exercise a day. Yes, that shaggy lump poured like putty over your couch cushions is, technically, a sporting dog. And no, his heaving himself into a different position every hour doesn't count towards his daily minimum.

For his sake and yours, you need to get out there in the elements and hoof it. It's not as bad as it sounds (Yes it is. I'm 63 years old and live in the South. We're not happy if we're not sweating buckets. I'm *trying* to be encouraging...). A few techniques to get you both out there and back again:

Layer Like A Laplander

While your dog may have a natural fur coat, you do not. I recommend layering. Long johns, sweat pants, jeans, T-shirts, sweaters, parkas, let's face it, you cannot wear too many clothes. If

you can still swing a leg, add another layer. It'll not only keep your parts from freezing, it'll give you extra bounce when you fall over. Layer evenly and you'll roll. Just hang onto that leash and let your dog do the work.

Lets Get *Happy!*

Most wolfhounds are like kids when it comes to snow. They love to frolic in it. I've seen wolfhounds completely white with hoar frost, grinning. It's not the cold or ice bothers them. It's having to budge off that couch. Researchers have concluded that wolfhounds don't actually hibernate in winter. It just seems that way. It seems that way so much that you probably poke yours every hour to be sure they're still breathing.

You have to make it interesting (After you make them conscious). I've tried darting past mine with a pinch of cheese. They snapped it up on my way by. And rolled back over. Then let loose a Green Cloud of Doom. Sure, you can take a sack of cheese but a sack will only get you to the door. You cannot *carry* enough cheese to lure them on a cold 60-minute walk.

So you have to be upbeat. You have to convince them that going out on the tundra in a screaming blizzard is way more fun than snoozing by the fireplace. Yes, you could win an Academy Award for this one, Best Performance With A Wolfhound In A Whiteout.

Some recommend knocking back a bottle of Jim Bean to boost your happy factor but this leads to disorientation on the ice and mumbling. The trick is to be chipper. Keep their interest. Talk to your hound while you walk. "Look, Armand! Have you ever *seen* a car do so many complete revolutions on ice?" Or, "Boy, those little ice pellets down the back of your pants sure are *exhilarating*, huh!" Maybe, "Wow, boy, see that squirrel? Over there! Frozen stiff to a tree!"

Be lively, but try not to sound manic. Try to keep the teeth chattering to a minimum.

On Prancer, On Blitzen!

If your banter is sufficiently animated, your hound will perk up once he drags his belly into a snowdrift. I know *I* would. In fact, he may get pretty excited. If you're on a leash, you're about to get excited, too, because in all that clothing, you're not bounding at all like you used to. And he's leaping like a freaking gazelle. But, if you've layer correctly, you'll just bounce around like a ping pong ball until your frisky friend gets tired of dragging all that dead weight. Sixty minutes more and you can roll back inside and see what color your bruises are turning.

The Road Less Taken

To keep your walks interesting, mix up the routes from day to day for a change of scenery. Of course, if it's snowed another two feet during the night, *all* landmarks may look different. Maybe there's a flare gun down there in one of those pockets for when you realize you've completely lost your way. Maybe the rescue choppers can still fly in this weather.

Check Your Footing

Being lashed to a 170-pound dog on slippery surfaces may sound foolhardy to some. But those are just the *sane* people. You're lashed to a 170-pound dog on a slippery surface. The sanity ship has *sailed*.

But meanwhile, watch your footing. In the worst winter conditions, you may want to invest in ice boots with those little metal cleats. If you don't want to spend the money, maybe you can lash the business end of a garden rake to your soles. I found this to be a bit lumpy for easy walking but a few smart spins across that ice and the tines were

nubbins in no time.

Or, you could just go completely native and strap on ice skates. If you have ankles of steel and the reflexes of a cat, sure, go ahead and do that triple salchow like you saw on TV. Otherwise, keep your knees bent, chug along behind your hound and watch for partially submerged curbs, benches or bodies.

Of course, watch your dog's feet for that gnarly ice balls between their toes and be on the lookout for puddles or anti-freeze or chemicals used to melt sidewalks, both of which can be deadly to your hound.

Relax. A few weeks of this regimen and you're bound to break something, maybe more than one something. Then you and your dog and your cast can sit out the rest of this cold, wretched winter by the fire.