



Pawsitive Steps

Canine Rehab

Physical Therapy and Wellness

Putting the pep
back in your
pup's step

Body Weight Support Treadmill Training (BWSTT)

External support system to support an animal's body weight over a treadmill to assist with walking. This system is highly researched in both humans and animals to help improve functional outcomes, improve gait sequencing, and improve endurance.

How does BWSTT work?

We use a Help 'em Up Harness which provides front limb and rear limb support. If additional belly support is needed, we have a sling to provide additional support. The front and rear harness components as well as belly support is attached to a quick release pulley system to our PVC pipe frame over the treadmill. We attach the dog to the pulley system at the front harness and rear harness and slowly raise them to get them into supported standing. One person is controlling the treadmill and encouraging the dog to walk while a second person is standing behind the dog to provide support as needed, which may include moving the legs through the walking pattern, providing tactile cues or physical assistance as needed.

When is BWSTT appropriate?

- Hind limb knuckling
- Any weakness or paralysis of limbs
- Neurological disorders
- Overweight/Obesity
- Post surgical
- Poor endurance
- Conservative Care for injury such as CCL tears

How is BWSTT different than underwater treadmill (UWTM)?

BWSTT does not involve water. It is very low tech compared to an UWTM system. There is open access with the BWSTT system to allow for physical assistance as needed and your dog is directly supervised at all times. Because our system is low tech, we do not have to worry about technological updates, equipment becoming obsolete, or malfunctioning equipment. It is cost efficient and as effective as UWTM. Additionally, the animal is not subjected to water, can take rest breaks lying down, and does not have to be dried off afterwards. It allows more time to do more activities.



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Is it beneficial?

Yes, BWSTT is a great component of rehab. It can be used in conjunction with rehab including other exercises, modalities, and manual therapies. Initially, animals will not be able to tolerate walking on the treadmill for an entire session. It will be a gradual increase of time, with several short bouts to allow for motor learning without over fatiguing the animal. This is only available at Waterloo Animal Hospital clinic.

Why consider BWSTT?

BWSTT is just one tool in the toolbox. Social media makes the underwater treadmill (UWTM) look like an exciting tool that makes everyone want to do it. However, there is a lot more that goes into considering what is appropriate and most beneficial to the animal. We strive for optimal outcomes based on both research and personal experience as well as the animal and how they present. The premise of the underwater treadmill is that the buoyancy of the water will decrease the effects of gravity and thus assist with gait training. The water height can be adjusted in relation to the patient—the higher the water level, the less body weight the patient uses. However, although its use could be beneficial in a minority of cases, the reality is that underwater treadmill is vastly over-used in the field of canine rehabilitation and, most of the time, dogs recover much better from injury or surgery without using an underwater treadmill in their rehabilitation program. The underwater treadmill does not promote progressive overloading. The clinics who use it will often claim that it will help increase strength, both post-surgically and during the treatment of other musculoskeletal conditions. However, it is well known and researched in the field of human sports medicine that to add strength—and subsequently generate muscle growth—muscles and tendons need to be gradually loaded with progressive resistance.

The BWSTT system is wonderful for dogs who are overweight and needing to shed some pounds because it will off weight their body to allow them to move better, giving their joints some relief. It is also great for animals who have weakness and difficulty walking. We can control the speed and provide physical assistance as needed. It will help retrain the nerves and muscles. Additionally, it also allows for more distance and steps to be completed as opposed to walking overground. Animals also have different walking/trotting/running patterns, so depending on what we are focusing on, will depend on what speed we work on activities. As a human therapist, I have over 17 years of using BWSTT systems with a variety of conditions. As a Certified Canine Rehabilitation Therapist, this has been a successful tool for several clients.

Pawsitive Steps Canine Rehab
Clinic at Waterloo Animal Hospital
405-367-5732

Instagram: PawsitivestepsOK

Facebook: Pawsitive Steps Canine Rehab-Pawsitive Steps OK
pawsitivestepsok@gmail.com
www.pawsitivestepsOK.com