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## How to care for a BIG dog

By JESSICA P. BLICH  
 Mid-Atlantic Great Dane Rescue League

Big dogs command a certain presence and level of respect. They are magnificent to look at and their sheer size alone leaves many people in amazement. These giant pets are often wonderful to have, but if you are thinking about getting one, understand that they have special needs.

Ramp up to high places. A frequent malady of large breeds is hip dysplasia. This deterioration of the joints in the hips and sometimes elbows can be crippling to any dog, but for a big dog, it really can be devastating just by the sheer size and weight requirements on their joints.

Small adjustments around your house can help ease the stress on your dog's hips. Purchase a folding ramp to assist the dog in getting into a vehicle or high elevation. The definition of "high" expands as these dogs get older, so be mindful of your dog's individual needs. Also, if you can keep all of your dog's things (crate, water, food, toys) on the first floor and not require him to use stairs, this can be a great help.

Play with caution. Big dogs come with big hearts, and the bigger they are, the faster they tire. Be aware of your dog's attitude and overall mood while playing. If it is exceptionally warm outside, play a mild game of tug-of-rope with your dog indoors where it is cool and save more energetic play for another day.

If you are able to play outdoors, monitor your dog's energy level and see how hard his heart is beating. Sometimes a playful pup does not know when enough is enough. This is where your pet-parenting comes into play. Running or jogging with an extra-large dog is generally not a good idea. You may be all set to burn calories on your 3-mile run, but these dogs are not built for marathons.

Be prepared for all situations. One never knows when tragedy or illness will strike and your dog depends on you to be his hero in desperate times. It is imperative when you have a dog of massive proportion to have an emergency contingency plan in the event that you need to move your dog if he or she is unable to walk.

Keep a large, heavy blanket handy that will provide you with a makeshift "hammock." It is much easier to roll a 180-pound dog than to carry one. Also, this is a gentle way to move a dog that might be having leg pain and is unable to stand or sit without discomfort.

Have an emergency contact list in place in the event that you live alone or your family is not at home when a pet transfer is required. Moving a large dog alone is often impossible -- make it a team effort, and if your dog resists walking on a leash because of an injury or pain, use the hammock method. Even the most mild mannered pet can lash out when in serious pain.



Angus

Make sure that your home is clear of breakable items at tail-wagging height. There is no need to discourage a happy dog from showing his or her appreciation when you can simply move these items to a higher elevation. Make sure that counter tops are also clear of any items that may be harmful to your dog if ingested. Large-breed dogs can often reach table tops and counter tops where they enjoy "surfing" for treats that they are not supposed to eat.

Feather has been in MAGDRL's care since April. She is 5-to- 6 years young and spayed. She has great manners -- she lies in her bed, but not on the furniture. She is attending obedience/training classes and working on her leash skills. She would love to live with other dogs.

Angus is large and magnificent, with a shiny black coat and proud Dane stance. Angus is "extra large" but also "extra friendly." This neutered male, with MAGDRL since August, is gentlemanly when encountering other dogs and has lived peacefully with both cats and dogs in his foster home.

For more information, contact the Mid-Atlantic Great Dane League at [www.magdrl.org](http://www.magdrl.org).

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Feather

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