

Disabled Dogs Products

Here are various types of assistive devices for disabled dogs, arthritic or elderly dogs, or any dog who needs extra mobility support.

By CJ Puotinen

If your dog has arthritis or is recovering from an injury or has a condition that restricts her range of motion, a variety of assistance devices ranging from simple to sophisticated can help her live a more comfortable, active life.

Dog Steps and Ramps

Steps and ramps are affordable, portable aids for dogs who need help getting onto or off of furniture or into and out of vehicles.

If your dog needs only a little help with a few stairs, nonskid strips from a home-improvement store may provide all the support she needs.

Longer distances, such as from the floor to a bed or sofa or from the ground to your car seat or the back of your SUV, may require a ramp. For a wide assortment of pet steps and ramps, search for these items at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), [Chewy.com](https://www.chewy.com), [Wayfair.com](https://www.wayfair.com), and other retailers.



The Free Standing Foldable 2-Step Pet Stair by Pet Gear is pricey (\$175 from many online retailers), but strong and stable.

Study products and their return policies carefully, for not all pet ramps and steps are stable, comfortable, or safe for your dog. As Michael Petty, DVM, explains in *Dr. Petty's Pain Relief for Dogs* (Countryman Press, 2016), "If your dog needs a ramp for two or three steps, I recommend that you invest in a custom-built, semi-permanent ramp." That's because temporary ramps are often wobbly, many dogs refuse to use them, and temporary ramps can slide out of position, injuring you or your dog. Several websites offer do-it-yourself construction plans for ramps and pet steps.

Depending on your dog's condition, a ramp may be so steep that it stresses the spine or painful joints, in which case a large step arrangement may work better. For examples, see the Free Standing Foldable 2-Step Pet Stair by [Pet Gear](#) or the [Pet Loader](#) dog steps. Look for a step or ramp that is easy for you to position, wide enough to be stable, sturdy enough to support your dog, and which has a durable nonskid surface. If the configuration is unfamiliar to your dog, introduce it gradually with plenty of rewards and encouragement.



ProSelect Adjustable Dog Diner, about \$50 from Amazon.com and other online retailers.

Elevated Dog Bowls

We're not usually fans of elevated bowls, because studies have shown that raised bowls can increase the risk of bloat in large breed and other susceptible dogs. For dogs with neck or spine injuries or osteoarthritis, however, elevated food and water bowls may help reduce pain (or anxiety about pain) from reaching down to eat or drink from low bowls. Some elevated bowls come with adjustable legs, so you can experiment to find the best height for your dog. Search online for "raised dog bowls" or "elevated feeding stations," or ask your independent pet supply store to order one for you. The ProSelect Adjustable Dog Diner (\$50 from Amazon) is an example.

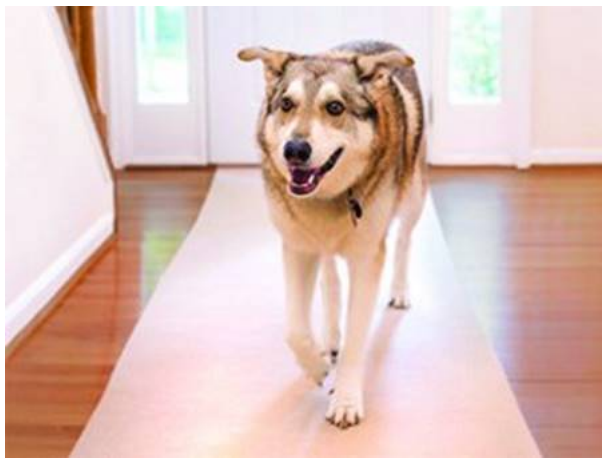
Orthopedic Dog Beds and Bed Warmers

Beds are not really assistance devices, but they are important because our dogs spend most of their lives lying down. An uncomfortable bed can worsen a painful condition and interfere with restful sleep.

For mattress-shopping advice, see "[The Best Orthopedic Dog Beds](#)," (March 2016), which describes nine leading orthopedic dog beds. Consider basic structure, mattress thickness, how much support the mattress provides, whether the cover is removable and washable, and whether your dog sleeps curled up in a snuggly ball or stretched in all

directions. Whole Dog Journal recommends ignoring bed sizes defined by breed or weight. Instead, measure your dog from nose to tip of tail and from toe to the top of the shoulder. Then order a bed that's at least 12 inches longer and wider than the dog's measurements.

Bed warmers can provide warmth and comfort to aching joints. Examples include [HipHugs](#), which are rice-filled blankets that can be warmed in a microwave and placed across your dog's hips or joints, and Buddy Bags, a similar product from [DogLeggs](#). Another similar product, the [K&H](#) Microwavable Pet Bed Warmer, is a neoprene bag filled with a nontoxic liquid that stays warm for hours after microwaving. It's meant to be used inside a dog bed only.



CarpetSaver as an affordable option to increase traction for a senior dog or one who is recovering from surgery.

Improving Foot Traction for Dogs

Sliding or skidding on a slippery surface is more than inconvenient; it can be a health hazard for older, three-legged, arthritic, or injured dogs.

[CarpetSaver](#) makes lightweight, nonskid, soft-fabric floor and carpet protectors that provide extra traction for pets and people. They come in different shapes, colors, and sizes, and are easy to move and machine washable. Placing yoga mats on a floor's slippery areas is another way to improve traction.

Nonskid socks for dogs, which are similar to nonskid socks used by hospital patients, help dogs maintain their balance on wood, vinyl, and tile floors. For examples, see [Drs. Foster & Smith](#) Rubber Bottomed Knit Dog Socks, [Ultra Paws](#) Doggie Socks, or Power Paws by [Woodrow Wear](#). A fabric paint or rubber material applied to the socks prevents slipping. Look for nonskid patterns that extend up the sides so that if the socks twist on your dog's feet, they will still prevent slipping and sliding. Buying the right size is important because a too-large sock won't stay on. Follow measuring instructions.

Disposable balloon socks, such as [Pawz](#), are rubber socks that improve traction on slippery surfaces, but because they don't breathe, they can trap moisture and lead to yeast infections if left on all day. For best results, remove them after exercise.

Dr. Busby's [ToeGrips](#) are small, non-slip rings that fit over a dog's toenails, adhere by friction, and grip the floor. ToeGrips work best on dogs who don't drag their feet because of an injury or neurological disorder. Watch the before-and-after videos on the ToeGrips website!



Dr. Busby's ToeGrips resemble tiny bits of rubber tubing. Slipped onto the dog's nails, they offer traction and proprioceptive stimulus, to help the dog's brain pay more attention to controlling his limbs.

Paw-Pads are nonskid adhesive bandages shaped to fit a dog's paws. Because they are thin and allow the skin to breathe, dogs don't usually notice them. These stick-on traction aids, which are said to stay in place from two to 10 days depending on weather and activity, are recommended for all dogs, including those with neurological deficits that cause feet to rotate. Available from [Pupgear Corporation](#) and other online retailers.

Rosin, a solid resin from pine and other evergreen trees, is used by tennis players and gymnasts to keep their hands from slipping. Rosin products for human athletes or sprays labeled for canine use, such as [Bio-Groom](#) Show Foot Professional Anti-Slip Spray, can be applied to your dog's paw pads. Rosin has to be reapplied as needed and doesn't protect as well as nonskid socks, but can be helpful for dogs who don't like socks or keep taking them off.

Dogs with long hair between their toes lose traction, too, so keep the feet groomed by trimming foot hair as well as toenails.

Dog boots, as described in "[The 4 Best Winter Dog Boots Out There](#)," (November 2016), provide warmth, traction, and protection from slippery ice, snow, and other outdoor hazards.

Body Lift Harnesses for Dogs

Sometimes dogs need help going up a flight of stairs, getting into a car, or just walking from one place to another. Support harnesses can make this job more convenient and comfortable for both you and your dog.

Some harnesses feature a single front handle while others have one at the shoulders and another above the hips. A front-handle harness takes care of most situations, but a two-handled harness helps dogs rise from a prone position and provides extra support on stairs, when getting into or out of vehicles, or when in pain because of hip dysplasia, illness, or injuries.



The Help 'Em Up Harness is available in five sizes, fitting dogs from eight pounds to 220 pounds. The harness has 11 different adjustment sites, so it fits your dog precisely and comfortably.

Ruffwear's Web Master Harness is a single-handle harness designed to assist dogs up and over obstacles. According to Ruffwear's website, the harness, which comes in two colors and five sizes, "is the preferred dog harness used by many avalanche rescue dog teams in the United States. This harness makes a great collar alternative and is ideal for hiking, scrambling, and mobility assistance." This harness primarily supports the front end and middle of the dog. The Web Master harness sells for \$60.

Ruffwear also makes a harness that adds support for the dog's rear end. The Doubleback harness (\$125) is meant for lifting and lowering dogs on mountain climbing adventures, so it's strong and comfortable, and could certainly be used to support a dog who was wobbly on his legs. [Ruffwear](#) sells its products directly as well in select pet supply stores.

There are also a number of products made specifically for mobility support. The [Help 'Em Up Harness](#) consists of separate front and back sections, each with a well-designed,

comfortable handle. With 11 separate adjustments, it's more complicated than most harnesses, but the website video, printed instructions, and fully assembled delivery make it easy to use as well as versatile.

I purchased a Help 'Em Up Harness for a friend's Labrador Retriever five years ago when he stayed with us in his old age, and later adjusted the same harness for my own Lab when a muscle injury made stair climbing painful. The Help 'Em Up Harness comes in five sizes and offers two hip lift designs to accommodate male anatomy.

See more harnesses described in the Whole Dog Journal article "[Orthopedic Equipment for Dogs Designed for Increased Mobility and Extra Support](#)," (March 2011).

Braces and Other Mobility Support Products for Dogs

Splints, wraps, braces, orthotics, and prosthetics can help dogs with disc disease, joint problems, cruciate ligament injuries, and other conditions that interfere with mobility. Most of these products are sold through veterinarians.

[Thera-Paw](#) Assistive and Rehabilitative Products include splints and wraps that support legs and joints.

The [Woundwear](#) A-Trac Dynamic Brace for dogs with cruciate ligament injuries was designed for use before, after, or instead of surgery to support and strengthen the leg. Therapeutic Dog Hock and Leg Wraps from [Back on Track](#) are said to relieve pain and inflammation, help injuries heal, and ease arthritis pain.

[Ortho Pets](#) makes custom orthotic and prosthetic devices, including Hoppy and Wheelie Vests for dogs with or without the use of their front legs.

For dogs unable to use their hind legs, canine wheelchairs include:

[Best Friend Mobility](#)

[Walkin' Wheels](#)

[K9 Carts](#)

[HuggieCart Dog Wheelchairs](#)

[Eddie's Wheels](#)

For additional information see [Handicapped Pets](#) and [Dog Mobility](#).

CJ Puotinen is the author of The Encyclopedia of Natural Pet Care and other books.