

Tips and Tricks *for* Wheelchair Dog Walking

Even as a wheelchair user you should be able to safely, efficiently, and independently take your dog with you as much as possible. Read on to find out about different tips, tricks, and gear options to help you roll along with your dog!

Remember: Please consult a reputable trainer before using any new tool with your dog!



Nerissa, the author of this article, walking 2 dogs from her everyday wheelchair using standard leashes.

*“ To me, being outside and dogs go hand-in-hand. Nothing says adventure like a happy dog! In addition to walking my own dog regularly, **I worked as a dog walker in my wheelchair for several months**, and had many regular clients. People were always surprised to hear that I walked dogs from a wheelchair. **The truth is, I control dogs better from a wheelchair than many people do on their own two feet!**”*

– Nerissa

Standard Leash

While they come in a variety of colors, textures, and styles, the standard dog leash means a clip on one end for the dog's collar and a loop on the other for your hand. These leashes can vary in length, though the average length ranges from 4ft to 6ft. For the purposes of wheelchair dog walking, I would recommend using a leash about 4ft in length. This allows your dog some off-

path sniffing time, but with less strand to become caught up in wheels or to get stepped over by the dog. With your hand being lower than an upright individual, any loose leash could easily be stepped over by the dog, causing it to get stuck in his armpit, and you may spend a great deal of time undoing that. The shorter the leash, the less likely this is to happen.

If you want to use a slightly longer leash, I'd suggest using a leash that is made of flat webbing. There are some leashes out there that are made out of round cord or rope. But if it's a long leash and you need to gather it AND push your wheelchair, the round cord makes it difficult to get a good grip on your rims. NEVER wrap the leash around your hand (pictured below, left)! When the leash wraps around itself and around your hand, if the dog pulls suddenly it will tighten. You risk damage to your hands and if your fingers are in any of the loops of the wrap, you could even break them.

Instead, you should loop the handle of the leash around your wrist, then FOLD the leash into your hand (pictured below, right). If the dog pulls or lunges suddenly, the leash will simply unfold out of your grip. It won't pull you into an unsafe situation. With the loop around your wrist, you'll keep possession of the leash so you can easily get your dog back close to you.



NO: Do NOT wrap the leash around your hand like this!



YES: Loop the handle around your wrist, then fold the leash in your hand.



PROS

- Inexpensive!
- Easy to obtain - even gas stations and grocery stores have pet sections with standard leashes for sale.
- A wide variety of color, styles, and features are available in this simple leash design to compliment you and your dog's personality!



CONS

- When handling a wheelchair and a leash, you greatly increase your risk of dropping the leash, especially if you have limited dexterity. If your dog is not reliably trained and this happens, you could risk them running off and/or getting hurt.
- The longer the leash, the more likely you could get it caught around your dog, your wheels, or it could get caught in your spokes while moving, even folded up. You have to always be aware and cautious while using a standard leash for wheelchair walking.

Hands-Free Leash

Hands-free dog leashes come in a variety of styles. There are over-the-shoulder, waist-wrap, and ones that clip to a pants belt loop. Perhaps the most handy leash (yes, pun intended) are those that feature a Neoprene slip-on grip in place of the handle. This style, like the EzyDog Handy Leash allows the user to securely keep their dog's leash in hand while performing a variety of activities. I, personally, favor EzyDog's, version because not only is the length of the leash adjustable from 36" to 48", but it features a bungee section! This is especially beneficial to wheelchair users walking their dogs. Sometimes obstacles that you have to deal with can come up suddenly, and this reduces shock to your dog's neck in those moments. Similarly, if your dog randomly lunges at a smell or tries to say "hi" to someone, the bungee reduces the impact on you so you are less likely to be pulled suddenly where you were not intending to go.



EzyDog Handy Leash in action with a standard manual wheelchair.



PROS

- No worrying about gripping or dropping the leash as it's securely on your hand like a glove.
- Many hands-free leash have adjustable lengths so you can customize it to your individual needs.



CONS

- There is no quick release. If your dog is not reliably trained and chooses to bolt, you will be pulled too.
- For manual wheelchair users who use their hands to brake, this leash's "glove" will be where the friction is so it will wear out faster and need regular replacement.



More tips on the next page 

Wristband Attachment

One newer option for dog walking is a wrist attach leash. This leaves the user with a COMPLETELY free hand. As with any general type of equipment, there are many options in this category, but my #1 choice for wheelchair users is the Liberty Wristband. Why is this ideal for a wheelchair user? Well, it's unlike any other wristband leash attachment I have seen on the market. The clasp can accommodate whatever leash you currently use on your dog, and is a quick release safety mechanism! Even if you have limited dexterity, you can pull the quick release tab with your teeth if you suddenly need to release your dog.



Utilizing the Liberty Wristband in conjunction with the Active Hands grip aids on the levers of the GRIT Freedom Chair.



PROS

- If you have limited hand strength and need to quickly release your dog for safety, you can use your teeth to release the clasp on the Liberty Wristband, even under force.
- The Liberty Wristband allows you to use almost any leash you already own, and could even allow you to walk 2 well-mannered dogs simultaneously.
- The Liberty Wristband is lined in neoprene padding which makes it very comfortable for the user.



CONS

- If your wrists are smaller around than 6.5" the Liberty Wristband may slide around during use.
- You should still use a short leash when using the Liberty Wristband in conjunction with a wheelchair so that any leash slack won't get caught in the wheels.
- Depending on your dexterity, it can be challenging to put the leash in the Liberty Wristband clasp while it's on your wrist. So, if you disengage the clasp for any reason, you may have to remove the wristband leash entirely to reset the system.

Bicycle Attachment Arm

There are many companies out there making dog walking attachments for bicycles. This can be advantageous for some wheelchair users because they don't have to worry about physically handling a leash. For dogs learning about position with the wheelchair they can also be a

beneficial training tool as many of the designs keep your dog from getting too close to the tire. Also beneficial during the training period for dogs, a lot of arms feature a spring or suspension that greatly reduce force from sudden sideways pulls. Depending on the arm you choose, and the frame of your wheelchair, you may need to make some custom modifications to make it fully compatible.



The Springer, a dog walking arm intended for use on a bicycle, but slightly modified to be used on the GRIT Freedom Chair.

You should NEVER attach the tether of a dog walking arm to your dog's collar. ONLY attach the tether of these types of setups to a harness (example pictured below). Because you won't have your hand on the tether, you can't compensate for certain circumstances and you don't want to risk hurting your dog's neck. If the dog gets tangled around an obstacle and the safety breakaway is engaged, then having your dog tethered by a harness will protect their neck from such a

high force. Also, by attaching your dog to a harness, they might even help give you a little momentum going up hills!



PROS

- You are 100% hands-free from your dog, leaving you free to maneuver your chair and enjoy the sights on your stroll.
- Most (but not all) of these types of dog walking arms come standard with a quick release mechanism for safety. This is especially beneficial if your dog is still learning walking manners. If your dog gets caught up around an obstacle, it will give way and free your dog.
- If you are working to train your dog on proper positioning with a wheelchair, this can be a beneficial training tool because most bicycle dog walking arms are designed to keep your dog away from the wheels.
- Because your dog will be attached by a harness, if they get excited about going on their outings, you'll have added forward pulling power, which can be especially beneficial on uphill stretches!



CONS

- Due to the added width, you won't be able to clear most doorways or gateways with the arm attached. You will likely have to attach the arm to your wheelchair outside, or at the trailhead.
- Depending on the specific dog walking arm you get, you might have to adapt the attachment of it to be compatible with your wheelchair.
- The tether lengths on these pieces of equipment are fixed for safety, so there is less room for your dog to have sniffing breaks if that's something they enjoy.
- If your dog is a powerful puller, you will find one side pulling harder than the other, so your chair may curve a bit. You can compensate by pushing more with the opposite arm or teaching your dog vocal pace commands.

DIY

Sometimes you can't find exactly what will work for you and your dog for your particular situation or activity. Or, maybe you found it but it's out of your price range. It's perfectly fine to make your own equipment! When I was regularly walking a large German Shepherd with my own dog, I created my own velcro wristband leash that solved some challenges I was having using separate standard leashes. I understood the dogs I was working with so I was able to make sure it was safe for our specific needs. However, you must also keep in mind that businesses making active gear stress test various components for safety. By making your own gear, you are starting from scratch, and therefore there might be equipment failures or safety issues while you experiment. Always think safety first when building your own equipment!



PROS

- You can specifically tailor your gear to your individual situation and/or aesthetic preferences.
- Often making your own gear is more budget friendly than purchasing from a company.



CONS

- While DIY can be budget friendly, sometimes you have to purchase new tools to complete your project, and in the end it could be the same or as much as buying a ready-made item.
- Most companies go through stress and safety testing of gear they sell. They have done this work for you and can advise on how best to use the equipment. When making your own gear, you do not have these experiences and guidelines; therefore, you must exercise caution so you and your dog don't get into an unsafe situation.

Have questions?



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