

If our dogs are always walking in busy environments with a lot of stimuli (like a normal neighborhood), they can be missing out on key relaxation time. Most dogs really benefit from exercise in calm environments like natural areas and hiking trails to supplement their routine walks where they have to handle a lot of different triggers.

AIRPORT VS. FOREST

- Think about taking 5,000 steps in an airport setting. You have to get checked in, check your bag, find the bathroom, empty your water bottle, find security, deal with TSA, take off your shoes, wait in line some more, put on your shoes again, repack your luggage after a search, walk to your gate, find the bathroom again, get your flight delayed, finally board your plane, and take off. Whew - that's exhausting just to think about.
- Now think about taking 5,000 steps in a forest. It's quiet. There are birds chirping. Maybe there is water running over rocks in a stream next to the trail. You have the place to yourself. You take deep breaths of clean air. How relaxed do you feel?
- For many dogs, their regular neighborhood walk is like a trip through the airport. They have to navigate so many different stimuli on that trek from your house, around the block, and back. Think of the cars going by, garbage cans being rolled out to the end of driveways, kids yelling and playing in yards, bikes zooming past, other dogs walking across the street, other dogs barking at them from windows or backyards, people asking to pet them, the UPS truck driving around and the delivery person running out of the van every few houses, and more. Even for the friendliest dog, this can be exhausting! While this might be physical exercise, it's not producing the same level of relaxation as a walk in an area without so many triggers would.



An alternative to "airport exercise" is something we call a decompression walk. This is a walk designed to maximize sniffing. We have had anecdotal evidence for some time that shows more relaxation when dogs have sniffing opportunities, and there are some fascinating research projects being published on this subject now. Most recently, a scientific study found that sniffing lowers dogs' pulse, even while walking. You can read more about that research [here](#) and [here](#).

DECOMPRESSION WALKS

- Work best in a natural area with as few triggers as possible.
 - Ideally on a long-line or off-leash. Keep in mind leash-laws and dog safety & reliable recall.
 - If using a long-line, practice [leash handling skills](#) for safety. Clip the long-line to the back clip of a harness if possible.
 - While your dog is sniffing, try not to "pester" too much with constantly calling them back to you or asking them to engage with you. Let them sniff! Save those cues for emergency redirects.
 - Even if you can't do this type of walk every day, add it to your routine as often as you can!
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DECOMPRESSION WALK EXAMPLES

- [Example 1](#)
- [Example 2](#)
- [Example 3](#)
- [Example 4](#)



DECOMPRESSION WALK PODCASTS

- Our friends at CogDog Radio have a few episodes discussing decompression walks that are worth checking out! Check out: [A Decompression Walk Chat](#) & [Decompression Walk Answers](#)

OUR FAVORITE FORT COLLINS DECOMPRESSION SPOTS

We've been to most of the natural areas and hiking options in the Fort Collins area with our own dogs and our student dogs. These are our top picks for dogs that need a little extra space or are looking for a true decompression area with as few triggers as possible. If you have a favorite spot that you think we should add to this list, please let us know!

You Might Have the Place Almost to Yourself on a Weekday:

- [Eagles Nest Open Space](#) - Livermore
- [Udall Natural Area](#) - Fort Collins
- [Soft Gold Park](#) - Fort Collins
- [Watson Lake](#) - Laporte

Click on each name for info and directions!

You Might Have the Place Almost To Yourself on a Weekend:

- 2 Unmarked trails up the Poudre Canyon - Up the Poudre canyon, there are several unmarked trails that get almost zero attention. These are head trainer Amber's favorite spots. Head up the canyon and pass popular trails like Hewlett Gulch and look for parking pull offs to the right hand side of the road when the river is on your left. Watch out for mountain lions in this area. **FIRST TRAIL:** small pull-off on the right just past Narrows Campground. If you reached Dutch gorge you've gone too far. **SECOND TRAIL:** Larger pull-off just past Dutch Gorge, also on the right. If you reach Century Park picnic area you've gone too far.
- [Kelly Flats 4-Wheeling Road](#) (November-May) - When this 4-wheeling road is closed to off-road vehicles, it's a deserted haunt perfect for true decompression walks. It's a strenuous hike, but there are some bypass trails that can make it a little easier.

Available to Rent for Exclusive Use:

- [Trust Your Dog Training Field](#) (through SniffSpot) - North Fort Collins
- [K9Fitness Works Arena](#) - North Fort Collins

Busier Trails with Good Visibility:

- [Reservoir Ridge: Overland Parking Lot](#)
- [Arapahoe Bends Natural Area](#)
- [Hughes Stadium Frisbee Golf Course](#)

