



## **Getting Fit with Fido** *How Your Dog Can Help You Stay in Shape*

It's no secret that owning a dog can be great for your health. Over the past 25 years, countless studies have shown that dog owners enjoy a host of health benefits including lower blood pressure and cholesterol, decreased anxiety, improved socialization, increased wellbeing, and overall longevity. In terms of physical fitness, what's the greatest perk of owning a pooch? Dogs are always eager to get you up on your feet!

### **The Research**

- People who own and walk a dog are 34% more likely to meet federal benchmarks for physical activity, according to a 2011 Michigan State University study. The study found that dog walkers are more active overall, generally walking about 1 hour longer per week.
- A 2011 study from the University of Calgary found that dogs help their owners remain physically active year-round. According to researchers, a dog's enthusiasm for walking tends to help owners get up off the couch—rain, sleet, snow, and shine.
- A recent U.S. National Institutes of Health study of 2,000 adults found that those who regularly walked their dogs were more physically active and less likely to be obese than those who didn't walk dogs.
- Another NIH study followed more than 2,500 senior citizens for 3 years. Those who regularly walked their dogs tended to walk faster and for longer time periods each week. Older dog walkers also had greater mobility inside their homes.
- Walking helps control blood pressure and weight, according to the Society for Vascular Surgery. "The need to provide daily walks for a dog is great for dog owners as well," vascular surgeon Dr. Leila Mureebe said in a society news release. "Exercise is good for the body's blood supply, for maintaining proper body weight and for controlling blood pressure."

Don't own a dog? No worries! You can always offer to walk a friend or neighbor's dog, or join the ranks of volunteers who walk dogs awaiting adoption at local pet shelters.

### **3 Fun Ways to Exercise with Your Dog**

- **Walking/Jogging:** All dogs love a good walk, and some will even run or jog with you. An expandable leash allows your dog to go ahead or vice versa, as needed.
- **Frisbee:** Frisbee's fun, and it also helps build balance, flexibility, and arm muscle. Your dog will benefit from the aerobic bursts, too. Tennis balls and sticks work just as well.
- **Stair Climbing:** Bring your dog to a public building or stadium and walk/ run up and down the stairs. It's a great aerobic workout and builds muscle tone.

As with all exercise regimens, don't overdo it. Keep an eye on your dog for any signs of fatigue or overheating (dogs have higher body temperatures than we do). Be sure to bring water along for both of you. It's also important to avoid rough terrain and watch for signs that your dog's paw pads are sore. With these safety tips in mind, have fun with your new fitness partner!