



## Getting fit with Fido

HE GETS SO EXCITED, YOU HAVE TO SPELL OUT THE WORD: W-A-L-K. WHY NOT ADOPT FIDO'S ATTITUDE? GRAB THE LEASH AND GET GOING. YOU'LL BOTH BENEFIT.

**NEED MOTIVATION** to take walks? Try guilt. Not the kind that nags you from the bathroom scale or grumbles as you button your pants. We're talking guilt wrapped in fur and staring at you with puppy-dog eyes.

A yearlong study released by Chicago's Northwestern Memorial Hospital and Hills Pet Nutrition has shown the benefits of exercising in dog/owner teams. Dr. Robert Kushner, medical director of the hospital's Wellness Institute, says companionship was a key factor. People exercising with their dogs were more likely to stick with the workout program.

These results are increasingly important. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, more than 60 percent of Americans are overweight. As for dogs, nearly 50 percent of them are overweight, according to Dr. Bob Krapfl, a veterinarian in Omaha. He says 20–25 percent of all dogs are clinically obese.

"There are a lot of parallel problems with obese pets and people," says Dr. Sheldon Rubin, a Chicago veterinarian. Dogs who become overweight or obese run the risk of joint problems, arthritis, torn ligaments, diabetes, cardiac conditions and related complications.

According to the American Kennel Club, the Midwest mirrors the nation in its three most popular dogs: Labrador retrievers, golden retrievers and German shepherds. These large working breeds require extensive exercise, but even tiny dogs benefit from daily walks.

Here's where the guilt really kicks in. Dogs hit their senior years by age 7. Krapfl has clients who wouldn't start an exercise routine for their own health, but did so to lengthen their dog's life. "A lot of people are more focused on their pet's health than their own," he says.

But as pets benefit, so do owners—and in much the same way. The Centers for Disease Control says regular physical activity will help people lose weight, cut their risks for heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure, and develop a stronger sense of well-being.

Another bonus: Choose your dog as your exercise partner and expect no complaints or excuses. How many humans barrel to the door when they hear the W word or jump for joy at the jangle of keys? "You bring a leash out, and their eyes light up," Krapfl says. "It's more enticing to exercise when you see how much they enjoy it." ■

By Lisa Meyers McClintick

## THE BASICS

### CONSULT YOUR DOCTOR

and your veterinarian. Dogs should be checked for joint or cardiac problems and for any underlying conditions. Make sure they're updated on vaccinations and on flea or tick medicine before heading into the woods, or even the park.

**EASE INTO IT** by starting with a few blocks, then working up to longer distances. Plan to walk or hike four to five times a week for 30 minutes to an hour each time.

**GO BEYOND BRISK WALKS** whenever possible. Look for hiking trails where you can work more leg muscles and lakes where you and your dog can swim.

**PAY CLOSE ATTENTION** to your dog during extreme weather conditions, or opt to stay indoors. Dogs overheat easily, especially during high humidity. Always take water for both of you. Keep an eye on your dog's footpads, which can be injured by hot pavement or icy roads.

**IF YOU HAVE A CAT** that needs exercise, use a toy on a pole to entice it to dance, or get a laser-light pointer it can chase around the house.