

PET HINTS

2011

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Get fit with your dog

Medical research has shown that both ownership of pets and walking for exercise is beneficial to human health, so why not combine the two for a pleasurable way to fitness.

Walking your dog is classified as moderate exercise and has proven health benefits for people of all ages. Walking is good for cardiovascular health, bone density, joint health and the maintenance of healthy weight levels.

Being active with a pet also has social and mental health benefits. Exercise is a good way to clear your head after a long or stressful day. Socially, if you live near a park you'll have the opportunity to meet and chat to other pet owners and may even make a new friend

Research published in the March 2008 edition of the International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity, showed that people who acquired a dog increased their recreational walking by 48 minutes per week compared with an increase of only 12 minutes per week for people who did not acquire a dog during the period of the study.

It's no wonder that it is much easier to stick to an exercise routine after you see the excited look on your four-legged friend's face every time you get the leash out for a walk.

Your daily walk should be made part of the dog's training routine. The dog should be encouraged to sit when it comes to the kerb or while waiting for lights to change. This ensures the dog doesn't surge ahead into the path of traffic. If the owner meets an acquaintance and stops for a chat the dog should be encouraged to sit or lie down quietly while waiting for the walk to resume.

Walks should ideally be varied, so that both you and your dog get added mental stimulation. Owners lucky enough to live by a park often make the walk a social outing for dog and owner and many friendships have formed this way.

Always walk with a plastic bag so you can pick up after your dog.

Dogs are creatures of habit and come to expect their walk at the same time every day but owners should be careful to ensure that during the summer months, dogs are not walked in the heat or on hot pavements which may burn the pads of the feet. Elderly pets require special consideration in hot weather and their walks should be adjusted to suit. Early morning or evening walks during the warmer months allow the dog and owner to enjoy the best part of the day.