

MEDIA RELEASE

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Want to care more for the environment? Walk the dog!

It seems that appreciating the local environment has a lot to do with the amount of time you spend walking in your area, according to Australian research published in the *American Journal of Public Health*¹.

“Our research primarily looks at the influence of dog ownership on physical activity and shows that dog owners do more walking than non-dog owners. However, it also shows that dog owners perceive their neighbourhood as more attractive than people who do not own dogs,” says Hayley Cutt from the University of Western Australia.

According to the research, dog owners reported that their neighbourhood had more greenery, shade along footpaths and interesting things to look at while walking than people who didn't own a dog.

“Dog owners were also more likely to say it was easy to access parks and nature reserves than non-dog owners,” says Ms Cutt.

“What this suggests is that because dog owners have higher levels of motivation for walking in their neighbourhood, they develop a greater appreciation of the environment in which they live. They are also likely to see walking a dog to a park as an added bonus rather than a reason for not going,” she adds.

“Walking our dog Clancy gets me out to the local park at least once a day and there is always something new to look at. The changing trees and misty mornings at this time of year are especially lovely,” says Chris Power.

“We also take Clancy to the country on weekends and we are very mindful of making sure he is supervised at all times. He loves nothing more than interacting with his environment but we don't allow this to include native animals and birds,” she adds.

“At a time when we are all being encouraged to care for the environment and appreciate the natural world, it seems that walking the dog could be one of the most simple and effective ways of achieving this at a local level,” says Susie Willis from the Petcare Information and Advisory Service.

She says that pet owners need to be aware of their responsibilities to the environment which include picking up any dog droppings; keeping your dog on a lead in sensitive areas such as wetlands or bushland; ensuring that you do not take a pet to a prohibited area such as a National Park; and, making sure your cat wears a bell on its collar and is kept in at night.

¹ *Understanding Dog Owners Increased Levels of Physical Activity: Results from RESIDE*
Hayley Cutt PhD, Billie Giles-Corti PhD, Matthew Knuiman PhD, Anna Timperio PhD, Fiona Bull, PhD
American Journal of Public Health, January 2008.

“Our research shows that pet owners are becoming more conscious of their responsibilities in caring for the environment. We were particularly pleased to find that the general population also believes that this is the case.

“78% of cat owners in 2006 said they always keep their cat in at night compared to 63% in 1994 and, in the same year, 64% of dog owners said they always pick up their dog’s droppings compared with only 33% in 1994. 61% of the general population felt that the extent to which dog owners pick up after their dogs had increased a lot since 1994²,” says Ms Willis.

Many researchers have shown that people who own pets are happier and healthier than people who don’t own pets and it would seem that this includes dog owners having a more positive view of the environment in which they live, so make the most of World Environment Day (June 5) – get out and about with your dog.

(ENDS)

Issued by the Petcare Information and Advisory Service

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Australia – A Nation of Pet Lovers

Australia is a nation of pet lovers. It is estimated that 63% of Australian households have some type of pet with 53% of households owning a dog or a cat.

Over many years, Australian and international research has shown that owning pets can help improve a person’s mental and physical health, reduce the effects of stress, help children learn about responsibility, facilitate social interaction between people and build a sense of community.

The Petcare Information & Advisory Service (PIAS) is funded by Mars Petcare Australia as part of its commitment to socially responsible pet ownership. PIAS’ websites: www.petnet.com.au and www.i-pet.com.au provide information on the responsible and enjoyable ownership of pets. The sites are suitable for children, although PIAS encourages parents to supervise any online access by their children.

² *Socially Responsible Pet Ownership in Australia: A Decade of Progress*
Professor Bruce Headey.
Petcare Information and Advisory Service, 2007. Available on www.petnet.com.au