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Your Smart Dog Good for Fido, Good for You! August 2006

Could you be contributing to your dog's early demise? If you knew you could do something to help your dog could live longer, would you do it? Well, the research is in and there is something you can do to help your dog live longer. And –bonus!- it's good for **you**, too!

According to statistics from "Fitness Unleashed," a new book by veterinarian Marty Becker and physician Robert Kushner (Three Rivers Press, 2006):

- About 40 percent of U.S. dogs are overweight or obese (yet almost half of owners describe their (pudgy) dog's weight as "ideal").
- Overweight dogs have a higher risk of diabetes, heart disease, arthritis and cancer.
- Bad-dog behavior like biting, chewing, digging and house-soiling is significantly reduced in dogs that get adequate exercise.
- Fit pets live, on average, 15 percent longer than overweight ones.

Just those four facts above should have you lacing up your tennis shoes and finding Fido's leash right now! Before you run out the door, there are a few things to take into consideration before you head out.

SAFETY

Heat – We're in the middle of summer. We've got heat and humidity to worry about, not to mention the air quality index.

Try to exercise in the early morning or evening hours if possible. Dogs can fall victim to heat stroke, just as humans. Dogs can't cool themselves as efficiently as us – they only sweat through the pads of their feet. The only other way they can cool themselves is by panting.

Fresh water – Both you and your four-legged friend need water during and after your walk. Carry some along for the two of you.

Dog's health – Start slowly! If your pooch is pudgy, start by walking to the corner and back. Don't overdo it. If your dog is obese, has joint problems or otherwise unhealthy, check with your veterinarian first.

Loose Dogs – If you walk in an area where loose dogs might be a problem, think about carrying DirectStop – a citronella deterrent that can be used to ward off other dogs. It's pain free, so you don't have to worry about hurting the other dog (or your dog, if he is accidentally sprayed).

TRAINING

Some dogs have never been taught how to walk on a leash. While a formal "heel" isn't necessary, a loose leash is. Teaching your dog to walk on a loose leash not only makes the walk more enjoyable for you, but you're less likely to be pulled down if your dog has leash manners. Start teaching your dog loose leash walking skills now, and practice them during your walk. The



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following are a couple ideas to get you started:

Be A Tree – Anchor your hands at your side, waist height. When your dog pulls ahead of you and the leash gets tight, stop walking immediately. Wait silently (that’s the hardest part of this whole exercise!). When the leash goes slack, say “Good dog!” and move forward. Repeat this each time the leash gets tight.

No Pull Harness – In the past few years, several great products have been introduced that help reduce pulling. Be sure to choose products that are pain-free for your dog. Avoid choke collars and prong collars (and definitely no shock collars!). The following are better, more dog-friendly options for achieving a relaxing, stress-free walk:

Gentle Leader® Headcollar
Easy Walk® Harness
SnootLoop®

Local Hikes

Now you’re ready to get out there and walk with your dog! Here are some nearby locations that would be great fun for you and your dog.

- [C & O Canal](#)
- [American Discovery Trail](#)
- [Appalachian Trail](#)

Ready to start? Just pick a time and a place and GO! Get out there and do it – set a schedule and stick to it. Once you start, your dog will keep you on track – it’s hard to say “No” to those big puppy-dog eyes!

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Helping good dogs become great dogs.

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