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[Dr. Ernie Ward](#) thinks pets can be great workout partners. For more from Dr. Ward, find him on [Facebook](#) or at www.drernieward.com.

We've become a nation of cooped-up couch potatoes. 42% of adults in the U.S. are overweight or obese, according to the **Centers for Disease Control (CDC)** ([check out the alarming trend here](#)). Over half our country's dogs and cats were classified as too heavy by their veterinarians in a [2012 nationwide survey](#). Only 1.2% of Americans met the seven cardiovascular health habits recommended by the [American Heart Association \(AHA\)](#) in a [2012 Journal of the American Medical Association study](#). The [guidelines](#) included healthy eating routines and walking for 30-minutes five times a week.

While we were busy packing on the extra pounds, health officials witnessed a surge in weight-related diseases such as diabetes, osteoarthritis, high blood pressure, heart disease, and more in both people and pets. The good news is this slide into sickness can be reversed with some very simple lifestyle changes. Here are five reasons why you and your pet are perfect workout buddies.

1. Equal Energy Burn

In over twenty years of practicing veterinary medicine, I've rarely encountered a dog that didn't jump for joy at the prospect of going for a walk. One of the reasons that dogs and humans are a perfect pair when it comes to exercise is the fact that we burn close to the same amount of energy per pound when walking or running. In general terms, dogs expend about 0.8 calories per pound per mile when moving at a brisk walk of 3.7 to 4.0 miles per hour (15 to 16 minutes per mile pace). Humans shed almost the same, about 0.73 calories per pound per mile, at a similar speed. This means a 150-pound person loses about 100 calories during a 1 mile walk while their 40-pound dog burns about 32

calories. Keep in mind that both you and your dog need to use 3500 calories to lose one pound of weight. This is why I say that weight loss for people and dogs is about 60-percent diet and only 40-percent exercise. It's really hard to walk your way to weight loss. You need to exercise for the innumerable positive health benefits it provides to both you and your pet.

2. Reduce Disease Risk

Regular aerobic exercise can help keep you and your pet healthier. Studies over the past twenty years have shown that maintaining lean body mass and aerobic fitness reduce risk of developing diseases such as type 2 diabetes, osteoarthritis, high blood pressure, cardiovascular diseases, kidney diseases, respiratory conditions, and many forms of cancer. Make it your goal to walk your dog (and yourself) at least 30 minutes each day to reduce the chances of developing these conditions. This isn't rocket science; it's good old fashioned common sense. Now go take your dog for a walk.

3. Similar Speed

Most dogs seem to enjoy walking at about a 15 to 17-minute per mile pace. That's a brisk walk for you – arguably one of the best walking speeds to help you stay healthy. Take advantage of your dog's natural speedometer and encourage them to move along at a solid speed instead of stopping to smell the flowers every few steps. Hint: if your dog is pausing frequently, you're probably going too slowly. If your dog continues to refuse to pick up the pace, it may need a little additional leash-walking training. But you are concerned about your pet's health and suitability of this exercise regimen or your pet is not tolerating exercise or a steady pace, please consult your veterinarian.

4. Social Creatures

It's really easy to go into lock-down mode in today's life. You can order take-out, have practically anything delivered to your doorstep, and many people earn a living in their living room. Walking your pet forces you to break out of this compound-mentality and interact with others. The social benefits of twice-daily walking your dog around the block can't be underestimated. You'll see friends, catch up on neighborhood news, and be forced to see the world outside your windows. Dogs are just as needy – maybe more so – when it comes to

staying connected to the outside world. Many of the behavior cases I see dramatically improve after I prescribe daily open-air excursions. Dogs that are constantly cooped-up indoors need environmental stimulation to remain physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy – and so do you.

5. Man's Best Motivation

There's something deeply rewarding about spending time outdoors with your dog (or even leash-trained cats). Maybe it's rooted in our genes; maybe it's our long history together. Whatever the reason, the connection between sweaty people and panting pets is profound. Your dog longingly looks at you and wants one thing – you. Sure, you can redirect that desire by giving your pooch a goodie, but what they really, really want is your interaction, your play, your time. I think one of the greatest reasons pets are our best workout buddies is the fact that it's our responsibility as pet parents. Stop taking the easy way out – treats and couch time – and start lacing up those walking shoes. You'll feel better and your pet will love you for spending quality time with them. Plus, your pet deserves it.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian – they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.