

See Spot Walk!

Exercise motivation waning? Let your pet renew your fitness mojo.

Talk about good press for pups: New research suggests that dog owners have lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels, and that walking a dog can reduce stress, boost self-esteem, and even burn over 900 calories a week. Read on to see why Fido is your best fitness buddy.

- **He's always ready to go!** It's tough to skip a walk when a dog is depending on you. Studies suggest that people who walk dogs are more consistent exercisers and show more fitness improvement than people who walk with a friend. "Your dog never has an excuse for why it's not a good time to go," says Dawn A. Marcus, MD, creator of fitasfido.com, a pet fitness Web site.
- **He pushes you to improve.** Dogs are naturally curious, so they'll give you a reason to walk farther or try a different route, says Dawn Celapino, owner of Leash Your Fitness, a pet-focused fitness company in San Diego. You may even walk faster: A University of Missouri study found that the speed of walkers with dogs increased by 28 percent over 12 weeks, compared with 4 percent for those with human companions.
- **He's the best wingman ever.** Having a dog with you can make it easy to start a conversation with fellow walkers. Dr. Marcus says that adding a social aspect to your walk and being involved in your community can improve your health in many ways, including warding off loneliness and lowering stress levels.

No Dog? No Problem.

Visit aspca.org to find a local animal shelter that offers volunteer dog-walking opportunities.



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FOR A WALK-THE-DOG WORKOUT AND TIPS, SEE P. 151. »