

Get Fit WITH FIDO

Yes, your best workout buddy is your dog.

By Arden Moore

Say the word exercise and many people respond with one word: ugh. Or, they may come up with a half-dozen excuses why they can't make it to the gym or why their bike is gathering cobwebs in the garage.

But the secret to improved health is just a tail wag away. The best workout buddy may be Fido. Need proof? Check out the latest fitness trend: people/dog workout classes that incorporate aerobic, strengthening and flexibility exercises while unleashing plenty of fun for humans and dogs.

In San Diego County, certified personal fitness trainer Dawn Celapino created Leash Your Fitness, and classes are springing up all over the county. She credits Jack, her Cairn terrier, for inspiring her to stay in shape by trading the gym for dog-welcoming parks. And the ideal San Diego weather makes this an easy feat year-round.

"I hated leaving Jack at home when I went to a gym to teach or work out," she said. "He has a lot of energy and loves running, hiking and swimming with me. I discovered a lot of other dog people also seemed to enjoy working out with their dogs."

During each hour-long class, participants (and paw-ticipants) mix in doggy obedience with sweat-making workouts. People sprint, skip and even hop while their dogs match their strides. Together, they leap over hurdles or weave through poles. At any time, Celapino will call out for people to drop into squats and get their dogs to go into sit positions. If your dog—or you—fails to clear a hurdle, then you must do 10 pushups, while your dog watches and breaks out in a wide grin.

I know firsthand. For the past year, I've attended class with my doggy duo: Chipper, a 60-pound Husky-Golden Retriever mix; and Cleo, a 12-pound terrier mix. Technically, we are all about the same age, chronologically. I'm 53 and both dogs are 7 (which equates to about age 50 in human years). Chipper and Cleo gleefully soar over hurdles and climb up and down A-frames, tugging on their leashes to encourage me to pick up the pace. At the end of the class, Celapino guides us through yoga poses that improve our flexibility and awaken muscles that have been left far too long in hibernation. Both dogs hover over to deliver sloppy kisses while I try to maintain my pose.

In Los Angeles and parts of Orange County, twin sisters Jill and Jamie Bowers created Thank Dog! Bootcamp that teams up dog trainers with personal trainers for people of all ages and dogs of all breeds and sizes.

"I was tired of being known as the 'fat twin' and thanks to this bootcamp format, I lost 40 pounds and am working toward my ACE group fitness certification," said Jill Bowers. "Getting your dog incorporated into your daily fitness routine provides a lot of motivation. I've found that people become proud of their dogs and stick with the class. Dogs learn good manners and the bond strengthens between people and their dogs."

In this bootcamp format, the pace is quick, and the key word is motion. Dogs learn to perform doggy pushups—a series of quick sit-downs, and people learn the proper way to lift and stretch. Don't have a dog? No worries, this class features a borrow-a-dog plan.

All ages and all fitness levels are welcomed at both Leash Your Fitness and Thank Dog! Bootcamp classes.

"The goal is to work at your own pace and to gradually get better and better," said Celapino.

Added Bowers, "Our regulars include people between ages 25 and 72, and the oldest dog we had in class was a 12-year-old German Shepherd named Frasier."

Taking these fitness classes yields many benefits to both human and canine. Each time you



SEE SPOTTER

Keeping watch for signs of overexertion

Be careful to not overexert your dog during workouts. Stop the activity, and allow your dog to rest if he displays any of these signs:

- ❖ Drooping tongue.
- ❖ Rapid panting, an early sign of overheating.
- ❖ Hesitation, taking a few extra seconds before retrieving a tossed ball.
- ❖ Weight shifting, using different muscle groups to offset soreness.
- ❖ Staggered walking.
- ❖ Muscle tremors.
- ❖ Limping, check footpads for cuts and bruises and legs for sprains or muscle pulls.

At the end of the day, how can you tell if your dog is exercising too much—or too little? Here's a nifty way to gauge your dog's energy output at night when you are watching television. Take note of which scenario best fits your dog:

- ❖ A dog needing much more exercise will often get in between you and the television program in an attempt for attention.
- ❖ A bone-tired dog will flop on the floor and barely move—even during a noisy TV program.
- ❖ A dog who received adequate exercise will lightly snooze or contently chew on a bone near you.
- ❖ Your goal: strive to ensure your dog matches the final scenario.

lift, bend down, twist, turn, throw, walk, run or even skip, you're improving your digestion, melting body fat and fortifying your body against a host of medical woes. You reduce your risk for heart disease, arthritis, diabetes and other conditions, and save money on doctor and veterinary bills.

Keeping your body in motion is like putting gold in the bank. A national study by the American Heart Association reported that burning 2,000 calories a week by performing a physical activity—such as briskly walking

your dog for an hour a day for a week—could increase life expectancy by two full years.

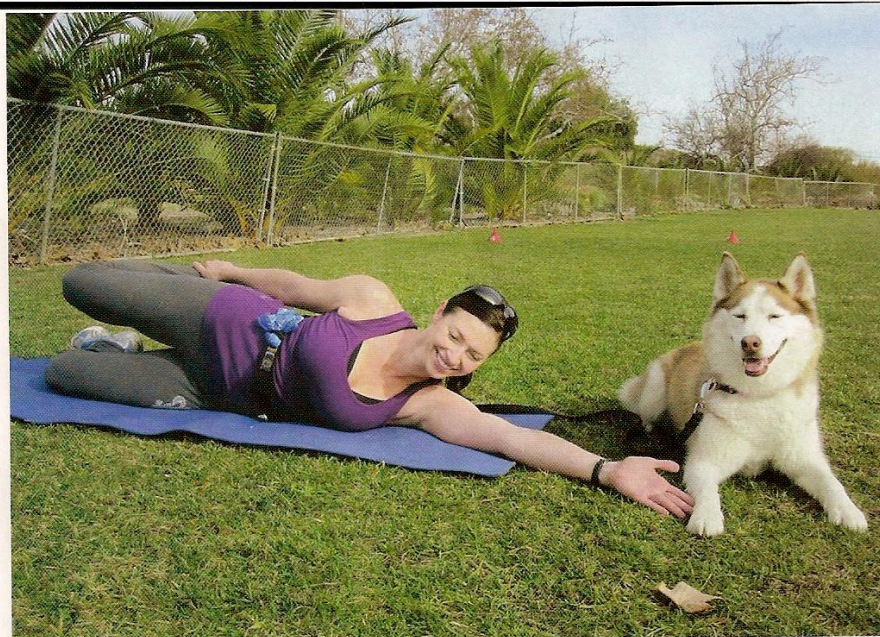
Working out with your dog lessens the chance of him turning into a furry version of Dennis the Menace. Quite often the cause behind doggy destructiveness in the home is sheer boredom. After all, a dog who doesn't receive adequate exercise will find another outlet for that pent-up energy, such as chewing on the sofa.

Until classes are available in your area, you can take the ho-hum out of boring dog walks, and spice up your workouts with your dog. Before you start, be sure to get a physical by your doctor, and have your veterinarian give your dog a complete head-to-tail checkup.

Begin workouts with a five-minute warm-up to stretch your and your dog's muscles. Using a treat for motivation, have your dog jump up on you. Then instruct your dog to get into a "play bow," with outstretched front legs, head down low and rear up in the air. If willing, have your dog do a figure eight in between and around your legs.

During walks, vary your routes and stop occasionally to practice obedience commands and fun tricks. Have your dog "Sit" or "Roll Over" or "Gimme Paw." Find a bench or other sturdy object to perform a series of planks or pushups.

Try one of these classes—or work out with your dog on your own, and together you will happily give new meaning to the expression: dog tired. 🐾



SIGN UP FOR PEOPLE-DOG CLASSES

Both programs mentioned in this article have been featured on television. To view videos of these classes and learn more, go to:

Leash Your Fitness

(619) 822-3296; www.leashyourfitness.com.

Thank Dog! Bootcamp

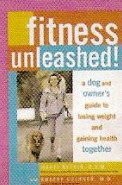
(888) 364-4256; www.thankdogbootcamp.com.



FROM TOP: Meg and Kiley strike a yoga pose; Leash Your Fitness founder Dawn Celapina demonstrates the proper lunge pose while her dog, Jack, focuses on his tennis ball; Debbie Redondo tries to reach her toes but her goofy Great Dane, Murphy, intercedes.

MUTT READS

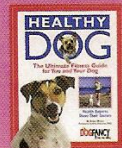
Paw through these to achieve true fitness for you and your dog.



Fitness Unleashed!

A Dog and Owner's Guide to Losing Weight and Gaining Health Together

by Marty Becker, DVM & Robert Kushner, MD



Healthy Dog

The Ultimate Fitness Guide for You and Your Dog

by Arden Moore, foreword by Dan Hamner, MD

