

Vet says owners should exercise with their dogs based on specific needs to prevent obesity

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People and their dogs both need physical activity to fight obesity, and there are many exercises that owner and pet can do together that can improve their health and their relationship, according to a Kansas State University expert.

Dr. Susan Nelson, K-State veterinarian and assistant professor of clinical sciences, said dogs, like people, reap many benefits from [exercise](#). She said there are physical and mental health advantages for the dog owner and the dog when they exercise together.

"Obesity is a big problem in pets, just as it is with people, and exercising helps keep the dog's weight down," Nelson said. "Dogs also need an outlet to relieve their energy or else they may develop destructive behavior. Your dog is going to be happier and more content if it receives adequate exercise.

"Exercising with your pet also promotes the human-animal bond," she said. "People like dogs because of their unconditional love, and dogs are going to be very pleased to have their owners do something with them."

Nelson said exercise is important, but dogs differ in the amount and types of exercise they should be doing to maintain good health. A blanket recommendation for exercise time amounts can't be given as exercise needs vary vastly between individuals, and factors such as age,

breed, weather and general health all influence the amounts of exercise your dog will need. Nelson said to consider these guidelines:

- In general, larger and working dogs have higher energy needs, and smaller/toy breeds need less exercise.
- Ideally, dogs should get out twice daily for exercise. Times may vary from 15-60 minutes, depending on your individual pet.
- Turning the dog loose in the backyard isn't enough -- [aerobic exercise](#) should be continuous with few breaks. Most dogs are content to lie in the sun and only get up for short periods of activity. If the dog has another dog it can run around with outside, that could be sufficient if they spend long periods of continuous play, but don't rely upon that in most circumstances.

Nelson said there are many generalities when it comes to exercising with dogs, but they are just generalities. For example, though many small dogs prefer lighter activities, Jack Russell terriers tend to be very high-energy pets. Here are some generalities for activities to do with your dog depending on its needs and interests:

- Medium and large dogs typically make better long-distance running partners. If your dog can run longer than you are able, you may want to consider biking while having your dog run beside you on leash. Pay careful attention to safety if you choose this option. Smaller dogs are better suited for shorter distance running or walking.
- While many dogs like catching flying discs, be careful to keep the throws low to avoid injury to joints from higher leaps.

Herding breeds, such as border collies and Australian shepherds, are dogs that perform well competitively, but there are many other pure and mixed breed dogs that perform equally well.

- Medium dogs, especially herding breeds, are good at agility activities. "That's not to say that big or small dogs can't do agility activities, but the herding breeds, overall, are at the top in these competitions," Nelson said.
- If you like playing fetch with a dog, then a retrieving breed such as a Labrador or golden retriever may be your best candidate. While retrievers are usually best at activities like fetch, many dogs enjoy playing fetch with tennis balls, racquetballs, toys or sticks. Playing fetch indoors with your small breed dog is often a viable option; you could run the risk, though, of enthusiastic, unintentional damage to the inside of your house if you try this with a larger dog.
- Swimming is a non-joint stressing exercise for dogs, just as it is for people. It is a great option during the hot summer months when heat exhaustion is a concern. Retrievers are at the top of the pack for this activity.
- Dogs also need mental exercise. Breeds such as border collies need a lot of mental stimulation to keep them happy. Activities to consider are searching for hidden items, laser light chasing or completing special tasks.

According to Nelson, health concerns to be aware of when exercising with your dog include:

- Make sure your dog is in shape before doing long or intense

workouts. If you want to do a longer distance run, you need to build your dog up gradually to the longer mileage.

- Dogs need to get acclimated to hard surfaces, whether they are going out to walk, run or go hunting with their owners. "If they have been on soft grass in the yard for an extended period of time, and then run on gravel or cement, they may tear up their pads," Nelson said. "Be mindful also in hot weather that your dog may suffer from burns to the pads from hot cement or asphalt."
- All dogs are at risk for overheating. When it's hot, the heat, especially combined with humidity, makes it easier for the dog to succumb to heat exhaustion. Be especially cautious with dogs with short noses, like bulldogs and Boston terriers, because they can't cool themselves as effectively as other dogs due to the conformation of their noses. Dark-haired and long-coated dogs also are at higher risk. If during exercise your dog starts acting woozy, gets a dark red-colored tongue or gets thick ropy saliva, you should stop immediately and get it in a shaded area. Offer water and hose it down with cool water if necessary. For more severely effected dogs, wet them down with water and then take them to a veterinarian immediately.
- Give your dog frequent water breaks while exercising, especially if it is hot out. Limit exercise times to early morning and later in the evenings, and be cognizant of daytime temperatures and humidity.
- Conversely, cold weather also poses special risks to your pet. Frostbite to the feet, nose and ears is possible along with irritation to the feet by ice melts. Do not allow your pet to drink from puddles in the street as they may be contaminated with antifreeze. Short-coated and smaller breed dogs may require a

jacket for extra warmth.

- Young dogs, particularly large breed growing puppies, shouldn't go on long runs until around 12-15 months of age. Up to that time their bones are still growing and elongating. Prolonged, pounding exercise on hard surfaces can potentially cause early damage to their joints.
- Don't feed your dog right before or right after intense exercise. This may predispose the dog's stomach to bloat or twist, especially for large breed or deep-chested dogs. A general rule of thumb is to not feed [dogs](#) an hour before or after exercising.

Source: Kansas State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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