

# If your New Year's resolution is to get fit, your dog may be your perfect training partner

January 3 2018, by Anne Carter And Emily J. Hall

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

January is the month of ambitious resolutions – and getting fit and losing weight tend to top the list. But how many people manage to maintain their exercise goals? Gyms are filled with enthusiastic people at the start of the month, but the numbers soon start to dwindle.

All is not lost, however. If you own a dog, your perfect fitness coach and motivator is right there at home with you – and, crucially, they will benefit, too.

Dogs make excellent exercise partners. But they also need your support. [Canine obesity](#) is the number one concern for vets. The health risks associated with obesity are similar for both people and [dogs](#), and overweight owners are more likely to own [overweight dogs](#).

Dog walking is a great way to start a new fitness regime and has been shown to have a positive impact on the [physical](#) and [mental](#) health of both pets and their owners. Dogs that walk less are more likely to be overweight and have [behavioural issues](#), so exercising with your dog may benefit you both in the long term.

## **Sporting season**

Winter is also the perfect season for your four legged friend to begin a new sport or training plan. Freezing weather and darkness may not appeal to you, but it could be safer for your dog to get fit in the colder months.

Dogs can struggle to exercise in the summer months as, unlike us, [they can't sweat](#). Instead, they rely largely on panting to cool down when temperatures start to increase. Unfit [dogs](#) are [more likely to overheat](#) while exercising which can lead to heatstroke, and dogs are more likely to die from heatstroke if they are [obese](#).



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Male dogs may also be more likely to develop [heatstroke](#) as they get hotter than female dogs while [exercising](#), and dogs with [dark-coloured coats](#) also appear to get hotter when [exercising](#). Consequently, winter is the ideal time to get your dog's blood pumping – especially if your pet's a slightly rotund, dark-coloured male.

So how to get going? Running with your dog is a good way to get out and about and increase activity levels. But just as you'd speak to your doctor before embarking on a new fitness phase, get advice from your vet on how much your dog can do. If your dog suffers from a breathing disorder, for example, they will be more likely to [overheat](#), and may be unsuited to more vigorous forms of exercise. Likewise, [younger dogs](#) may not be able to take part in more energetic sports and too much exercise could lead to problems, such as joint disease, in later life.



## So much choice

A [couch to 5km type programme](#), which encourages you gradually to increase your fitness level through walking and gentle running, can be perfect for both you and your canine companion – you can download an easy-to-use app onto your phone. [Parkrun](#), a free, weekly 5km run – offered in towns and cities around the world – also often allows dogs to participate.



Canicross time. Credit: Becky Harding [houndandaboutphotography.co.uk](http://houndandaboutphotography.co.uk)

For a slightly different experience, and a little more speed, [canicross](#) is

gaining popularity. Dogs are attached to their owner via a waist belt, bungee line and harness. Dogs of all shapes and sizes compete from local to international level from autumn to spring when temperatures are cool enough to reduce the risk of dogs getting too hot. Joining a local canicross club is a great way to get started and to meet like-minded people and dogs, who can offer motivation, advice and equipment.

A less muddy (and indoors in winter) sport is dog agility (think showjumping for dogs). The range of jump heights allows most breeds and abilities to participate, with both dog and handler running the course – although you get to leave the jumping to your dog.

If you and your dog are already fit and are perhaps looking for more of an adrenaline rush, then wheeled canine sports may appeal. Many canicross clubs also offer [bikejor and scooter](#) races and training where the dog is attached to and pulls a mountain bike or scooter.

In fact, there are dozens of exciting options. So if you're inspired to get off the sofa and out into the fresh air with your dog, there's no time like right now.



Bikejor racing. Credit: Becky Harding houndandaboutphotography.co.uk

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