

Exercise goes to the dogs

Created 11 Jun 2010 - 9:43am

They found that people who obtained a dog walked approximately 31 minutes more each week than they had in the past. However, dog owners who lost their dog decreased their walking by as much as 44 minutes per week.

'Clearly, this research shows that the level of physical activity a person undertakes is adversely affected by the loss of their dog but the reality is that if you have been walking your dog, there is every reason to keep walking,' says A/Prof Hayley Christian from UWA.

Dr Christian also says that taking the dog for a 30-minute walk each day will also mean that you are achieving the recommended level of physical activity sufficient for good health.

These results do not surprise health and fitness expert Michelle Bridges, who says she knows firsthand the motivation a dog provides for exercise.

'Winter is the perfect time to start a regular walking program, even if you don't have a dog. You might be able to help a friend or neighbour out by walking their dog, or just join them on their daily walk. By summer, you'll be seeing the benefits,' says Michelle.

Australia is a nation of pet lovers. It is estimated that 63% of Australian households have some type of pet, with 53% of households owning a dog or a cat.

Over many years, Australian and international research has shown that owning pets can help improve a person's mental and physical health, reduce the effects of stress, help children learn about responsibility, facilitate social interaction between people and build a sense of community.

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