

## **Benefits of Leash Walking Your Dog**

In addition to the basic needs of food and shelter, a dog needs social interaction, positive attention from its owner, exercise and mental stimulation. Many of these needs can be met by taking your dog for a walk.

Walking your dog daily provides it with attention from you and allows the bond to grow strong between you and your pet. More than anything, our pets simply want our company. Even when you remain at home during the day, much of your time is spent doing chores rather than interacting with the family pet. A walk allows you to practice obedience skills with your dog in a "fun" environment and to increase the reliability of training. Reviewing the basic obedience commands also increases the benefits of a walk because your dog is not simply ambling along, but is performing additional tasks.

One important thing to remember is to walk your dog on grass or natural surfaces. Pounding on the sidewalk or road can lead to joint problems as your pet ages.

Taking your dog for a walk provides not only physical benefits but mental stimulation through territorial investigation. Nose to the ground and alert to the sights and sounds of the neighborhood, your dog gathers information about how its territory has changed since the last walk. Is that the odor of an unknown dog or the traces of a recognized playmate or rival? Some dog owners liken the daily walk to humans reading the daily paper.

The physical benefits of walking your dog are numerous. It is best way to exercise a dog that may not move about much in your home or even in your yard. Aging pets must be kept as agile and fit as possible but may not be inclined to exercise without encouragement. Senior pets are able to keep their joints mobile and more comfortable through daily walks. Granted, they may not be as vigorous a walk as when they were younger, but walks are still important to them even at reduced levels. Even if your dog is not active in your yard, it is more active during a walk. The pleasure of your company is one of your dog's greatest motivations to exercise.

If you pass by another dog or person along the way, your dog has an opportunity to socialize. Dogs are social animals. It is in their nature to investigate unrecognized or recognized individuals. Puppies should be encouraged from a young age to appropriately greet and interact with other dogs (after the full series of vaccinations is complete) and people while on walks. These positive experiences help the puppy behave appropriately when greeting visitors to your home, or when the dog is with you anywhere else. If a dog does not have the opportunity to socialize, it will not interact appropriately with people or other dogs.

Walking your dog is one of the best ways to prevent behavioral problems. At least 2 daily walks of 20 minutes (aerobic walking) help to prevent inappropriate elimination, destructiveness and other common behavioral disorders. Do NOT walk your dog soon after a meal. This may lead to a problem called Gastric Torsion which is a serious disorder and will likely kill your pet if not recognized and treated immediately.

After meal exercise should be limited to bathroom time only, as you want your dog to be reinforced for good behavior and you may do this if you leash walk during bathroom breaks. Heavy exercise should occur only on an empty stomach. Once you have walked your dog, allow him or her to cool down over the next 20 to 30 minutes allowing only small sips of water. Once the cool down period has occurred, you may feed your dog as usual allowing at minimum one hour before any type of activity. If you want to engage in higher levels of activity, make sure at least four hours have passed after a meal before doing so.

Allowing a dog to roam freely is dangerous and gives the unsupervised dog freedom to regress to unacceptable wild behavior. We do not recommend that you ever let your dog off lead to run unless they are in a securely enclosed area. If your dog happens to escape, its life could depend on its obedience to your warnings of oncoming traffic. This is one of the main benefits of obedience training. It may save your pet's life. It is best to keep your dog on a leash regardless of the leash laws in your area. Restricting some activity cannot be unkind in view of the possible consequences.

One of the last benefits of walking is that it will stimulate the release of endorphins and serotonin in our brains and thus allow us a better sense of well being and happiness in our daily activities!