

Walking the Dog- Worth Every Step

This week I toss a bone to two of our well represented constituencies: dog owners and academics who enjoy a good study. I won't take the ink to offer too much detail as you can find the article on the pages of "The Gerontologist."

<https://academic.oup.com/gerontologist/article/57/5/930/2632039#.WmeUQxL5Yy8.email>

Here are some excerpts:

The CDC recommends that adults of all ages engage in 150 or more minutes of moderate physical activity per week. Walking is the most common form of leisure-time physical activity for adults older than 60 years, because it is a self-paced and low impact form of exercise which does not require specialized equipment, facilities, or training, and it can be done with others or alone.

[The] study focused on companion animals as an interpersonal motivator and supporter of physical activity within the behavior settings of home and neighborhood. Dog walking was associated with lower body mass index, fewer activities of daily living limitations, fewer doctor visits, and more frequent moderate and vigorous exercise. (and no surprise)The relationship with one's dog may be a positive influence on physical activity for older adults.

Individuals older than 50 years who frequently walked their dog were more likely to report having a sense of community, more likely to get at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week, and less likely to be sedentary than those who did not live with a dog .Older adults who walked their dogs regularly were significantly more likely to meet the physical activity requirements than dog non-owners 3 years later. Older adult dog owners who regularly walked their dog had greater functional ability than dog owners who did not walk their dog and dog non-owners . (Having a treadmill in the basement or knowing that there is one in the commons building alone does not improve your health.)

And here is some ammunition for future community decisions: *Retirement communities could also be encouraged to incorporate more pet-friendly policies, including dog walking trails and dog exercise areas so that their residents could access the health benefits provided by interactions with dogs, and dog walking could be easier for dog owners.*

Now dog ownership is not for everyone and not every dog-owner is able to walk their dog as often as they'd like, but there is a take away here for us all: *having a potential partner for physical activity in the home (or the neighborhood)increases the likelihood of performing a physical activity.* Now I am not suggesting we whine and threaten an accident to motivate our friends to join us for exercise. But being a persistent non-judgmental friend could help bring some of these benefits to others without the vet bills and hair on the furniture.