

HEALTH

Exercising with Your Dog Improves Dive Fitness

By Gretchen M. Ashton Aug 15, 2016

The dog days of summer are upon us. Exercising with your canine companion is not only a good way to spend time together, it can also improve your dive fitness.

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One of my favorite things about visiting a new dive shop is meeting the dive-shop dog. It seems almost every shop has adopted a local rescue or stray dog. The dog has long been a friend of divers. It's not uncommon to see Fido dressed as a diver at Halloween. Whenever I think of the dog days of summer, rather than languid heat, I imagine all the dive shop dogs I've met over the years frolicking in the water or relaxing in the shade of a palm tree.

Exercising with Your Dog

Exercising with your dog is a great way to not only improve your physical and mental fitness. Dogs are good for divers. They are loyal companions, provide comfort, and help us stay more active. Simple caring tasks of feeding, bathing, brushing, cleaning up after, and casually walking our pets is physical activity. Walking our dogs quickly or running with them means exercise for both of us.

Playing with our pets is fun, lifts our mood and keeps us active. This can mean everything from getting on the floor to pet them, to throwing a ball in the backyard, to going for a swim together. Our dogs get us outdoors more often, which also has health benefits. Remember to keep yourself and your pets dressed properly for the temperature, hot or cold, and well-hydrated.

Canine Companions Make For Healthier People

While we have ample anecdotal evidence, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) found relatively few controlled studies about the benefits of man's best friend. In response, they brought together leaders in the field of human-animal interactions to gain more insights and plan research.

Since then, according to the NIH, "some of the largest and most well-designed studies in this field suggest that four-legged friends can help to improve our cardiovascular health. One NIH-funded study looked at 421 adults who'd suffered heart attacks. A year later, scientists found that dog owners were significantly more likely to still be alive than were those who did not own dogs, regardless of the severity of the heart attack. Another study looked at 240 married couples. Those who owned a pet had lower heart rates and blood pressure, whether at rest or when undergoing stress tests. Pet owners also seemed to have milder responses to stress when they were with their pets than with a spouse or friend.

Several other studies have shown that dog owners may get more exercise and other health benefits than the rest of us. One NIH-funded investigation of more than 2,000 adults found that dog owners who regularly walked their dogs were more physically active. They were also less likely to be obese than those who didn't own or walk a dog. Another study supported by NIH followed more than 2,500 older adults, ages 71 to 82, for three years. Those who regularly walked their dogs walked faster and for longer time periods each week than others who didn't walk regularly. Older dog walkers also had greater mobility inside their homes than others in the study."

Studies also demonstrated that walking a dog helps us stay more socially connected, leading to more conversations with others. In short, exercising with your dog not only improves your dive fitness, but your mental health as well. So grab a leash and get out there — exercising with your dog is good for both of you.



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20 posts

Gretchen brings her passion for diving and fitness together as the founder of ScubaFit® the only fitness for diving certification which is also approved by both diving and fitness agencies. She is an advanced diver, NBF and ISSA Elite Personal Trainer, Specialist in Fitness Therapy and Nutrition, an AAU World Champion Hall-of-Fame athlete, and a mentor for Water Women, Inc. She shares her message with divers by visiting dive clubs, presenting at scuba shows, as a radio guest, as the publisher of FitDiver® Magazine, and with FitDiver® mobile apps. She widely published with more than 125 articles for diving publications and blogs. For more information or to contact Gretchen, visit www.scubafit.com.

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