



PetsMatter

Learning how to take better care of your pets.



Walk Your Way to Health With Your Best Friend

By Jen Reeder

Slim your dog and shape yourself up in the New Year.

When Charley Stone took her four-year-old Welsh corgi, Bernice, for a routine checkup last year, her veterinarian, Greg McDonald, DVM, of McDonald Animal Hospital in Santa Barbara, Calif., said that Bernice was overweight and needed to lose about eight pounds to get healthy. So Stone and Bernice began walking together five times a week up a hill near their home in southern California for 25 to 30 minutes.

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Certain breeds of dogs are more prone to excess weight gain, including cocker spaniels, Labrador retrievers, dalmatians, dachshunds, rottweilers, golden retrievers, Shetland sheepdogs, and mixed breeds. Older dogs of any breed also run a higher risk of being overweight or obese.

"Within two or three months, we both lost five pounds! And now we do two hills in 30 minutes," Stone says.

She's happy to have noticed a marked change in Bernice's behavior since she lost the excess weight.



"She was a couch potato — we couldn't get her to play. Now she's more playful and gets so excited when I put her collar on, because she knows we're going on a walk."

And working out together made it easier for Stone to stick to an exercise regimen and lose weight herself.

"It's like having an exercise buddy — it's so much fun!"

New Year's Eve is just around the corner, and losing weight is one of the most common resolutions Americans make — and break — each year. But resolving to get in shape with your dog can help you lose weight *and* extend the life span of your pet.

Studies have shown that the extra pounds can have serious health implications, putting dogs at risk for osteoarthritis and respiratory problems, as well as diabetes mellitus, hypothyroidism, pancreatitis, ruptured cruciate ligament and neoplasia, which results in tumors. Moreover, the lives of obese dogs are considerably shorter.

Fortunately, health problems related to being overweight or obese are preventable. Because the key to weight loss is to burn more calories than are consumed, controlling your dogs' diets and making sure that they exercise can help them lead longer, healthier lives.

A 2008 study by the Association for Pet Obesity and Prevention showed that more than 44% of dogs in America are considered overweight — about 33 million.

Why not resolve to get your dog in shape in 2010? You can start by signing the pledge and tracking treats on [this printable handout](#). To help you keep your resolution, AAHA's booklet *Dogs Lose Lbs! You Win!* is filled with helpful tips to make it easy to slim down your dog and shape up yourself in the New Year. To order your copy, visit aahanet.org. After all, the healthier you and your dog are, the more time you'll have to enjoy together.

Jen Reeder writes about pet health topics from her home office in Denver.



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