

How Your Four-Legged Friend Can Mend A Broken Heart

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It's been said that a pet can heal a broken heart. Their unconditional love, loyal companionship and little quirks make it difficult to have a bad mood. If you're a dog owner, you might find yourself being more active, whether it's getting up and down every few minutes to let your indecisive dog in and out, throwing a ball around or going out for walks. It may not seem like much, but your dog spells good news for your heart health.

Studies from Mayo Clinic and the American Heart Association found that dog owners had better health scores than other pet owners and people who did not own a pet at all. This is because people who owned pets, especially dogs, were more physically active, had a better diet and had an ideal blood sugar level, compared to people who do not.

According to the CDC, heart disease accounts for a quarter of all deaths in America each year and leads the cause of death for men. People who are most vulnerable to bad heart health are those with:

- *Diabetes*
- *Obesity*
- *An unhealthy diet*
- *Physical inactivity*
- *Excessive alcohol use*

Inactivity has long been a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease. To make matters worse, the average American worker will sit up to nine hours per day, which accounts for 89 percent of their work. With seemingly endless energy, dogs are always raring to go on new adventures, expecting their owners to match their energy and forcing them off the couch. You may think you're only walking them once or twice per day, or throwing a ball around for only 10 minutes, but steps add up to miles. Minutes turn to hours. The time and energy you spend tending to your dog ultimately lead to a healthier life.

Walking everyday may not seem like it could make much of a difference, but it can make maintaining a healthy weight easier; prevent or manage heart conditions, type II diabetes and blood pressure; build muscle and strengthen bones; improve balance and coordination; and even improve your mood. By walking your dog, you are both reducing your risk to heart disease and improving your health overall.

Not only is 30 to 60 minutes of daily activity the exact amount doctors recommend for patients who want to decrease their risk, it is also around the same amount of time most dog owners spend walking their pooch every day.

Research also confirms what any dog lover already knows: Dogs have a healing essence about them. Animals are often brought in to hospitals to comfort patients and are known to significantly reduce stress, which is a contributor to high blood pressure and other cardiovascular conditions. Let's also not forget the social benefits: Dog owners lead a more social life than others. When dogs meet, there's a pretty good chance they'll become fast friends. The study showed that dog owners were likely more social than people who don't own dogs, likely because they're chatting it up with the owner of their dog's new friend.

There are many reasons to love dogs, so owning one being linked to good cardiovascular health is just the icing on the cake...that you will work off by walking your dog! If you've ever needed that extra push to take cardiovascular disease by the leash, remember to start by exercising with your four-legged friend.

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