

PhysicallyFIT

MAKING EXERCISE FUN

FOR YOU AND YOUR PET!

By Dr. Leah Garlan

The benefits of exercising have been documented for years, but starting a program can be challenging at times. A great way to begin exercising is to have a goal in mind. Whether you are beginning for yourself or your pet, you will be more successful with a plan and support team to get you started.

Obesity in dogs can be a serious medical problem. Overweight dogs are more at risk in surgery, more prone to injury, and have more stress on their heart, lungs, liver, kidneys and joints. Any owner can control his pet's weight by realizing that food is not a substitute for attention, even when they give you the puppy dog eyes, it doesn't mean they need a treat!

TOP TEN WAYS TO GET THE WEIGHT OFF YOUR 4 LEGGED FRIENDS...

Have your dog evaluated by your vet to rule out any health conditions that may cause weight gain such as thyroid problems or diabetes. Also, if the dog has arthritic joints, supplements or alternative treatments such as chiropractic, acupuncture or massage may help them feel better.

Start slowly. Just like a person you need to gradually introduce an exercise program.

Make a schedule and stick to it. Taking your dog for a walk at least 3-4 times a week will greatly benefit your pet.

Cut back on the amount of treats you give your dog each day and avoid table food!

Evaluate your pet's food. The top three ingredients are the most important. There are also low calorie or low activity foods that help with weight loss.



5 Feed 5 consistent times each day and avoid free access to the food bowl.

4 Go on play dates with other dogs or visit your local pet friendly park or hiking trails.

3 Swimming is the single best form of exercise for dogs especially if they are overweight. It's kind to arthritic joints and has therapeutic benefits as well.

2 Agility and Frisbee are great sports that dogs love. Check with your local dog club or publications for locations.

1 Make it fun! There is nothing better than enjoying the time you spend with your pet.

Prior to starting an exercise program, your dog should be evaluated by your veterinarian. I advise owners to closely monitor changes and adjust their exercise program if necessary. Weight in dogs usually comes off slowly, but even losing 3-5 pounds can make a big difference depending on the size and breed of the dog. Certain breeds, for example Labradors or German Shepherds, are known for hip problems and Dachshunds and Basset Hounds are prone to back problems. It is important to know your breed and the potential problems that may be prevalent. It is more difficult to take the weight off once your dog becomes overweight or obese. Your dog will live a better quality of life if you start good habits at a young age.

Prevention and instilling good habits is always better than waiting for a problem to arise.



Dr. J. Leah Garlan is a licensed chiropractor specializing in chiropractic care for animals. She is certified by the American Veterinary Chiropractic Association (AVCA) and practices in Bucks County at the Silverdale Wellness Center. For more information or to contact Dr. Garlan please visit www.drleahgarlan.com.