

MAN'S BEST WORKOUT PARTNER?

If you struggle to lose weight—get a dog. A new study shows people with pets are more likely to stick to their weight loss programs. BY CHARU SURI

A 12-month study conducted by Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago, Illinois, called People and Pets Exercising Together (P-PET), observed 145 overweight people and dogs. The results indicate that people who exercise with their furry companions are more successful at losing weight than those who exercise alone. Jennifer Jellison, DVM, practicing veterinarian at Minerva Park Veterinary Clinic in Columbus, Ohio, says part of the study's success is attributable to the fact that dogs are more forgiving and therefore make better exercise partners than people. "Dogs love you whether you exercise or not," she says. "When fighting something as serious as obesity, people are psychologically ridden with guilt. Exercising with pets makes people feel good about themselves."

The study's results were announced last November at the North American Association for the Study of Obesity's Annual Scientific Meeting. Dogs and their owners were recommended to exercise for at least 30 minutes, three days a week. The group that exercised with dogs stuck to their exercise plan longer than those who exercised and dieted alone.

Kathleen O'Dirk, a P-PET participant from Chicago, walked three miles a day as part of her program, and dropped two dress-sizes in six months. Her dog Winston, a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, lost seven pounds in four months. "I have really redistributed my weight," she says. "Winston and I spend a lot more time together since the study. When you have a pet that needs you and is helping you as well, it's a very special relationship."

O'Dirk was inspired to do more than what was required. She joined the YMCA and enrolled in "Women on Weights" classes, and does yoga to improve her flexibility. Her weight has been stable and the exercise has given her increased energy.

