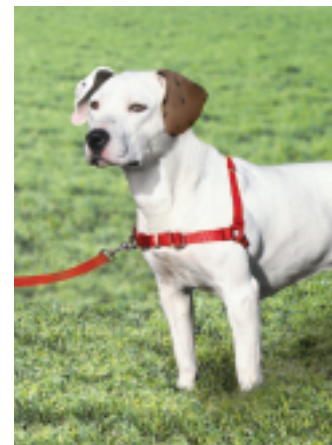


Walking your dog for weight loss



When you combine exercise with proper diet and lifestyle, you extend the years you'll have to hug and love and snuggle with your four-legged friend. Walk with your dog every day, and you'll enhance the bond you share—and know you're doing both yourself and your pet a world of good. Of course, make sure your veterinarian examines your dog before undertaking a weight loss exercise program with your portly friend.

Get the right equipment

- ✓ Forget the leash and collar. Collars can compress the trachea (windpipe) when pulled, causing difficulty breathing or even injury. Especially dangerous are choke collars or constricting collars of any design. **A head halter or walking harness is your safest choice.** Look for wide, soft, padded straps and breathable materials. I prefer retractable leashes no longer than 12 feet—you'll be keeping your canine companion close to keep up a steady pace. Save the long leash for those casual strolls around the neighborhood when Daisy wants to catch up on her latest pee-mail.
- ✓ For winter walks, **protective booties** may be required if you live in a cold climate.
- ✓ If it's warm (above 80 to 85 F for most dogs) or if you'll be walking longer than 30 minutes, carry water. There are many styles of **portable water bottles** available for dogs on the move.

Set the right pace

- ✓ Few dogs will naturally walk at a pace that generates the elevated heart rates needed for sustained aerobic activity. Walking for weight loss is very different than walking for pleasure. Make your objective to move briskly on the "out" leg of your walk, and then let your dog smell the roses on the "back" leg. If you start slowly, allowing your pet to sniff everything he sees, you may have a challenge getting him to speed up when you're ready.
- ✓ Draw your dog close on his leash, generally within two to four feet on the side away from the street, and set off at a pace you feel comfortable sustaining. It should feel brisk and you should break a light sweat. The key is to keep it up! Don't look down when your pooch inevitably wants to stop and smell something or mark a hydrant. Continue looking straight ahead, tighten the leash (don't jerk), and give a command such as "No stop," "Come," or "Here." It's important for your dog to understand that you have places to go and that this is different from your usual lolly-gagging affair. Head halters are a great way to train dogs to heel during a brisk walk and pay attention.
- ✓ If your pet sits or refuses to walk, you may have to return home, crate him or put him in a quiet space without your attention, and try again another time. I have yet to encounter a dog that didn't take readily to brisk walking.

Set time goals

- ✓ For most overweight or obese dogs with normal heart and lung function, normal blood pressure, and no other pre-existing medical conditions, I recommend starting with 30-minute walks five times a week. Here's a sample schedule:

Week 1	30 minutes total	10 minutes brisk followed by 20 minutes casual pace
Week 2	30 minutes total	15 minutes brisk followed by 15 minutes casual pace
Week 3	30 minutes total	20 minutes brisk followed by 10 minutes casual pace
Week 4	35-40 minutes total	30 minutes brisk followed by 5-10 minutes casual pace
Week 5+	35-60 minutes total	Two 20- to 30-minute walks per day: 15-25 minutes brisk followed by 5 minutes casual pace

If you can, walk 30 minutes a day seven days a week.

Check weight monthly

- ✓ Have your dog weighed by your veterinarian monthly until he or she reaches the right weight. Also, have the clinic staff inspect the dog's pads for any injuries or problems and check that the nails are short and healthy. After your pooch hits the desired weight, reweigh every three months.