

Dogs help owners remain active year-round

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(Medical Xpress) -- Researchers surveyed 428 Calgarians identified through random sampling, and 115 of these participants indicated owning dogs. Two surveys were completed by all of 428 participants, one in the winter and one in the summer season. In both seasons, dog-owners reported more walking for recreation in their neighbourhoods than did non-owners. These results appear in the May 4th edition of *BMC Public Health*.

“We are reporting, for the first time, quantitative evidence showing that [dog-owners](#) tend to go against the trend of marked declines in [physical activity](#) during winter. The winter is quite harsh in Calgary yet dog-walkers tend to remain active in their neighborhoods despite snow, ice, cold, and reduced daylight,” says Melanie Rock faculty member in the Faculties of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine at the U of C, and a member of the Calgary Institute for Population and [Public Health](#) (CIPPH).

“Dog- walking in the neighborhood can also help non-owners. We know that seeing others about and active encourages people to get out and walk. Further, visibility of neighbours makes people feel safer in their communities.”

Prabh Lail, a medical student as well as a master’s student in population and public health at the U of C, is the lead author on the paper. “Physical activity is something many people struggle with, including myself,” she says. “Many people who own dogs don’t recognize dog-walking as a source of exercise, yet it’s a great strategy for incorporating physical

activity into daily routines. Regular activity protects physical as well as mental health.”

Patricia Cameron is executive director of the Calgary Humane Society and as a dog-owner herself, she knows she is keeping active thanks to her pets. “Winters last a long time and we need to be active. My two dogs help me get out in the cold weather. I’m not stuck inside for 3 weeks during a cold snap, the way I was before I adopted my dogs. Their enthusiasm for walks gets me going every day, rain or shine, cold or warm.”

While previous studies have associated pets with multiple health benefits, the UofC researchers caution that owning a dog is not feasible or affordable for everyone. Researchers recommend Calgarians offer to walk a dog belonging to a friend or neighbor, or join the ranks of volunteers who walk [dogs](#) awaiting adoption at the Calgary Humane Society.

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Provided by University of Calgary

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