

To make new friends, walk the dog

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Dog-walking is one of the top five ways to meet new people, according to research at The University of Western Australia.

UWA's Associate Professor Lisa Wood is lead author of a study in which 2700 adults in Perth and three US cities were surveyed about the role pets play in improving [social relationships](#) and connecting communities.

Associate Professor Wood and Assistant Professor Hayley Christian presented the research in Chicago last week at the triennial conference of the International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organisations.

"We found that more pet owners than non-pet owners got to know new people since moving to their current [neighbourhood](#)," Associate Professor Wood said. "And of the [pet owners](#) who had got to know people in their neighbourhood because of their pet, more than half considered one or more of the people they met to be friends."

The research also looked more specifically at the benefits of dog-walking, which included an increase in physical activity and an improvement in people's perceptions of neighbourhood safety.

"The findings provide further evidence of the personal and collective benefits of dog-walking," said UWA's Assistant Professor Hayley Christian, who was one of the study co-authors.

Not only can dog-walking be an important strategy for increasing people's [physical activity](#) - with 30 minutes per day of [brisk walking](#) being the commonly accepted guideline for [good health](#) - but people who walked their dog also had a stronger sense of community and a more positive perception of how safe their neighbourhood was for walking, Assistant Professor Christian said.

The research was supported by funding from pet food company WALTHAM and confectionary firm Mars, and is the first international/cross-country study to look at the broader ripple effect of pets in the community.

Provided by University of Western Australia

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