

Can dogs help kids lose weight?

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The fight against childhood obesity may have new allies: pets and veterinarians.

"There are many facets to [childhood obesity](#) that can make it difficult for kids to adhere to healthy habits and individualized weight loss plans," said Deborah Linder, D.V.M., a research assistant professor and the head of the Tufts Obesity Clinic for Animals at Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University. "Pets may be able to offer motivation and unconditional support that will help children stay committed to their weight reduction goals."

Linder has been awarded funding from the National Institutes of Health to research whether companion animals have the ability to help children stick with weight loss interventions. The project will test the hypothesis that incorporating pet dogs into a comprehensive behavioral weight reduction intervention will have physical and psychosocial benefits in overweight and obese children.

The weight management program will emphasize similarities between pet and child-healthy lifestyles. For example, fruits and vegetables that are healthy and safe to eat for both pets and children will be recommended. Additionally, the program will incorporate physical activity that can be done with a pet such as agility, walking and swimming.

Advisors to the research project are Lisa Freeman, D.V.M., Ph.D., a board-certified veterinary nutritionist and Cummings School faculty

member, and Miriam E. Nelson, Ph.D., a professor at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University. The project is supported by the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences, National Institutes of Health, Award Number KL2TR001063.

Linder has been named a 2014 KL2 Career Development Program scholar through an initiative of the Tufts Clinical and Translational Science Institute (Tufts CTSI) that enables highly-qualified junior faculty to conduct multidisciplinary clinical and patient-oriented research. This federally funded program is specifically designed to further the goals of Tufts CTSI, which include fostering collaborative research across Tufts-affiliated hospitals and campuses and across disciplines.

"Tufts CTSI is committed to supporting innovative research, and One Health—the interdisciplinary collaboration to improve the health of humans, animals, and the environment—is one of our focus areas," said Karen M. Freund, M.D., MSPH, Tufts CTSI associate director for research collaboration and head of Tufts CTSI's KL2 Program. "We look forward to Dr. Linder's study, and to her participation in our program."

"The collaboration between Cummings School and the Friedman School of Nutrition makes us uniquely equipped to develop a [program](#) that addresses the issue of childhood obesity from a One Health perspective," said Nicholas Frank, D.V.M, Ph.D., DACVIM, professor and chair of the Department of Clinical Sciences at Cummings School. "Our university's dedicated researchers are interested in bridging the gap between human and veterinary public health."

Provided by Tufts University

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