

Researchers find walking a dog to be especially good behavior for nursing students

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Auburn researchers are encouraging nursing students to be proactive about their physical health, which could mean simply walking a dog on a regular basis.

Credit: Auburn University at Montgomery

Auburn University researchers recommend nursing students take a dog for a walk to improve the students' own health and wellness.

Morgan Yordy, an assistant professor in the School of Nursing, and Emily Graff, an assistant professor in the Department of Pathobiology in the College of Veterinary Medicine, collaborated on a review of health concerns associated with a [sedentary lifestyle](#), the benefits of walking and the value of dog-walking programs as a means of addressing the health of nursing students.

Unhealthy lifestyles and obesity are common problems among Americans. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention finds that adults need at least 150 minutes of moderate to intense aerobic activity each week to maintain health, and yet most do not meet this recommendation, putting them at risk for compromised health.

Nurses and nursing students are not exempt from the issue. More than 50 percent of nurses are estimated to be overweight or obese.

Nursing students are taught about health promotion in class, but many do not apply them to themselves. The 2016 National College Health Assessment II found only 20 percent of nursing students were meeting the recommended physical activity guidelines.

Yordy and Graff found some research to suggest current curricular demands put nursing students at risk of an unhealthy lifestyle, which may continue throughout their career.

"There is a critical need to carefully evaluate and develop new means to increase and sustain lifestyle changes that promote adequate physical activity for nursing students in hopes that these lifestyle changes will continue after graduation," they wrote.

Yordy and Graff's review was recently presented at the 2019 National Consortium for Building Healthy Academic Communities Summit and published in the latest issue of Building Healthy Academic Communities

Journal.

The pair assert that several studies support the notion that increased physical activity—even low to moderate activity—is crucial in preventing and managing many diseases, including [non-alcoholic fatty liver disease](#), diabetes, renal disease and Alzheimer's disease.

While research suggests [dog owners](#) are more physically active, which is beneficial to dog and owner, Yordy and Graff considered using animal-assisted therapy programs on campuses as a way of helping nursing students address their wellbeing.

Yordy directs the animal-assisted therapy [program](#) at Auburn's School of Nursing with Associate Clinical Professor Stuart Pope.

"Faculty could influence health promotion by developing evidence-based health initiatives such as dog walking programs that are sustainable and attainable within the School of Nursing," she explained. "This includes incorporating student dog walking initiatives with animal-assisted therapy programs."

Yordy and Graff said further research would be needed to empirically evaluate the effectiveness of dog walking on [student](#) and dog [health](#), with a goal to improve and better develop programs for the future.

Provided by Auburn University at Montgomery

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