



Rhodes and his dog, Sydney.

Demanding doggies provide health benefits

by Patty Pitts

Like most dog owners, University of Victoria exercise psychologist Dr. Ryan Rhodes can't resist those pleading doggy looks from his golden retriever, Sydney, when she wants to go walkies. Rhodes, who studies the motivation behind exercise and activity, wondered if other dog owners responded in a similar fashion and if there were benefits from being at the other end of a leash.

Physical education master's student Shane Brown had similar thoughts when walking his adopted mutt, Charlie. Teaming up with Rhodes for a directed study project, the pair did a random survey of 177 men and 174 women between the age of 20 and 80 in Greater Victoria to determine if dog owners are more motivated to get out and if they benefit from leash time with their pooch.

Their co-authored study, published in the February edition of the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, concludes that dog ownership nearly doubles the amount of time spent taking healthy walks.

"There's this extra dog obligation that helps get people up and out for their exercise," says Brown. Other than walking, dog owners in the study actually got less overall exercise

than people without dogs, suggesting that when dog owners go for walks, they do it partly because they choose to be active with their pets.

The study determined that the 70 dog owners walked an average of 300 minutes a week compared to 168 minutes a week for the others.

Neither the sex of the owner nor the size of the dog made a difference; men and women who owned dogs both participated in increased amounts of moderate exercise compared with those who had no dog.

However, not all dog owners feel compelled to get off the couch just because Fido is sending them "walk me" looks. "About 25 per cent of the dog owners we surveyed did not walk their dogs," says Rhodes. "We want to do further study to determine whether the people who walk their dogs have a predisposition to walking, or whether it's the dog that prompts the activity."

Despite the findings, Brown said he's certainly not recommending people get a dog just to help them get exercise. "We're saying that for those of us who have dogs, or those who are thinking of getting a dog, this is an added benefit."

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