

Dogs: A Woman's Best Friend



NEWS & REVIEWS

Active, playful canines are an untold secret of maintaining health during pregnancy

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Dogs have often been hailed as man's best friend. Their need for routine exercise, coupled with their unparalleled loyalty, can do wonders for owners' physical and mental health. So who's to say they can't be woman's best friend, too?

A [recent study](#) from the University of Liverpool revealed that pregnant women who own dogs are more physically active than those who don't. Expectant mothers can benefit from exercising for a minimum of 30 minutes per day, and dog owners are significantly more likely to get that exercise in. There's more of a push to get outside when Fido is waiting at the back door.

Thus, women with dogs are more likely to stay in shape and suffer fewer pregnancy-related complications. They may also shed the pounds more easily after a baby's arrival. The advantages also extend to little ones: Various studies, including

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[one published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*](#), find that kids with pets have fewer allergies.

This doesn't necessarily mean it's time to rush out and adopt a dog: Bringing one into your home is a big adjustment, especially if you have a child on the way. Try "borrowing" a friend's pup for a few days per week during your pregnancy. Either way, keep these tips in mind, especially for the summer months.

Gear dog training toward postpartum scenarios. Push a doll in a stroller while walking your dog on a leash, or teach him to lie quietly, perhaps with a chew toy, while you "feed" the doll. If your dog is already trained, consider agility classes or canine nose work (low-impact games and activities that revolve around the animal's powerful sense of smell). These techniques help teach patience when your baby needs

immediate attention and prevent your dog from colliding with the stroller.

Run, walk, hike, swim, and dance. Choose a stroller designed for running or hiking. During walks or runs in off-leash areas, let your furry friend enjoy a carefree run while you move at your own pace. Otherwise, keep your pet nearby on a nylon, non-retractable leash, which allows for the greatest control.

Stay hydrated. Whether pregnant or postpartum, drink plenty of water — especially if you're breastfeeding. Your dog needs plenty of water as well, so bring enough for both of you. Keep an eye on the temperature to avoid overheating.

Sources: Pia Silvani, co-author, Raising Puppies & Kids Together: A Guide for Parents; Erika Mathews, vice president of development, St. Hubert's Animal Welfare Center,

Madison, NJ

Sarah Zobel writes profiles and features primarily on health and wellness and parenting for a variety of publications and websites. Her two sons and dog make sure she gets plenty of exercise.