

DOG OWNERSHIP COULD INCREASE LIFESPAN

Dogs could be a man's best friend

By Richard Hanners

Blue Mountain Eagle

According to a Swedish study published Nov. 17 in the journal *Scientific Reports*, owning a dog could lengthen lifespans. Physical exercise, social interaction and immunity are the benefits from dog ownership believed to lessen the risks of death, the study's authors said.

Persons living alone are believed to be at higher risk of cardiovascular disease and death than people living in multi-person households, according to Mwenya Mubanga, a Ph.D. candidate at Uppsala University and one of the study's authors. The study looked at more than 3.4 million Swedish individuals between 40 and 80 years old over a 12-year period.

For people living alone, owning a dog can decrease the risk of death by 33 percent and the risk of cardiovascular-related death by 36 percent. Chances of a heart attack were found to be 11 percent lower than for people living alone without a dog.

Owners of hunting breeds, such as terriers, retrievers and scent hounds, were

most protected from cardiovascular disease and death, according to the study.

Tove Fall, the study's senior author, noted that dog owners in general have a higher level of physical activity, including taking dogs out for a walk during adverse weather.

"When it's dark and gray here in Sweden or rainy, the only people you see outdoors are people with dogs," Falls told the PBS News Hour.

But the findings also suggest increased social well-being and immune system development could explain why dog ownership offers protection against cardiovascular disease and death. The dirt dogs bring into homes and their licking behavior could impact a person's microbiome and improve their health, it was suggested.

Another study, "All Creatures Great and Small," recently published in the *British Medical Journal*, looked at 9,000 people with an average age of 67 and did not determine that pet ownership made any difference to the aging process. The study did, however, find that walking a dog could help with weight and cardiovascular problems.

13 ways to exercise with your dog

These ideas from health.com provide novel ways to work out with your four-legged friend:

- **Running:** Short or long, rain or shine, but be careful in heat and humidity because dogs don't sweat like humans.
- **Active fetch:** While your dog is chasing the ball, consider some exercise of your own like crunches, lunges and squats.
- **Stair running:** A good way to strengthen your quads, hamstrings and glutes.
- **Charity races:** Dogs make the perfect training buddy, so consider a dog-friendly race.
- **Soccer:** Herding breeds love soccer, and balls resistant to sharp teeth are available.
- **Dog yoga:** According to some, dogs are a natural for yoga, but it's mostly about the pet-human bond.
- **Stand-up paddleboarding:** Dogs have no trouble balancing on the nose of a paddleboard.
- **Kayaking:** Smaller breeds will ride the bow of a sit-on-top kayak, while larger breeds stick closer to the middle.
- **Cycling:** If your dog has too much energy, take her biking. This will also help with behavioral issues.
- **Rollerblading:** Recommended for expert skaters and in an area free from vehicular traffic.
- **Dog-friendly boot camp:** While you undergo strength, balance and cardio training, your dog practices obedience drills.
- **Snow sports:** Most dogs enjoy the snow, so why not take them snowshoeing or cross-country skiing?
- **Borrow a dog:** If you don't have a dog, call a local animal shelter and volunteer to take dogs out for walks and runs.



The Eagle/Sean Hart

Dog owners may live longer, according to a recent study.