



Walk A Hound Lose A Pound & Stay Fit for Seniors

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INTRODUCTION

The rising rate of obesity in older adults is linked with the national problem of limited physical activity, resulting in chronic illness.

Dog walking may improve long-term physical activity by improving readiness and physical function.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- To what extent do older adults in a dog walking group have better physical function, physical activity, and weight loss than those in a human companion walking group or a no-treatment control group?
- What are the participants' perceptions of the walking program (dog or human companion)?

DESIGN & PARTICIPANTS

- Three-group, repeated measures design
- Adults over the age of 65
- Health care provider gave assent
- Fitted with walking shoes
- 12-week / 5 days per week walking program

Three retirement facilities served as recruitment sites for:

- Shelter Dog Companion (SDC) walking group came to the shelter to walk (matched with dog for walking ability).
- Human Companion (HC) walking group walked around their facility.
- No-treatment control group maintained usual activity.

DATA ANALYSIS

- Wilcoxon Signed Rank Sum test using a 0.05 level of determining significance of findings.

This study was made possible by:



1, 2, 3 Shelter Dog Companion Walking Group



4 Weekly data collection for the Human Companion walking group



6, 7, 8 Human Companion Walking Group



5 Weekly data collection for the Shelter Dog Companion walking group



SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

Variable		Shelter Dog Companion Walking Group N=12	Human Companion Walking Group N=23	Control N=19
Age (years)	Range Mean	74 - 87 82	67 - 97 86	78 - 92 86
Gender	Males Females	3 9	6 17	5 14
Race	Caucasian African Am. Native Am.	10 1 1	23 0 0	16 0 3
Marital Status	Married Widowed Divorced Never Married	2 9 1 0	10 12 0 1	6 11 0 2
Education	No High School High School Some College Bachelor's Degree Graduate Work	1 1 3 2 5	2 2 7 5 7	0 8 7 3 1
Number of Children	None One -Four Five and more	0 11 1	3 19 1	3 14 2
Pet ownership	Pet owner Non pet owner	3 9	2 21	2 17

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FINDINGS

Variable		Shelter Dog Companion Walking Group N=12	Human Companion Walking Group N=23	Control N=19
Physical Activity Stage of Change PRE	Range Mean	2 - 6 3.67	1 - 7 3.61	1 - 8 3.74
Physical Activity Stage of Change POST 12 weeks	Range Mean	2 - 8 5.25	1 - 8 5.09	1 - 8 4.0
6 minute walk (yards) PRE	Range Mean	153 - 420 279.3	103 - 439 273.1	141 - 383 239.5
6 minute walk (yards) 6 weeks	Range Mean	218 - 497 369	174 - 499 282	135 - 363 258
6 minute walk (yards) 12 weeks	Range Mean Increase	212 - 567 356.4 =28% p=0.012	116 - 437 283.9 =4% p=0.32	65 - 383 253 =6% P=0.18

Physical Activity Stage of Change – Higher scores mean greater readiness to exercise
Level 4: I'm doing vigorous exercise less than 3 times per week or moderate exercise less than 5 times per week.
Level 5: I've been doing 30 minutes a day of moderate exercise 5 or more days per week for the last 1-5 months.

OVERALL FINDINGS

- SDC walking group had significantly improved walking speed.
- Both walking groups became competitive with their walking times & distances.
- SDC group expressed an affinity for & a bond with the shelter dogs that they walked.
- Given the added challenge of walking a dog on a lead, SDC group believed that their balance & walking confidence improved.
- HC group sometimes discouraged others from walking.
- No significant differences in weight over time.

PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

General Comments:

- "I have benefited from this program and will continue to walk several times each week, having taken part and reporting to someone gave me some discipline for a good habit."
- "I would get up ready to go. I would wonder which dog I would have. The thing that was the hardest was the extreme heat. All the assistants were very good and I enjoyed all of them."

The Best Part:

- "The exercise itself. My physical energy has improved. My legs have been strengthened and I think I just feel better. My enthusiasm for exercise has been increased."
- "Getting to walk with the dogs."
- "Helped me to change my thinking about dogs."

The Worst Part:

- "The heat and humidity and getting up to walk--- I like to sleep in!"
- "Having a different dog everyday as you could not get adapted to your dog."
- "Cancelled on because of weather. "
- "I truly can not think of a worst part."