So what can you do besides change your dog’s diet to help your dog lose weight? Just like with humans, exercise can help. Here are five fun and easy ways to exercise with your pup! These can be tailored and adjusted depending on your dog’s fitness level.

1. **BIKING**
   If you can ride a bike and have a proper bike side attachment (like the BICE WalkyDog, pictured at right; walky.co.uk) securely connected to a harness, you can bicycle with nearly any dog. You can bicycle slowly, at a moderate pace or even enjoy short bursts of speed safely with your dog.

   This is a cool-weather activity, so think autumn and winter. Remember that dogs don’t sweat like humans. They only have two sets of sweat glands, plus their thermoregulation is affected in temperatures over 60 degrees Fahrenheit doing cardiovascular exercises, much like bicycling.

   When starting out bicycling with your dog, keep the distance short, 1 to 3 miles, until you and your teammate work up (slowly) to 100 accumulated miles, then you can increase the amount of distance you do together. Always have water for your dog, take breaks, have fun. Dirt and grass trails are preferred, extended duration on pavement is not. In a short time, you and your dog could either be enjoying a nice day out bicycling and stopping at fun places or do a quick 3 miles in 30 minutes.

   **Things to note:** Biking with puppies under 9 months of age is not advised at all. For young dogs, do only short and slow outings until they are over 18 months of age. Also, go only as fast as the slowest dog, including overweight and elderly dogs. They can still come bicycling with us, just with plenty of breaks at a slow pace, while doing short distances. Ensure that the return trip home is as fun as heading out on a bicycle adventure.

   **WHAT YOU’LL NEED**
   1. water
   2. harness and leash
   3. dog personal flotation device
   4. first-aid kit
   5. take breaks and enjoy the time together

2. **SWIMMING**
   Swimming is great for all dogs, as it is low-impact, full-body exercise. Dogs will need a [personal flotation device](https://www.google.com) depending on their age (very young or old), the environment in which they are swimming (where it is deep or has a current) or exposed to water for extended durations (where they will get tired, like a day on the water with family). Swimming can be done in any safe body of water that is clean, like swimming pools, rivers, bays, lakes and calm ocean waters. There are also water treadmills at canine hydrotherapy businesses that have exercise programs for dogs.
Paul J. Kearney of PawesomeDogs.com is a professional dog trainer who has been helping dogs learn without the use of pain, fear, coercion or corrections for over 25 years. He and his canine teammates engage in a variety of sports from mushing to paddleboarding, working with their physiology, not against it. A life with and for dogs.

**Sniffaris**

Sniffaris are walks where your dog picks where to go — only, of course, if the environment and direction he chooses are safe. Like the name suggests, the idea is to stop and smell everything and anything that is safe to engage with. When I’m not walking with dogs from point A to point B, I’m allowing them to engage with safe things to smell. During sniffaris, I time them. After 30 or 45 minutes, I’ll start guiding us back toward our starting point. Most people are amazed at how a Sniffari will tire out their dogs. Being allowed to gather scent is a great thalamus workout (that’s the part of the brain that relays sensory information).

**FLIRT POLE**

I love flirt poles. They are 6-foot long flexible poles with a 4-foot line going out to a lure or flag on the end. (Like Squishy Face Studio’s Flirt Pole V2, pictured at left; squishyfacestudio.com.) The idea is to move the lure at the end of the line around on the ground and have your dog engage with it — chasing and eventually capturing it. With younger dogs, older dogs and overweight dogs, make bigger loops with the line instead of short cuts and fast moves.

There is a quick learning curve to using this. Practice alone at first to keep the lure on the ground — spin around in a circle a couple of times first to get the hang of using one. Have something with you to trade up with your dog for when he does catch the lure. When he releases the lure, mark that with “drop it” and then reward (which can be the continuation of play). A flirt pole is not a tug toy, so make sure the dog drops the lure before rewarding.

**MINI HIKES**

Mini-hikes are basically 3- to 5-plus mile walks. Instead of walking around your neighborhood, go somewhere special with a great trail, like a local county or state park, river or beach to experience *waldesinsamkeit* (the feeling of being one with nature), but with the added bonus of being with your dog(s).

For our dogs, exercise is vital, as is the experience shared with us. Exercise doesn’t need to be cardiovascular. Exercise can also incorporate enrichment-based mental stimulation into this important time spent with our dogs. Remember: If we engage the brain, we tire the body.
Yes, there actually are designated fat farms, weight-loss centers and so-called miracle diet pills to help dogs shed excess pounds, but most of us don’t have access, or perhaps, even the money to spend on them. But here is the skinny: Far too many dogs are overweight and even obese. Finding the right — and safe — strategy amid the hype of quick-loss broken promises can be challenging.

To help you — and your canine pal on this get-to-a-healthy weight mission, Dogster reached out to a pair of canine health experts: Ernie Ward, DVM, founder of the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention and based in Raleigh, North Carolina, and Jason Nicholas, BVetMed, The Preventive Vet based in Portland, Oregon. They recommend these effective weight-loss strategies:

1. **MAKE FRIENDS WITH YOUR VETERINARIAN.**
   
   Most veterinary practices are canine weight-loss centers in their own right, Dr. Nicholas reminds us. “Lots of practices will help pet owners formulate a specific diet/feeding/exercise plan, do regular weigh-ins and celebrate successes with people.”

2. **SWAP OUT TREATS FOR CALORIE-FREE PRAISE.**
   
   Sure, you want to reward your dog for sitting on cue, going potty in the backyard instead of on your living room rug and for politely greeting visitors instead of jumping up on them. But treats can pack on the pounds quickly. So instead of automatically handing out a treat each and every time your dog does what you ask, save calories by heaping on the praise.

Help is here for dogs with *more waddle than wiggle* to their step.

BY ARDEN MOORE
AIM FOR SLOW AND STEADY WEIGHT LOSS.
Instead of focusing on the end goal — say, getting your 100-pound Labrador Retriever to get down to a healthy 75-pound weight, celebrate minor drops in weight.

“I have a lot of Labrador Retriever patients who are 100 pounds and who need to be 75 pounds,” Dr. Ward says. “But if they lose just 5 to 10 pounds, you will see improvements in their mobility and energy levels. Focus on your dog’s quality of life and not on the number of pounds lost.”

COUNT ON YOUR KITCHEN SCALE.
It may surprise you, but when it comes to measuring your dog’s daily food portions, it is easier to do so using canned food than trying to count pieces of kibble. Dr. Ward recommends you use a kitchen scale to weigh out your dog’s daily portion of canned food.

“It is easier to divide a can of food than do kibble counting,” he adds. Of course, you can also measure out kibble pieces in a measuring cup, but the number of kibble may vary depending on the size of each piece.

MAKE A SPLASH WITH A WATER TREADMILL.
If your dog is obese and having trouble covering much distance on your neighborhood walks, help him get into shape by safely walking him on a water treadmill. Check with your veterinary clinic about available water treadmills for dogs in your area you can use. Walking in water is less stressful on your dog’s joints.

RECOGNIZE THAT CERTAIN BREEDS ARE PRONE TO OBESITY.
Studies show that there is a genetic link to a dog’s food drive. For example, working breeds are bred to respond to food rewards. Pay extra attention to your dog’s weight if he is a Labrador Retriever, Dachshund, Golden Retriever, Pug, Cocker Spaniel, Boxer, Basset Hound, Beagle, Pekingese or Cairn Terrier.

SUCCESS TALES: Josie and Bujeau

Sometimes, extra pounds seem to sneak up on dogs. Take the case of Josie, a Jack Russell Terrier mix who was adopted by Mary Tan, public relations manager for the Animal Humane Society in St. Paul, Minnesota.

“I thought Josie needed extra calories to run with me as I was training for 5Ks and a marathon, so I gave her a lot of treats,” Mary says. “Her highest weight was 42 pounds. When she started limping on our runs, that was my wake-up moment. The extra weight resulted in the need for her to have cruciate ligament surgery.”

Mary stopped the treat doling and shifted to carefully measuring out 1 cup of food in the morning and 1 cup of food at dinner and one treat before bedtime. Now, Josie weighs a healthy 34 pounds.

As for my own dog’s story, I realized Bujeau, my Bernese Mountain Dog mix, was taking a longer time to get up and was sleeping a lot on the sofa. During her annual physical exam, she weighed a whopping 90 pounds. I was to blame for her 10-pound weight gain in a year.

So, out came her leash and harness. I made a promise to Bujeau that I would walk her four to five times a week every morning. We started with 1 mile and gradually worked our way up to 3-mile walks. Within three months, Bujeau was back to her ideal weight of 80 pounds.
OFFER HIGH-NUTRIENT, LOW-CALORIE VEGGIES.

Instead of succumbing to your dog’s begging eyes for your pizza crust, offer a meaningful choice, such as a baby carrot or slice of zucchini.

KEEP YOUR SENIOR DOG MOVING.

“Age is not a disease,” Dr. Ward says. “It is essential for senior dogs to engage in aerobic activity daily. Bodies are designed to move. Work with your veterinarian on pacing your dog’s activities.”

TRY SOME HIGH-TECH GADGETS.

For home-alone dogs, there are products designed to entertain and exercise them while you are at work. For example, the iFetch releases a mini tennis ball for your dog to chase, grab and place back into the device to be relaunched. The FitBark tracks his activity level throughout the day. The Animo tracker tells how many calories a day your dog burns.

“These gadgets can make it more fun and engaging, but not every pet or person needs such technology to achieve weight loss,” Dr. Nicholas says. “One benefit is that these devices can help people take note of their dog’s heart rate, respiratory rate, activity level that might otherwise go unnoticed.”

AVOID CRASH DIET GAME PLANS.

If you abruptly reduce your dog’s food intake, the plan can backfire. “Scaling back on the amount of regular food you are feeding your dog can lead to some vitamin, mineral and/or other nutrient imbalances when feeding lower quantities of an otherwise balanced food,” Dr. Nicholas says. “There are therapeutic diets available from veterinarians that help achieve the desired degree of weight loss while helping the dog still feel full and satiated.”

Dr. Ward adds, “Nutrition is not a one-size-fits-all approach.” Nutrition is about finding out what works best for your individual pet.

Time to count CANINE CALORIES!

The number of calories in food and treats your dog gobbles up each day does matter and does count. Too many calories can pack on the pounds and cause your dog to have more waddle than wiggle in his step.

Ernie Ward, DVM, agrees it can be tricky and confusing to determine how many calories your dog needs each day if you simply go by the recommended guides posted on dog food labels.

Instead, he recommends you first reach out to your veterinarian to calculate the right number of calories to keep your dog at a healthy weight. Factors include level of activity and age. And, here is a calorie-calculating formula to use on dogs of all sizes:

1. Weigh your dog on a reliable scale.
2. Divide your dog’s weight by 2.2.
3. Multiply this figure times 30.
4. Add 70 and you will have the number of calories to feed a typical dog. (spayed/neutered, typically inactive and who lives indoors)

For example, my 35-pound Kona, a 5-year-old terrier mix, should consume 547 calories per day.

Ernie Ward, DVM, is a veterinarian who has devoted his career to educating pet owners and veterinarians alike on nutrition and weight management. He is a board-certified veterinary nutritionist and co-founder of Pet Nutrition Education Services (PNES). Ernie is also the author of numerous nutrition and fitness books for pet owners. Arden Moore is the Pet Health and Safety Coach, a pet behavior consultant, master certified pet first aid instructor, author and host of the Oh Behave Show on Pet Life Radio. Learn more at ardenmoore.com.