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## Man's Best Friend or Man's Best Workout Buddy?



That's what a Cornell team aims to discover.

Bringing research together from weight loss studies focused on humans and canines, research associate Dr. Barbour Warren and health educator Mary Maley from the Breast Cancer and Environmental Risk Factors Program, and Dr. Joseph J. Wakshlag, assistant professor of clinical nutrition, will be starting a 12-week pilot study, sponsored by a Hatch grant and Purina, this March. Their ultimate goal is to ascertain if dogs positively influence their owners' lifestyle in terms of physical activity.

Why is this important? According to Dr. Warren, over two-thirds of the people in the United States are now considered to be overweight (having a body mass index of 25-30), and an astounding one-third are obese (a body mass index of greater than 30). Dr. Warren also says that this increase in obesity has led to a surge in obesity-related illnesses, such as cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and arthritis. Many doctors prescribe weight loss programs as a solution, but previous studies have shown that the number of people who maintained their weight loss decreased drastically after six months.

That's why dogs may be able to lend a helping paw.

"Dog walking offers two of the key elements for regular physical activity, purpose and companionship," explains Dr. Warren. "This is important—as a viable approach to weight loss is regular, daily physical activity at the intensity and length of a typical dog walk. We are excited to evaluate if promoting dog walking provides even greater incentive to walk on a regular basis."

Adds Dr. Wakshlag, "We have always assumed that increased physical activity was advantageous in canine weight loss and we have finally put some numbers out there as potential guidelines. Of greater importance is the fact that dog ownership and the human-animal bond may be strong enough to promote a healthier lifestyle not only for dogs, but also for their human counterparts."