

## Exercise Program Benefits Shelter Dogs and People

**Program encourages people to be active and provides exercise to shelter dogs.**

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The University of Missouri-Columbia says its "Walk a Hound, Lose a Pound" program will tackle two societal problems simultaneously — obesity and unwanted pets. The program, which is modeled after one that began in Texas several years ago, encourages people to exercise while also providing attention to shelter dogs.

Participating adults and families are partnered with shelter dogs. Shelter dogs participating in the walks are selected by shelter staff based on adoptability, amicability, and ability to be walked.

"We hope that the program will encourage people to be more active and, at the same time, give shelter dogs the exercise that they need," says Rebecca Johnson, director of the Research Center on Human Animal Interaction at the College of Veterinary Medicine. "Additionally, we hope that the program will help meet animal shelter needs by encouraging people to adopt more pets."

Johnson, who is also the Millsap Professor of Gerontological Nursing at the MU Sinclair School of Nursing, will use the program in a research study as she measures people's weight, blood pressure, mood, and self-perceived health before and after the program.

"We anticipate that there will be weight loss and an increase in physical activity outside of the weekly dog walks among those who participate in the study," Johnson said. "We also will monitor dog adoption rates at the three local animal shelters before and after implementation of the project. Similar projects have been conducted in Indianapolis and Lubbock, Texas, with favorable outcomes in people and in shelter adoption rates."