

Celebrity Trainer, Actress Battle Dog Obesity

Gunnar Peterson and Molly Sims promote a campaign to help overweight dogs and cats lose 50 million pounds in 2008.

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Molly Sims demonstrates the “Dog Squat Tease” with direction from trainer Gunnar Peterson. Thirty-five percent of dogs and cats in the United States – 54 million pets – are overweight, according to Hill’s Pet Nutrition. In an effort to combat the pet obesity epidemic, Hill’s teamed up with the American Veterinary Association (AVMA) and launched the Alliance for Healthier Pets campaign to help the country’s pets lose a total of 50 million pounds in 2008.

Events kicked off in Los Angeles Jan. 22 with the PetFit Challenge. Celebrity fitness trainer Gunnar Peterson released a free downloadable pet fitness video aimed to keep pets and their owners healthy and active. Actress and model Molly Sims, best-known for her role on the television show “Las Vegas” along with her two Yorkshire Terriers, Chloe and Poupette, joined Peterson to demonstrate a few of the exercises, such as the “Dog Squat Tease.” The squat incorporates a new twist on a typical exercise and has owners tapping the dog with their favorite toy as they squat and lifting the toy above their head as they stand, encouraging dogs to jump after it.

Molly Sims holding her two dogs, Chloe and Poupette, with Gunnar Peterson after her workout.

“I’m good with them and so they’re good to me,” Sims said. “And I think that’s the key to life even with the whole PetFit challenge. It’s doing something where you’re getting the benefits and so are the dogs, and they love working out and having fun and getting to be with you. And it’s so healthy for them.”

Peterson added that dog owners must make a commitment to their pets’ fitness and block out time to exercise and play with them.

“Everything can’t keep taking precedence over the care of your pets,” Peterson said. “I do give my dogs treats, but I try to be judicious about it. I do it just like I do it with my kids – not before meals, not late at night. But I do give them a lot of toys.”

Excess calories can add up quickly, said Dr. Chad Dodd, DVM, with Hill’s Pet Nutrition. Feeding a 20-pound dog one ounce of cheddar cheese is equivalent to a person eating one and a half hamburgers, and just five extra pounds on a 30-pound dog is equivalent to a human gaining 25 pounds.

“It’s a tragic thing, pet owners see this oftentimes as a cosmetic issue and what we see is there’s a medical concern here,” Dodd said. “With that weight, come things like arthritis, diabetes, heart disease, and a shortened life expectancy.”

The Pet Fit Challenge will hit the road with an 18-city PetFit Tour this year to give pet owners a first-hand look at the dangers of dog obesity what can be done to promote a healthier lifestyle. In addition, at the end of the tour one dog and one cat will be named America’s fittest pets with a chance to appear in a Hill’s advertisement.

“The idea is that anyone, no matter what your fitness level, can integrate this into your daily regime of exercise and eating right and doing the right thing for your pet,” said Dodd. “Hill’s Pet Nutrition and the AVMA are making a pledge to pet owners that we’re going to help them through proper nutrition, daily exercise, and routine veterinary medical checkups. Encouraging all of those things, we’re going to help dogs and cats in 2008 lose over 50 million pounds.”

To view Peterson’s pet fitness video and to submit a success story to be considered in the America’s Fittest Pets contest, [click here](#).

-Heidi Hatch, Associate News Editor for DogChannel.com