

June 2006 | Whole Health :: Body Talk

Dogging it for Fitness

By Bob Condor

If you're feeling the call of a pet more playful than, say, tropical fish, here's some inspiration: Dog owners get nearly double the walking exercise of non-owners, according to an *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* report.



Researchers from the University of Victoria in British Columbia surveyed 351 men and women, finding the 70 dog-owning participants walked an average of five hours a week. Non-owners averaged 2.8 hours of walking weekly, although they practiced other forms of exercise more frequently than the dog owners did.

To treat your four-legged friend to even more outdoors time, visit HikeWithYourDog.com for a guide to the most dog-appropriate hiking spots across the country. And when it's time to hit the trails, remember to bring along water for your pet — especially during hot summer months.

Flashing to herbal relief

For women going through menopause, an herbal concoction could serve as a natural alternative to hormone replacement therapy. In a recent study published in the journal *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, women taking a combination of black cohosh and St. John's wort had half as many hot flashes and 42 percent lower rates of depression than those who took a placebo.

Of the study's 301 participants, all of whom had experienced menopausal symptoms and depressed mood for at least three months, roughly half took one milligram of black cohosh extract and .25 milligrams of St. John's wort extract twice daily for eight weeks, then once daily for eight additional weeks.

"Black cohosh is very effective in reducing hot flashes," says L.A.-based naturopathic physician Dr. Lesa Werner. "But since some studies have suggested the use of black cohosh could exacerbate the spread of breast cancer in those who already have the disease, it must be used with caution."

St. John's wort can help to treat the mild to moderate depression often seen in menopausal women, Werner adds, but she recommends consulting with your doctor pre-treatment in order to prevent harmful drug interactions.

Peel me a grape

Grape seed extract may tame high blood pressure, according to recent research from the University of California at Davis. In the first human clinical trial to assess the extract's effect on people with metabolic syndrome (a group of risk factors that increase risk for heart disease and type-2 diabetes, including high blood pressure, excess abdominal weight, high cholesterol, and high blood sugar), researchers gave 150 milligrams of grape seed extract, 300 milligrams of grape seed extract or a placebo daily to 24 people with high blood pressure. After a month, those who took the extract had significantly lower blood pressure, while those taking the 300-milligram dose also had reduced levels of LDL ("bad") cholesterol. The suspected reason? Grape seed contains a class of antioxidants known as proanthocyanidins, most often associated with deeper pigment in fruits and vegetables.



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