

NEW YEAR, New



YOU

10 tips for a new leash

on life for you and your pooch

By Linda Hepler

It's a new year, and you're ready to get started on the new—and improved—you. But before you get too far in developing a plan, consider including your best friend in your makeover. Dogs can benefit from changes, too!

Here are 10 ideas to help you and your dog get a new leash on life:

1 YOU: Make an appointment with your health care provider

According to the American Medical Association, routine annual physicals are unnecessary for healthy adults. But it's important to receive specific age- and risk-related health screenings and tests that can help to detect medical conditions that are treatable when discovered early. Ask your health provider which tests she recommends for you.

YOUR DOG: Needs regular health care, too Dogs of all ages need a yearly exam with a veterinarian, says Susan Nelson, assistant professor at Kansas State University's Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital. "This includes keeping its vaccination status up to date and checking for dental health, lumps and bumps, heart murmurs, and other things an owner may not notice at home," she explains.

2 YOU: Take personal power over food with mindful eating

Have you ever absent-mindedly noshed on a bag of chips while watching reality TV? It's easy to lose awareness of what—and how much—we're eating. Mindful eating is the process of becoming aware of food—how it looks, smells and tastes, what goes into preparing and serving it—as well as paying attention to your own internal hunger and satiety cues. Learn more at www.mindfuleating.org.

YOUR DOG: Depends upon you to control his food intake

Dogs are notorious for their lack of discrimination when it comes to food—after all, they'll forage for tasty morsels in the garbage can! If you're uncertain about the type or amount of food your dog needs—especially if she's looking a bit chubby—see your veteri-



Find time each day to do something indulgent just for yourself.

narian for advice. Dogs should also get a checkup if there is a sudden change in appetite or weight, whether a loss or a gain in either.

3 YOU: Build character by learning something new
If you're like most people, you know a lot about your job and maybe a hobby or two. But learning about many different things across a wide subject range can help to round out your character. It can also teach you to adapt to new situations and increase your confidence. So sign up for a cooking class, learn a new language, try a different sport — you'll be happy you did.

YOUR DOG: Thrives on the challenge of learning
Dogs are easily bored, says Deborah Rosen, Good Citizen Canine dog trainer (www.goodcitizencanine.com) and animal behavioral consultant. "And when dogs don't have enough to do, they find things to do, such as chewing up your belongings or helping themselves to food on the table," she adds.

Rosen advises giving your dog constructive things to do so he is less inclined to be destructive. Look for treat dispensers or pull-apart puzzle toys that your dog has to work at—and change the toys from time to time to keep the challenge fresh. You can also play games with your dog to teach him new tricks. One of Rosen's favorite is "The name game." To play, give each of your dog's favorite toys a name, such as "hedgie" or "mortie." Then teach your dog the name of the toy by tossing it and saying, "Go get hedgie." Over time, your dog will learn to distinguish between different toys.

4 YOU: Make exercise fun, not work
Getting started on an exercise habit is the hardest part, but it helps if you try to make exercise fun. Skip rope, play indoor golf, learn to rollerblade, or check out the latest Wii version of Dance, Dance Revolution. Find an exercise buddy to make the time pass. If you enjoy physical activity, you're more likely to stick with it.

YOUR DOG: Loves to exercise
Let's face it, you don't have to try too hard to make exercise fun for your dog. Just get out the leash, and she's ecstatic about the idea of a romp. If you don't have safe open spaces to let her off-leash, look for a local dog

park—or if there are none, consider working to start one in your area. For ideas, check out www.dogpark.com.

5 YOU: Bust stress with play time
It's important to have at least one activity that you do on a regular basis just for fun. Whether it's playing with the kids, spending time on a hobby or an art, you'll be able to express yourself and blow off steam at the same time.

YOUR DOG: Needs daily play time with you
"Dogs thrive on play," says Victoria Stilwell, British dog trainer and star of Animal Planet's "It's Me or the Dog." "Play is important to stimulate both the body and the mind," she adds.

Stilwell advises a rousing game of hide and seek, where you hide a favorite toy or treat and then help your dog to find it.

6 YOU: Indulge yourself
In addition to play time, you need to find time each day to do something indulgent just for yourself. This can be as simple as watching a funny movie or taking a relaxing bath. Or spring for a manicure, pedicure or massage.

YOUR DOG: Enjoys pet pampering
Dogs love to be indulged! Spoil him with a special massage, or whip up a batch of healthy pet treats (find recipes on www.all-natural-dog-treat.com).

7 YOU: Assure job success by brushing up on manners
Recent studies by Harvard University, The Carnegie Foundation and The Stanford Research Institute have concluded that keeping and advancing in your job position has more to do with people skills than with technical knowledge and skills. Check out Jodi R. R. Smith's *From Clueless to Class Act: Manners for the Modern Man* and *From Clueless to Class Act: Manners for the Modern Woman* to brush up on skills that will help you to make a favorable impression in professional and social arenas.

YOUR DOG: Can wow others with good manners, too
"There are 4 commandments that all dogs need to know," says Steve Brooks, Certified Pet Dog Trainer and owner of Steve Brooks K9U in California. "These are to come when called, sit/stay, walk nicely by your side when on leash, and to stop whatever he's doing when the owner says 'no.'"

If your dog has trouble with any of these pooch manners, says Brooks, consider a basic training class or consultation with a dog trainer.

8 YOU: Save the environment and go green
If you haven't already done so, now is the time to begin new habits that help to preserve the environ-

ment for generations to come. Recycle and compost rather than dumping garbage, walk, cycle or use mass transit instead of driving your car, eat local foods whenever possible. Get ideas from The ReGeneration, a global movement of people committed to sustaining the world's natural environment at www.regeneration.org.

YOUR DOG: Contributes to environmental problems
Dogs and their accessories and waste contribute to our environmental problems, too. Think about all that poop sitting inside of plastic bags in landfills! Help your dog go green by purchasing recycled toys and accessories and biodegradable dog waste bags. Find bags and other household supplies at www.ecoproducts.com.

9 YOU: Volunteer to help others
Nothing makes you feel better than giving back to others. Check out volunteer opportunities at your local hospital, school, or food pantry, or look for exciting volunteer opportunities all over the world at www.worldvolunteerweb.org.

YOUR DOG: Is a natural volunteer
The wolf, a dog's ancestor, works together with other members of the pack for survival. When humans bred the wolf into the dog, says Bonnie Bergin, President of Bergin University of Canine Studies, home of the Assistance Dog Institute, that trait was retained. "Dogs partner with

humans for the betterment of both. Humans and dogs are a great team," she explains.

According to Bergin, there are several programs that focus on training people to use their dogs in service to others. Two to check out are Therapy Dogs International (www.tdi-dog.org) and Delta Society's People Pet Partners Program (www.deltasociety.org). Dogs can help others in hospitals, schools, rehabilitation institutes, and many other facilities.

10 YOU: Reinforce your efforts at learning new habits
When you're on track toward your goals, make sure to give yourself rewards along the way. If you're trying to lose weight, make those non-food rewards, such as a new item of clothing, a movie, or even splurging on a mini-vacation.

YOUR DOG: Responds to positive reinforcement, too
Dogs need positive reinforcement for a job well done, says Stilwell.

"There's more chance of good behavior being repeated if you use reward-based training. This doesn't have to be food, either; use whatever motivates your dog, whether that's praise, playtime, a toy or a walk," she adds. **ND**

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