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## Mindfulness and your dog

Mindfulness has garnered tremendous interest over the past decade. Research suggests that mindfulness — the ability to live each moment as it unfolds and accept it without judgment — can help reduce stress and enhance health.

Perhaps one of the greatest psychological benefits of interacting with a dog is the opportunity it provides to be more mindful — to purposely focus your attention on the present moment.

Mindfulness is a component of many relaxation techniques, including yoga, deep breathing, tai chi, massage, reflexology, journaling, and prayer. You can also easily use the technique while walking with a dog. In fact, let your dog show you how. Notice how joyously present she is when out in the world: her head is up, her tail is wagging, and she's alert and taking it all in. She is open to new sights, smells, sounds, people, and animals. Each walk is an adventure.

Try this:

- As you start your walk, take a moment to bring your attention to the sensations in your body.
- Breathe in through your nose. Let your abdomen expand fully. Then breathe out through your mouth. Notice the sensations of each inhalation and exhalation.
- As you continue to walk, engage your senses fully. Notice each sight, touch, and sound. Savor every sensation.
- When your mind wanders — and it undoubtedly will — gently bring your attention back to the moment, including your dog's delight at being with you and outdoors.

Mindfulness is a lifelong practice that can help you to better appreciate simple everyday experiences like being physically active with your dog. By learning to focus on the here and now, you may find yourself less likely to get caught up in worries or regrets.

To learn more about the health benefits of owning a dog, as well as raising and living with your canine family member, buy [Get Healthy, Get a Dog](#), a Special Health Report from Harvard Medical School.

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