

# Dog Walking: Why To Start, How Often, And Where

### Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

### Transcript

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SG If someone had suggested 25 years ago I was going to do a podcast on why everybody should be walking their dogs every day, I'd say you're crazy, because I might have walked my dogs like three or four times a week tops. But here I am. Here to encourage each and every one of you to make sure your dogs get out and get walked daily.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. You know, the benefits of getting a dog out and getting them walking are both obvious and some are very, very hidden. I categorize them into five categories. I mean the most obvious would be the health benefits to our dogs, the decrease of behavioral problems, the opportunity to do some really good training, and of course the bonding with us.

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Now, I'm going to start this off by talking about the reasons people give me why they don't need to walk their dogs. And it starts like, "My dog doesn't like to walk." And you take a dog like our dog Tater Salad, Bulldog cross, and legitimately in the heat of the summer, he does not want to get out, he's brachycephalic, it gives him a harder time to breathe. But we can do it in the cooler times of the day.

But there'll be times where it's like pulling teeth to get him to the door. We will have him go outside. I will take him down, maybe it's a block and a half walk away. It's all in our property, it's grass. And then I take the leash off and it's his choice.

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He always finishes that walk with me. He doesn't ever say, "Okay, now that I'm here, uh, yeah, you're right." It's kind of like kids, you know, they're playing on their video games you go, "Hey, let's go to the beach." "No, really, I just want to play my video games. I'm good. You guys go." No, no, no. You get those kids to the beach they don't want to go home, right?

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So, saying your dog, "Oh, my dog doesn't really like it." You will find your dog will enjoy it if you make a regular habit of it. "So, dogs don't like it, I do other things that I can meet my dog's needs." Do you really? Is there a way that you can meet all your dog's needs and how do you know you're meeting your dog's needs? Is that just something like, it's a great catchall phrase that you say so that you don't have to walk if you really aren't a person who likes to walk.

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"So, I'm meeting my dog's needs elsewhere." I find it very, very difficult for anybody to meet all of the needs I'm going to mention in this podcast without getting out there and walking their dog. "It's too hot." "It's too cold." Guys, I know there's extremes. Like if you've got a really little dog and we get you know, temperatures of a -40. Yeah, maybe that's not an ideal time to be taking your dog out walking. But that's not going to happen to many people very often. And are there times of the day when it's too hot that you can go out when it's cooler?



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"I'm in pain myself, Susan. I just don't like walking." Now that one could be legitimate if you've just like had surgery. If you are somebody who just, "I just don't like walking." Get out there and you make a habit of it, and eventually you're going to become a person who misses it when you don't walk. And of those times that you can't, maybe you can get a relative, a neighbor, you can hire a dog walker because after this podcast I think you're all going to say, "I've got to find a way to get my dog out and get them walking."

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Okay, first let's talk about the health benefits. Some are obvious, some not so obvious. Did you know that as of 2022 more than 50% of the population of dogs in North America are obese.

And with obesity comes a drastic increase in the probability of your dog becoming diabetic, a drastic increase of many, many types of cancer, along with a lot of other problems that let's not even go into the quality of life some of these morbidly obese dogs are – because people love them so much – overfeeding them and really not giving them much exercise. So, health benefits, there's the obvious physical exercise. It is the stress on the dog's muscles, tendons, and bones. That stress is what creates health benefits.

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My friends, Dr. Karen Becker and Rodney Habib, they wrote this book, New York Times bestseller book called [The Forever Dog](#). I recommend everybody gets it. In this book, they talked about the dogs that are the world's longest living dogs. So, a 31-year-old dog who followed his owner behind a tractor three miles a day, from one end of the farm for the other for more than 20 years.

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So, people will say, "Oh my dog's too old to walk." "How old is your dog?" "Well, my dog's 12." I don't consider that very old, but he may be old in your years because of the life that he's led to this point. So, getting our dogs to use their body. Now, people say "Susan, I do agility. So, I don't have to. That's all the stress they need on their muscles and their ligaments."

If you use agility to keep your dog fit for agility, I promise you there will be an injury along the way. A blown ACL, a blown-out shoulder, something's going to happen if you were relying on a sport to be your dog's physical activity.

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So that's the obvious, the ability to keep the dog's weight down is a massive benefit of this exercise. Getting them out in fresh air. Cardiovascular stress, giving that dog the opportunity to get their heart rate and respiratory up for a sustained period of time ideally 20 minutes, that's a benefit that they can't receive by giving them a snuffle mat in thinking you're meeting their needs. Cardiovascular stress is just so important to our dogs.

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Getting the dog out in sunshine, the dog benefits just like we do by receiving sunshine. And something that you may not even considered, there's something called earthing or grounding, where it's been proven that the earth is negatively charged and sustained interaction contact, your bare feet, your dog's paw on dirt, on grass, and some suggest even on concrete, actually is discharging the positively charged free radicals that are circulating in your dog's body.



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“So, what?” you say, that's what oxidizes the dog's tissues and contributes to that dog's aging. So, getting your dog in contact 20 minutes a day, sustained contact, is going to give you that added benefit you may not have known about. Getting your dog out of the house changes the environment for them. And you could say, “Oh, my dog gets exercise. We have a fenced in backyard.” I'm sorry, that is not exercise. I promise you your dog isn't walking around for 20 minutes at a minimum at a time every day of his life when he's in the backyard.

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Unless maybe he's fence fighting with a neighbor's dog and that goes on for 20 minutes a day, but then that's creating a lot of behavior problems you just don't want to rely on. So having a fenced in backyard is not a replacement for exercising your dog. The other part about that fenced in backyard, it is the same scenery for the dog. There is no “Oh, this is new.”

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The opportunity to scent the ground, new ground, not just your backyard. Going in new locations, dogs love to use their nose to scent new smells and to mark where they've been. Keeping them in the same environment especially if that environment is a high-rise apartment is absolutely contributing to your dog's mental and physical stress.

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So, getting that dog outside and ideally changing the path that you walk with that dog, helps to [give the dog an outlet](#) for relieving their stress. So what happens when we relieve stress? You'll see a decrease in behavioral issues. Things like nuisance barking or nonstop whining or the obvious destruction of your property.

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But behavior issues will decrease if you give that dog an outlet for their stress, plus you are tiring them out a little bit, giving them the opportunity to have a really deep sleep, and sleep contributes to your dog's longevity as well.

The next benefit to getting your dog out, it's another opportunity for you to do some good old fashioned dog training in an ever-changing environment. Because you might have a dog who, it wants to pull on leash.

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Well, you can work on [loose leash walking](#), and they don't have to be walking beside you and looking at you, but maybe not just putting any stress on that leash. So, working on loose leash walking, working on appropriate ways to allow other dogs to walk by without them being reactive. Working on their appropriate ways to let people and children and all those distractions walk by, every single day, even when the dog gets to be five years old and they've been doing this their whole life.

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By that point, all these distractions could be white noise and you could just be working on a new skill. Hey, let's just work on walking on the right side all day today. So, training you're out there with your dog for 20 minutes. Yes, we want the dog to just have the freedom to do what they want to do, but I'd like to say the first 20% of the walk you should be doing some amount of training with the dog and maybe even the last 20%.



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If you have the opportunity to take that dog off leash and let them run, well running gives them even more benefits. I recognize some of you are in a city and there aren't the same opportunities to do that. Maybe go to a baseball diamond, after hours when the kids aren't there, that would be a great chance to do it. And on weekends, make a special trip out of the city, [go to a sniff spot](#), go to a conservation area and let that dog get to new environments and stretch their legs in a bigger way.

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So, we're going to decrease the dog's behavioral issues, at the same time giving you an opportunity to work on distractions. Relationship with you. You take your dog out for a walk, especially if you take your dogs out one on one, which I like to do with my geriatric dogs when they get older. You take your dog out that is a big, special adventure time for you and your dog.

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So, you're increasing that bonding with your dog. "Yeah, oh I can do that sitting on the couch." Not the same at all. Calling the dog in, asking them to just turn around in a spot, and just that interaction you're giving that dog good old fashioned [dopamine spikes](#) and creating that feel good motivation to want to hang out with you, to want to do things with you, because you took the time out of your schedule to do some walking.

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Now let's talk about the bonus of walking your dog every single day. All of those benefits I just mentioned for your dog, guess what, we as humans are reaping those benefits as well.

And if you stay in tune with your body, you will find that you will crave getting out, in getting fresh air, in getting sunshine. And for me, I make a habit of gratitude when I'm walking my dogs. So, it's a trigger that I've paired together. So, as I'm walking, I think, or sometimes I even say out loud the things that I'm grateful for that day.

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So, walking for me is more than just a time to be out with my dogs. It's a time to reflect and I just think any and all of that contributes to being a happy and healthy person. So yes, exercise and movement. There's a friend of mine who's here and she has this expression that is 'motion is lotion'. Meaning when we're in motion, we're lubricating our joints.

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So, if we're feeling in pain and we get up moving, you'll find after a few minutes of motion, now I'm not suggesting that all pain is easily solved by moving, but you will find that aches and pains aren't as achy or painful once you get motion.

And once you stay consistent with the habit of getting out with your dog, then you're going to find a lot of these things are going to fall into place because walking is such a phenomenal exercise for all of us.

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Who shouldn't walk? I personally don't think really, really young puppies should be walked because they're going to be rehearsing habits that you really don't want to see repeated. I think they should be outside, I think they should be out in nature, I think they should be in fenced in areas where they have the opportunity to interact with you, maybe doing some recalls.



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But work on value for hanging out with you and then I start walking my puppies probably when they're three to four months old. I'll do short little walks with them, not very long. Building them up to when they're six months old. That might be more of a couple loops around the field twice a day. So that's a kilometer or two, twice a day for my dogs.

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So young puppies, I encourage you not to get them out walking until you've put in the value for them not fussing with their [collar and leash](#) and to want to hang out with you.

Also, the obvious when the weathers are extreme, there certainly are dogs that probably shouldn't be walked, keep those [dogs at home](#).

And dogs who are super high anxiety, until you can work on [counter conditioning that fear](#) to whatever that fear is. If it's heightened when they see kids, or dogs, or cars, if those things put them over threshold, then you want to work that at a distance so that you can do walking on a regular basis.

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How much should you walk? Well, as I mentioned, in this book the common denominator, you think like the dogs who live longest all get fed the same things, they don't. The dogs that live the longest, the common denominator was they were outside walking a minimum of two hours every day. Now, I get that none of us have that kind of time. So, what is the minimum? Dr. Becker mentions that the very basic, basic is that you need to get out at least three times a week for 20 minutes at a time.

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I encourage you not to take that onboard and here's why. It is so easy for that three times a week at a minimum to become zero times a week. If you're doing something daily, it becomes a habit. And when it becomes a habit, it gets done daily, rain or shine. So, I really encourage you to try and squeak in two walks a day, even if they can only be one smaller one and one longer one at night.

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Make that habit and mark it on your calendar for at least a couple of times a month to get out of your normal environment. Get your dog in a wider area, a longer walk. You and your dog are going to benefit greatly by it. It's something that 25 years ago I was not much of a walker, today if I don't get out there, I actually start craving it. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

### Resources:

[Book: Forever Dog by Rodney Habib and Dr Karen Becker](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Loose Leash Walking with Susan Garrett](#)

[Sniff Spot](#)

[Podcast Episode 174: Dopamine In Dog Training: Anticipation, Rewards, And The Transfer Of Value](#)

[YouTube Video: Puppy's First Training with Susan Garrett: Shaping, Targeting and Collar Conditioning](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Exercising Your Dog's Body and Mind: Tips and Games with Susan Garrett](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Reactive or Aggressive Dogs: Key Insights with Susan Garrett](#)





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### About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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