

## ARE FIDO & FLUFFY HEFTY – INCLUDE YOUR PET IN YOUR NEW YEARS RESOLUTION!

Even if you could teach an old dog new tricks, Max wouldn't be able to learn. The 10-year-old beagle mix used to love running around the backyard. But now, when the once lean Max lies on her back with all four paws in the air, she struggles to roll back onto her feet.

Max is not the only dog that cannot roll over. As the number of obese Americans rises, so does the number of their obese canine companions. With about 25 percent to 40 percent of American dogs overweight and owners too busy to attend to the activity needs of their pets, doggy fitness has popped up around the nation to tone up man's best friend.

With a strict diet and streamlined exercise program, these fitness experts try to get dogs and their owners into the groove of healthy eating and regular exercise.

Veterinarian, Dr. Tony Kremer says, Max's girth increased as she aged and ate too many snacks offered by loved ones. While the owner was concerned about his dog's weight, it was difficult to resist throwing his best friend a snack or two during the day. The owner felt uncomfortable watching her struggle athletically, he too felt out of shape and not in a position to

Dr. Tony Kremer, a veterinarian in Chicago, estimates that 80 percent of his canine patients are overweight or obese. Those conditions can cause severe joint problems, like arthritis. Kremer said the dogs' habits mirror those of their owners and the owners can be in denial about their pets' weight issues.

After Kremer met with Miguel Calhoun, a personal trainer specializing in veterinary fitness, they worked together to create Unleashed Fitness, an exercise program for dogs. The rise of obesity in dogs has increased his business and caused him to change some of his exercise techniques. With overweight or obese dogs, he is cautious about overexertion and exercises that can damage a dog's joints.

Calhoun said owners can be reluctant to acknowledge their dogs' problems. After noticing one client's dog was a bit chunky, she said the woman claimed her dog was "just a big girl" with "a lot of hair." "Oh my God, your dog is overweight," Calhoun recalled thinking. "It's not the hair."

According to Kremer and Calhoun, clients sometime become offended "I'm not fat, how dare you is a common reaction. Then after a few times it comes full circle from denial to how can we both lose weight.

With a special diet and stricter exercise regime—both owners and dogs shed the unwanted pounds, feel better and look better while become a little more spunky, Kremer says.

Kremer also notes "In America, people see food as a physical manifestation of love, and instead of saying, 'I love you,' they say, 'Here, have a cookie,'" Both Kremer and Calhoun say "I love you, let's take a walk or go work-out!"