



Robert F. Kushner, MD is an internist and professor of medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, where he focuses on studying obesity, nutrition, and lifestyle medicine. In October of 2008, Dr. Kushner was named president of The Obesity Society, an organization dedicated to the scientific study of obesity. Dr. Kushner has published over 140 medical articles on obesity and nutrition, as well as several books, including Dr. Kushner's *Personality Type Diet*. Dr. Kushner is well known to dog lovers for the book he co-authored with veterinarian Marty Becker, called *Fitness Unleashed: A Dog and Owner's Guide to Losing Weight and Gaining Health Together*. Dr. Kushner's research has proven that exercising your dog results in improved weight loss in the dog's owner, as well as improved motivation to stick with an exercise program.

Dr. Kushner, how common is obesity?

RFK - Sixty five percent of American adults are overweight or obese.

Why is obesity such an important health problem?

RFK - Obesity is second to cigarette smoking as the most preventable cause of death. Obesity is associated with the most common chronic medical problems including diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, fatty liver, sleep apnea, and many forms of cancer, among others.

How did you become interested in combating obesity? Have you ever had a weight problem yourself?

RFK - My interest does not come from a personal story of being overweight but lies in the study of diet and nutrition. I realized early on that obesity was the most common and serious nutritional problem in our country.

What made you decide to research the benefits of dog walking for people with obesity?

RFK - I was originally approached by Hills Pet Nutrition to develop a program to combat the combined obesity epidemics in people and dogs. What came out of this relationship was to design a study to see if a combined owner and pet weight loss program would benefit people and their pets.

Do you have a favorite patient story about dog walking improving obesity that you can share?

RFK - Many of my patients tell me that their dog is the reason they stick to their exercise program as they can't ignore the wagging tail and big brown eyes staring up at them with the leash in their mouth. Part of my routine history taking always includes asking my patients if they own a dog.

Do you have a dog in your life? If so, how has your dog impacted your own life?

RFK - Yes, Cooper is a 3- year-old black and white spotted havanese who is adorable and a faithful exercise companion to me and my wife.

What tips to success can you give people challenged by obesity?

RFK- The PPET (People and Pets Exercising Together) study has shown me that social support whether it comes from a friend, family member or companion animal is an important part of one's exercise program. Who would know that a dog leash, for many, is more motivating than an expensive gym membership?

Anything you'd like to add?

RFK - For further information about me and my work, visit <http://www.doctorkushner.com> and <http://www.ncco.northwestern.edu/index.html>

So take Dr. Kushner's advice – whistle for your dog, grab the leash, and start getting fit with your Fido!

You can read more about obesity at these websites:

- <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/>
- <http://www.obesity.org/>
- <http://www.who.int/topics/obesity/en/>
- http://www.medicinenet.com/obesity_weight_loss/article.htm