

Fitness with Fido



For more photos from this feature, visit our Facebook page on Monday, Aug. 1.

Photos by Michael Jacob

Most of us are familiar with the pattern: When we settle into a comfortable relationship, our desire for quality time and comfort outweighs (no pun intended) the need to hit the gym. It's not just by happenstance – recent studies from Southern Methodist University and the journal *Social Science & Medicine* have shown that the happier we are in our relationships, the more likely we are to gain weight.

Becoming a parent can exacerbate this phenomenon, and becoming a pet parent, as it turns out, can have a similar effect. To stay competitive among the bevy of options out there, many gyms are expanding their amenities to include child care built into the price of memberships. But no gyms – at least not any of the national heavy-hitters – offer amenities for pups, save for a bowl of water outside the front door.

With an enthusiasm for health and fitness and an everlasting love for her two poodles, Oscar and Leah, Kimberly Flatley found herself in this predicament. Each time she left to work out, she faced her dogs' sweet, guilt-inducing eyes. The time she had to herself was quickly swept away by gym time and quality time with her pups. "I decided to start combining my workouts with them, to save time and spend time with them," Flatley says. "This is how it came together – combining fitness and dogs."

A few online searches of fitness classes with dogs led her to a California-based company called Leash Your Fitness. Flatley reached out to owner Dawn Celapino, who mentored Flatley as she began developing her own

doggie-fitness classes. Flatley worked hard to complete the necessary certifications to become a trainer. She also is certified in pet first aid and CPR, pet nutrition and animal behavior, and has worked with dogs as a groomer and agility trainer. For her human clients, she has American Council on Exercise group-fitness instructor certification, and is a certified personal trainer, Pilates instructor and nutrition coach. Flatley also has CPR and automated external defibrillator training and certification.

Fitness with Fido launched in July 2015 with classes at Edmunson Park by Lambert-St. Louis International Airport on Mondays, as well as six-week classes at the American Kennel Club Museum of the Dog in Queeny Park in Ballwin, with the occasional special workout event in between at Forest Park.

The classes begin with a 10-minute walk to get the dogs to acclimate to being around other dogs and new humans and to calm their nerves a little. The workout focuses on a different area of the body – for example, one week focuses on the upper body, which includes a lot of resistance-band workouts and pushups, Tabata-style – instead of a set number of reps at the instructor’s pace, and sets are timed with rest intervals in between (for example, 30 seconds on with 10-second rests between sets) so attendees can push themselves to their maximum level of fitness within their own timing. The dogs join the fun with puppy pushups, to see how many “sits” the dogs can do in a single minute.

The lower-body puppy challenge is more a workout-in-tandem: Called the “squat and stay,” this test of wills requires the pet parent to squat and hold a position while his or her dog has to sit and stay – to see who can hold the longest. The exercise combines mental stimulation for the dogs with a vigorous physical workout for both.

Flatley also offers “Doga” classes – yoga for dogs. For the first half of the class, attendees walk and stop to do standing yoga poses, then come back to the mats for dog stretches, and some mat work for the humans, ending with a five- to 10-minute dog massage. Both targeted body classes as well as Doga classes are about an hour long.

If you’re worried about your spirited dog breaking the calm vibe, Flatley is prepared to help. “I usually tell them they can come without their dog to get in the movements themselves, then bring their dog,” she says. “Normally, the more you come, the more they get used to it, as long as you’re practicing good behavior.”

Among the many benefits of the Fitness with Fido program, Flatley cites specific behavioral and emotional benefits from being able to bring your dog with you to participate in a workout. Bonding is a big advantage – far too often dogs miss out on spending quality time with their pet parents, especially during the workweek. Flatley allows one dog per person, not only for a ratio that is easier to control, but also so both dog and human get the maximum physical and mental benefits. Adding in dog obedience to the regimen helps with compliance training, and throwing in games for furry friends in the middle of the routine helps humans take a bit of a break themselves, “so people aren’t just sweating,” Flatley says.

Flatley plans to grow the Fitness with Fido program as more interest picks up, with plans to offer more dog-friendly active programs such as paddleboarding and hiking, as well as an online program for at-home Fitness with Fido workouts. She also hopes to offer hands-free dog leashes to allow easier movements for clients and their pups. Long-term, Flatley hopes to open a dog-friendly fitness studio and dog plaza that will offer fitness

classes and personal training for humans and dogs, healthy snacks and a spa for dogs to freshen up post-workout.

She currently offers nutrition seminars for dogs and their owners, as well as large-scale Doga events, with part of the Doga proceeds going to support local dog shelters and charities.

To keep up with class schedules and Flatley's special events, follow [Fitness with Fido](#) on Facebook and Instagram at [@FitnesswithFido.fit](#).

