

Slim Down Your Pet

The Biggest Loser host Alison Sweeney dishes on getting your pet—and the whole family—fit.

by Celia Shatzman

As the host of *The Biggest Loser*, Alison Sweeney has helped dozens of people shed pounds and improve their eating habits. So when she learned that her dog, Winky, a Boston terrier, was overweight, she put her fitness skills to the test and made it a family affair. FC chats with Alison about Winky's success story and how her pup motivated them all to shape up.

→ How did you know Winky needed to drop a few pounds? My 6-year-old son, Ben, and I took Winky for a checkup and the veterinarian

explained to us that Winky had a weight problem. Even an extra pound can have a tremendous impact on your pet's life.

→ Did you put Winky on a diet? I chose to use Hill's Science Diet Weight Loss System for dogs, which I am also a spokesperson for. The pre-measured food and biscuits help me make sure she's getting exactly what she needs. We started to see the difference within a month, and we knew we were doing the right thing for her.

→ What's the most surprising thing you've learned? Human food really isn't good for her. People think a piece of cheese you drop while making dinner is okay for your dog to eat, but feeding a 20-pound dog one ounce of cheddar cheese is comparable to a 5'4" woman eating one and a half hamburgers. And giving a 10-pound cat a cup of milk would be like a 5'4" woman eating five chocolate bars. Many human foods aren't good for a dog's digestion, so it's best to stick with pet food. I've taught Ben not to sneak Winky table scraps.

→ Do your kids pitch in? Part of the reason we have animals is because I want Ben and Megan, who is 2, to experience how pets enrich our lives and to learn how to take care of them. I want to share that love with my children and show that it comes with responsibility.

Ben asks me about what I do on *The Biggest Loser* and how I help contestants become healthy, which gets us talking about which foods are good for your body and which aren't. We discuss ways to make changes to Winky's diet—he helps me feed her—and I know he's learning a valuable lesson.

→ Did you develop a fitness routine for Winky? We started bringing her on our family hikes to make sure she's active. In the beginning it was hard for her to move quickly, but now she takes the lead. Before she came along with us, our walks were often cut short, but now that we have an agenda, it inspires us to walk farther and push harder. Everyone gets a better workout.

→ How else do you stay in shape as a family? We run around the backyard—Ben and Winky race. When we're inside, they chase each other around the dining room table. If you turn the TV off there are so many ways to be mobile. We also bought active toys that challenge her. Winky is pretty strong, so playing with those little wrestling toys keeps your muscles going for a while. It's been so much fun to get Winky—and all of us—exercising. ●



THE FAT TRUTH

→ Approximately **45%** of U.S. dogs are overweight or obese, which adds up to 35 million dogs.

→ Two extra pounds on a medium-size cat like a Siamese is equal to 25 extra pounds on a 125-pound woman.

→ An estimated **58%** of cats—54 million—are overweight or obese.

→ Just one pound too many on a small breed like a Chihuahua is equivalent to a 125-pound woman gaining 31 pounds.