



American Heart Association®
Heart Walk®

BEST FRIEND FRIDAYS



COMPANY GUIDE

Date:

Time:

Location:

Your pet can be a powerful partner in keeping you healthy — and in helping the American Heart Association lick cardiovascular disease. It's a high-five for health!

Heart disease and stroke are the world's top two killers. To turn the tide, we must tackle the problem in innovative ways. That's why the American Heart Association is launching Best Friend Fridays. The concept is simple — human and pet interaction can lead to better physical and mental health.

Studies have shown that pet ownership is associated with increased exercise and fitness levels, lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels, decreased stress and greater overall happiness and well-being.

Best Friend Fridays is rallying workers to leash up their furry pals and bring them to work on Fridays in June.

Let's get started!



Introducing Best Friend Fridays

High five — it's Friday

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Organize a Best Friend Friday by agreeing on a Friday in June for bringing pets to work, or host an employee/pet event at a nearby park. Best Friend Fridays is a great opportunity to benefit the health of your employees and bring purpose by inspiring them to make a donation to the American Heart Association in honor of their pets. Your donations, which fund lifesaving research, help ensure that pets keep their beloved humans around longer.

Best Friend Fridays dates in 2019 are:

- June 7
- June 14
- June 21 (also Take Your Dog to Work Day®, organized by Pet Sitters International)
- June 28

There are just three simple steps to participate:



Step 1: Leash up your pet and come to work or to a designated green space or park nearby. (See the suggestions below so safety and courtesy are top of mind.) If your pet doesn't travel well – that's OK! You can still post a photo and donate in honor of your favorite cat, rabbit, bird or bearded dragon.



Step 2: Donate in honor of your heart's best friend. Whether you give \$25, \$50 or \$500 at you're helping to fight the world's top killers, heart disease and stroke.



Step 3: Capture your high-five for health with a selfie using #BestFriendFridays! Paw to hand, you and your pet can congratulate each other for giving. Your generosity helps keep human hearts pumping — and that's something to celebrate.

Why participate?

You already know that pets love, honor and protect us and can be a lifeline during difficult times. A relationship with a pet can even help you stick with healthy habits, like weight loss.



68% of U.S. households, about 85 million families, own a pet.

There are now more pet-owning households than those with children. Millennials are the primary pet parent group at 35%, followed by baby boomers at 32%.



Pets can even help you thrive in the workplace.
67% of employees say work often stresses them out,

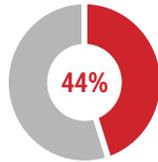


while 40% say their job gets in the way of their health.

Studies have shown that pets at work can reduce stress, increase productivity and improve employee teamwork and satisfaction.

Need further convincing?

THE SKINNY ON FURRY FRIENDS IN THE WORKPLACE



44% would consider a career move for a pet-friendly workplace.

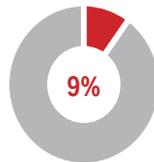
and



37% of pet parents say they would sacrifice vacation time and take a pay cut to bring their pet to work.



22% of employees said they would be more productive with a pet at work.



Yet, **9% of employers allow workers to bring their pets to work** every day.

Dog parents are more likely to reach their fitness goals than those without canine companions. In fact, they're 34% more likely to fit in 150 minutes of walking per week than non-dog owners. A big increase in movement helps lower a person's heart rate and blood sugar, according to the American Heart Association.

Dogs may help with chronic conditions and prevent chronic disease.

Owners who walk their dogs regularly have one-third the diabetes risk of those who don't own a dog. (It's also important to eat a healthy diet and control stress.)

Dogs may improve mental health and social relationships. Canine closeness can help improve human relationships. Studies find that owning and walking a dog increases social interaction and helps ease people out of social isolation or shyness. When a dog is present in a collaborative group setting, group members rank their colleagues higher in terms of trust, team cohesion and intimacy.

Pets may help you live longer. Overall, pet owners tend to live longer than non-pet owners.

Fetch more information at [BestFriendFridays.heart.org](https://www.heart.org/bestfriendfridays).

How it works — make it fun!

It's easy to help your company create Best Friend Fridays in June.

- Organize a Best Friend Friday for one or all Fridays in June (see safety and policy tips at the end of this guide.)
- Create a “host committee” of staff who can make the day fun for the pets and pet parents with special treats and activities.
- Encourage employees to bring their pets to work and to donate to support the American Heart Association at High-five for health!
- If your company participates in the Heart Walk, this can add to the fun. If you are part of a fall Heart Walk, this a great way to kick-off for June 21. Did your Heart Walk just happen? No problem, keep walking and use Best Friend Fridays to continue to promote health in your company.
- Post photos of your pet event on your company’s social channels and tag the AHA.
- Ask those who can’t attend to donate online. Send an email with a link to your fundraising page. Ask friends to send the link to their friends.
- Encourage walking meetings with pets, so colleagues can walk and talk while fitting in physical activity.
- Incorporate a Chief Pet Officer contest where employees donate to the American Heart Association to vote for the top dog!



Company Sample Emails

Email subject: Let's shed heart disease

Body: Bring your pet to the office help save lives. It's easy to participate in Best Friend Friday on **<date>**. There are three easy steps:

Step 1: Leash up your pet and come to work or to a designated green space or park nearby. If your pet doesn't travel well, that's OK! You can still post a photo and donate in honor of your favorite cat, rabbit, bird or bearded dragon.

Step 2: Donate in honor of your heart's best friend. Whether you give \$25, \$50 or \$500 at **<insert local Heart Walk page here>**, you're helping to fight the world's top killers, heart disease and stroke.

Step 3: Capture your high-five for health with a selfie using #BestFriend Fridays! Paw to hand, you and your pet can congratulate each other for giving. Your generosity helps keep human hearts pumping — and that's something to celebrate.

Questions? **<local company contact info>**.

Email subject: Is your pet project ready?

Body: We're celebrating Best Friend Fridays on June 7, 14, 21 and 28. **<revise if your company is only celebrating one Friday>**.

At home, pets help you move more. At work, they help you stress less. Great reasons to high-five your furry friend — and help the American Heart Association!

We'll have treats and fun for the humans and their pals. Stop by **<location throughout the day/or certain time>** to join in the fun. And don't forget to donate in honor of your heart's best friend. Whether you give \$25, \$50 or \$500 at **<enter local Heart Walk page here>**, you're helping to fight the world's top killers, heart disease and stroke.

Questions? **<local company contact info>**.

Email subject Headline - No Bones About It. We've made a difference!

Body: Thank you for bringing your pet to the office for Best Friend Friday. The fur flew and the donations rolled in. Thanks to you, we raised money to fight heart disease and stroke, the top killers of humans.

It's not too late to donate in honor of your heart's best friend! Whether you give \$25, \$50 or \$500 at **<enter local Heart Walk page here>**, you're helping to fight the world's top killers, heart disease and stroke.

Thank you! We look forward to celebrating with you again next year.

Sample Social Media Messages

For Your Company

Check out our “new employees” who came to visit thanks to @American_Heart’s #BestFriendFridays. Studies show that pets can reduce stress and keep us healthier, so we told **#companyname** employees to bring them on! When you give to @American Heart, you help fund more research that leads healthier hearts and more days like this. **<insert donate link> <insert pic of pets in the work place>**

For Employees

This **puppy/kitty** is helping me out today. Studies show that pets can improve your heart health. I just gave to @American_Heart in honor of [pet name], thanks to **#companyname** for participating in #BestFriendFridays! **<insert pic of pet in the work place>**

Check out **@company’s** newest hire! He’ll probably be my boss soon. **<laughing emoji>** Science shows that having a pet is linked with better heart health. Maybe that’s why I love **<pet name>** so much. I donated to @American_heart in **<pet’s name>** honor. #BestFriendFridays **<insert pic of pet in the work place>**

Pause the paws — we’re not sure this is the right fit for us.

Participating in Best Friend Fridays doesn’t mean that your company has to commit to pets at work year-round.

If your environment isn’t conducive to pets, or if you’re worried about barking or messes, you can still join in the fun. Host an employee event at a nearby green space or dog park or allow employees to work from home with their pets on your designated Best Friend Fridays.

And if your company already participates in Take Your Pet to Work Week®, you can do both. Just highlight the health and well-being benefits of pet parenthood.



Safety and policy tips

Here are some tips from the American Kennel Club and the Society for Human Resource Management for your company to consider before participating in Best Friend Fridays. This isn't intended to be a year-round pet-friendly policy, but you could try it out as a good benefit to drive retention!

Coordinate with the host committee to make sure everything runs smoothly.

- Decide if you'll restrict participation to dogs and cats or if other types of pets are allowed. Some companies require use of a leash for all pets.
- Communicate clearly that pets will be in the building so employees will be mindful of paws underfoot.
- Avoid large group meetings on these Fridays so pets are not disruptive.
- Ask pet parents to register their pet and answer a few questions. Managers should collect the registrations and make sure no one in their departments objects to pets on Best Friend Fridays. Pet parents should:
 - Double-check that their pet has had a recent veterinarian visit and has a clean bill of health and proof of rabies vaccines.
 - Have a flea/tick prevention program in place before coming to work.
 - Ensure pets have demonstrated skills like staying in an office, being quiet and not causing trouble during the day. Baby gates and crates should be used as appropriate. The American Kennel Club offers a Canine Good Citizen Test for dogs to ensure good behavior. If you are considering a longer-term pet policy, some employers ask employees to provide proof of passing this test before allowing dogs at work.
 - Walk dogs only in designated dog walk areas.
 - Clean up after pets.
 - Identify a "back-up" human buddy who can take the pet out if necessary and help if there's a problem and the owner is in a meeting.

- o Respect the rights of staff, visitors or building neighbors who might have animal allergies or fears. For example, some people are afraid of dogs and don't want to interact with them. Human health always comes first.
- o Keep the pet from interfering with productivity and work progress.
- Rules/policies should include "petiquette" (like the tips above) and a procedure for handling any situation that might arise.
 - o Consider a "no tolerance" policy for biting or other injuries. If a pet injures someone or another pet, the pet must immediately leave. In the case of a small mess or inconvenience, many workplaces invoke a "three-strike" policy before asking the pet parent to take their pet home.
 - o Employees who object for any reason (such as allergies) can either work in a designated "pet-free zone" such as a meeting room or can be given the option to work at home on Best Friend Fridays.

Check back next year for more detailed tips on implementing a full-time pet-friendly policy!



Help us lick heart disease and stroke.

We look forward to working with you on **Best Friend Fridays**.

Questions?

You'll find the answers on our website at

