

If You're an Older Person, Be Careful Walking Your Dog



By *Chuck Dinerstein* — March 6, 2019



My two dogs, Juno and Loki, are to my bias eye, adorable. There is their picture, you can judge for yourself. They are Shiba Inu's; a dog bred that is as close as you can get to a cat and still be a dog – if they want to be with you they will. Otherwise, they have their own interests. One of the compensations for this behavior, although Loki will momentarily greet me when I come home, is that they are self-walking – I open the door, and they wander around the yard. A research letter in *JAMA Surgery* indicates how lucky I am that I don't have to take them for a walk.

Evidently, dogs are responsible for their humans falling and breaking bones while exercising themselves and these dastardly companions. Using data from the US Consumer Product Safety Commission that includes the purchase of pet supplies, identifying pet owners, and reported injuries the researchers concluded that there were over 32,000 dog caused, fall-related fractures over 13 years. And according to their calculations, the absolute number is increasing by more than 14% between 2016 and 2017 [1] More frightening is the increase since 2004, an astounding 113%

Their target, predominantly women, but without a baseline of how many women walk dogs versus men, we are unsure whether this is an injury of opportunity or a doggy conspiracy. Not surprisingly, the hip is the most fractured bone, followed by the arm. And before moving on, let me report that nearly 29% of the victims were admitted to the hospital, rather than treated and released. (That latter phrase has always been amusing to me, like catch and release for a trout or other game fish).

The authors conclude with these ominous words,

"..this study is the first to identify and characterize leash-dependent dog walking as an activity that imparts a significant and rising injury risk in older adults... For older adults – especially those living

alone and with decreased bone mineral density – the risks associated with walking leashed dogs merit consideration. Even one such injury could result in a potentially lethal hip fracture, life-long complications, or loss of independence.”

At least they spared us an economic cost-benefit analysis of dog ownership versus the cost of hip surgery and setting of fractures. And although I suspect that Big Feline is somehow behind this report, the authors claim no conflicts of interest.

[1] Of course the estimated number of 4396 in 2017 is 0.009% of American seniors, so it is hard to characterize this as either an epidemic or a canine uprising against The Man.

Source: Fractures in Elderly Americans Associated with Walking Leashed Dogs JAMA Surgery
DOI: 10.1001/jamasurg.2019.0061

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