

A dog: the perfect partner for losing weight

As stage names go Whistletyne Nightingale may not be catchy. Mischa doesn't use her stage name – she isn't showy – but, nonetheless she should be rightly proud of her pedigree. Mischa is, of course our adorable black Labrador. She has a lot in common with Scooby Doo the Hanna Barbera cartoon character. Very loveable.

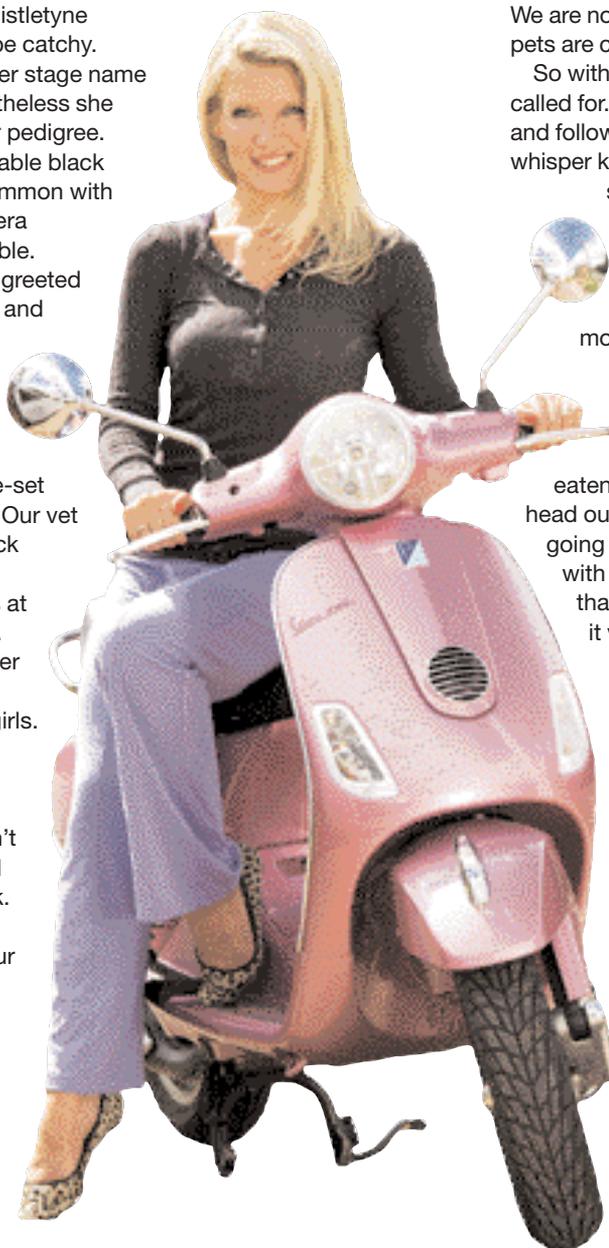
So when a so-called friend greeted Mischa by patting her behind and exclaiming she's on the large side – we do not use the 'f' word – I found myself standing wide-eyed with Mischa beside me slack jawed. Admittedly she is wide-set and powerfully built for a girl. Our vet on our last annual health check called her athletic – Mischa's mouth curled up at the edges at this point and quite rightly so. In fact the foresters I encounter on my daily run think she and Truly Scrumptious are lucky girls. She is not overweight.

Our antagonist countered with the words 'I'm only messing!' Too late; we couldn't see him off quick enough and he will not be welcomed back. There are no slouches in this household – we can all feel our ribs and have visible waists.

Dylan, a chimpanzee at Chester Zoo, is 25. Like it or not he is currently having medical tests on his heart. Vets at the zoo are working with scientists at Cardiff Metropolitan University to investigate a link between life in captivity and heart disease in chimpanzees.

The 6.1 million dogs in our British Isles are not in captivity and yet their health is being put at risk. Like humans they are starting to suffer from depression from an inability to move freely from 'a' to 'b'. Diabetes, heart disease, all the weight-related conditions are spreading to the animal kingdom, and unlike Dylan, who will be cared for and loved, albeit in restricted circumstances, they are able to run free.

The astute among you will recall the startling fact that British bottoms are topping the European charts for being the biggest.



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We are now being told that our pampered pets are climbing up those very same charts.

So with harnesses at the ready action is called for. Take a good look at your charge and follow that with a big cuddle. Then whisper kindly in their ear that this is something you are going to tackle together. Before this becomes one sided, and in defence of the dog, they do say dogs look like their owners. Do I need to say more? This is a win win.

To make this a happy occasion follow the same rules you would apply to us humans. Make sure you have both eaten a couple of hours before you head out, and are hydrated. If puddles are going to be in short supply take water with you. I use a bottle with a big lid that I use as a miniature bowl – I hold it very tightly when Mischa goes in.

The smallest member of our gang wears a harness. She is very fast so a harness doesn't try to choke her. It also means she can be picked up over streams. Mischa has a wide collar with a karabiner securing her lead for added strength.

Be careful where you pick up pace. We tend to trot out of our village and get going on the quiet lanes.

Watch out for signs of fatigue: heavy panting (the dog not you), and tongue lolling – again the dog. As a cyclist I will always check my tyres before I set out. Making sure they are not soft. You should check their paws before they go out. Truly Scrumptious is very sensitive to where she pads. She will always choose the softer surface and will tip-toe very slowly over sharp gravel. If they become or are dry use petroleum jelly to nurture them. Just like humans an unfit dog will need conditioned to exercise gradually. You wouldn't want to run with sore feet, so why should they?

So, you ask, what if I haven't got a dog? Well, with permission, go and find one. There will be a dog at this very moment dreaming of open space and blue sky and a chance to have some fun. In return you will have a friend for life. 🐕