

# TO YOUR *Pet's* *Health*

## HEALTH BENEFITS *of Pets*

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As a veterinarian I focus a lot on keeping pets healthy. Lately I have been thinking of some of the possible health benefits of owning a pet. Although there is not a ton of research done on these benefits, what is out there is convincing.

One of the largest health benefits is companionship and mental health. Pets provide a certain level of unconditional love, that is undeniable. There is nothing like coming home to that bark of excitement, that quiet meow or purr, that wagging weapon of a tail, or that gentle nudge of a head for attention. It is undeniable that this can lighten any mood. It has been shown that pet companionship can help alleviate feelings of stress or anxiety, which can help lower blood pressure and lead to less heart disease.

Owning a dog also helps promote heart health by motivating owners to get out and exercise with their dogs. It is recommended by the American Heart Association that adults participate in at least 2 ½ hours of exercise a week; often dog owners exceed this amount. By being active, stress levels and blood pressure are often lowered, weight loss is seen, as well as a decrease in cholesterol and triglycerides. Being active is important for us at any age but is especially important as we age. Research has shown that people who own and walk dogs are mobile well into their 70s and 80s. They often have a lower body mass index, fewer limitations on their daily living activities and may even have less doctor visits.

Pet ownership can also improve our social lives. Much like people who have children, pet owners are very willing to talk about their pets and experiences. Pet owners are more likely to strike up a conversation with a stranger who is also a pet owner. This can happen when out walking your dog, or in the waiting room of a veterinary clinic. It is becoming more and more common for people to take their pets to work. This has been shown to decrease workplace stress levels and increase productivity.

Pets can be good for young children as well. In an attempt to prove that pets were a cause of allergies in children, researchers found that the opposite may actually be true. By exposing young children to pets and healthy germs, their immune systems were stronger - this often decreased the amount of colds, allergies and ear infections seen in young children with pets versus those without pets.

Besides being great companions, did you know some dogs can be trained to detect things like cancer, low blood sugar or seizures? They are trained to detect and signal their owner or caretaker that something is not right. Some dogs can detect an epileptic seizure almost 45 minutes before it occurs!

It is undeniable that pets add to our overall quality of life, but they may also contribute quite a bit to our physical and mental well being as well. The next time you have a chance, sit down for a few minutes and destress with your pet - I guarantee you will both enjoy the time spent.



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