

Health Benefits of Pets

www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk

Caring for a pet has magical powers for human health and wellbeing.

Pets are an important source of love and friendship for millions of people and they are also great for our health.

There is increasing scientific evidence that pets can help to keep us fit and well. Pets can even help speed up recovery after major illness.

SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

Promoting Health – A study at Cambridge University found that owning a pet produced improvements in general health in as little as one month. This continued over the 10 month study¹. Pet owners were found to suffer fewer ailments, such as headaches, colds and hay-fever.

Beating Stress – Stroking a pet or simply watching a fish swim in an aquarium helps us to relax. Indeed, the mere presence of a pet seems to have the same effect, reducing heart beat rate and lowering blood pressure.

Research has shown that this effect is particularly marked in people suffering from high blood pressure (hypertension). The reduction in blood pressure is equivalent to that gained by eating a low salt diet or cutting down on alcohol consumption.



Preventing Heart Disease – Heart disease is one of the UK's biggest killers, yet it is another area where pets provide health benefits.

One study showed that keeping a pet significantly reduced levels of cholesterol and blood triglyceride (two risk factors for heart disease). These effects could not be explained by differences in diet, smoking or socio-

economic group². This fact, combined with the reduction in blood pressure from being with a pet, may make pet owners less prone to heart attacks than non pet-owners.

Overcoming Heart Disease – Pet ownership proved to be one of the best predictors of survival from a heart attack, according to an American study. The study showed that pet owners were found to have a far greater chance of surviving a heart attack.



PETS CAN ALSO OFFER A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL BOOST TO OUR LIVES:

Psychological Benefits:

- Children who own pets are often less self-centred than those who do not.
- People with psychological illnesses are happier as a result of looking after a pet.

Social Benefits:

- Pets provide companionship and promote a general feeling of well being, for example pets in residential homes improve both patient and staff morale.
- Pets can lessen the feelings of isolation and loneliness and provide a sense of purpose for older people. Caring for pets brings sunshine to the day, satisfies the human need to nurture and provides a feeling of fulfilment.

Ice breaker – Pets have been described as a social lubricant. Attending dog training classes, visiting the vet and walking in the park all provide opportunities to meet and talk to other people. Studies have shown that people walking a dog have far more positive encounters with others than those out walking alone, with the pet often providing a topic of conversation⁴.

Educational Stimulus – As well as all the fun elements associated with owning a pet, pets can bring many educational benefits.

Owning a pet can teach a child about responsibilities and mutual trust. By feeding and exercising a pet children can also develop an understanding of daily care. Children with learning difficulties can also benefit from interaction with pets. One study found that the presence of a dog helped to channel the children's attention and responsiveness towards the therapist - in effect, the dog helped increase the attention span of the children.

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ENJOYING PETS

Pets provide us with loyalty, companionship, love and affection, as well as the many physical and psychological benefits. The least we can do to repay this is ensure that we keep them in the best of health by following the five golden rules to pet ownership.

A healthy pet is a happy pet and a happy pet can help us enjoy a much fuller and more rewarding life.

References

- 1 James Serpell PhD: Beneficial effects of pet ownership on some aspects of human health & behaviour, Journal of Royal Science of Medicine, Volume 84, December 1991
- 2 WP Anderson, CM Reid, GLR Jennings: Pet ownership and risk factors for cardiovascular disease, Medical Journal of Australia, 1992
- 3 E Friedmann, SA Thomas: Pet Ownership, social support and one year survival after myocardial infarction in the Cardiac Arrhythmia Suppression Trial, American Journal of Cardiology, 1995
- 4 J Rogers, LA Hart and RP Boltz: The role of pet dogs in casual conversations of elderly adults. The Journal of Social Psychology, 1993

For further information on health benefits of pets, please contact, Society for Companion Animal Studies on 01993 825597.

Remember a healthy pet is a happy pet and a happy pet means a happy owner!

The Pet Health Council was formed in 1979 with the specific aim of promoting the health and welfare of pet animals in the interests of both pets and people. The PHC works with medical and veterinary advisers who are experts in this field.

The leaflet range currently comprises the following:

Insuring your Pet	Pets and The Family
Choosing a Pet	Your Pet's Teeth
Fit Not Fat	Practical Steps for Healthy Pets
Getting a Puppy	Stressed Pets
Health Benefits of Pets	The Facts about Toxocara
International Pet Travel	The Facts about Toxoplasmosis
Nutrition for Cats and Dogs	Worm Your Dog
Pets and Allergies	Your First Pet

Download leaflets from the PHC website:
www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk

The Pet Health Council 
working for healthy pets & people

The Five Golden Rules to Successful Pet Ownership

1. Follow a preventive health programme for your pet that includes:
 - a good diet
 - regular exercise
 - worming
 - vaccination
 - annual veterinary check ups
 - health insurance
2. Observe basic hygiene practices around your pet
3. Respect your pet, you have a duty of care, to fulfil your pet's basic needs including privacy and space as well as love and attention
4. Be a responsible owner, clear up after your animal and be considerate of other people and animals
5. Consider the changing needs of your pet throughout his life.

Associated organisations of the Pet Health Council include:

Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Animal Therapy, Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors, British Small Animal Veterinary Association, British Veterinary Association, National Office of Animal Health, National Pharmacy Association, Pet Food Manufacturers' Association, Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and Society for Companion Animal Studies.



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