

Reap the Benefits of Having More Time with your Pet During the Pandemic

By Allison Walsh

What would we do without our pets? These days many of you may find you have lots more time at home with your pets, and some have even taken this opportunity to adopt or [foster a new pet!](#) And the bonus? Scientific evidence suggests that pet ownership can improve your overall health.

So as a silver lining to the stressful headlines today, here are five reasons to give your furry friend a little extra appreciation:

Pets are good for your mental health

Pets can be a great source of companionship, motivation and calm for their owners. Overall, science has shown that pets can greatly reduce stress and anxiety and can help with depression. According to mentalhealth.org, pets can have calming effects on their owners. Just stroking, sitting next to or playing with a pet can give you a chance to relax and calm your mind.¹ Caring for a pet also gives your day a sense of purpose and reward, so it is a great motivator for people with depression to get up every day and feel valuable and needed.

Pet owners have less stress

While it may seem like cleaning a litterbox or walking the dog is just one more task you have to stress about, science has shown that it's actually worth it and helps reduce your overall stress. Just being around an animal decreases your blood pressure, which is one physical measure of stress. You don't even have to touch your pet; just looking at animals is enough. Pet owners also get more exercise than non-pet owners, and they are less likely to say they feel loneliness. A study from psychologists at Miami University and Saint Louis University showed that pet owners had better self-esteem and tended to be less lonely, less fearful, less depressed and less preoccupied than people without pets—and that all of these qualities correlated with feeling less stress.²

Pets are good for your heart

Did you know that pet owners are less likely to have heart disease? According to the CDC, pet ownership is associated with decreases in blood pressure, cholesterol and triglyceride levels—all factors that play a role in heart disease.³ Pet owners are also 67% less likely to die months after suffering a heart attack than those who do not have pets. Doctors believe these impressive statistics stem from the social support that pets provide. Those who feel depressed or lonely have an increased risk of heart disease. Therefore, the love of

a pet can literally keep your heart pumping.

Pets keep you active

This is a fact that everyone can agree on, especially dog owners. Daily exercise is one of the best things we can do for our health, and having to walk the dog can help you get your daily steps in. According to a study in the *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, dog owners walk about 20 minutes more per week than people with cats, or people without pets.⁴ While this may not seem like a lot, a little bit of exercise every day goes a long way to keep your heart healthy.

Pets help fight allergies

This may seem counterintuitive to many people with allergies. We often hear about families who desperately want a dog, but unfortunately, dad is allergic. But according to WebMD, studies have shown that kids who grow up in a home with furry animals will have less risk of allergies and asthma.⁵ Kids were also less likely to have eczema, a common allergy skin condition that causes red patches and itching. Since dogs and other pets often bring dirt in from outside, babies and infants are exposed to greater amounts of dirt and have stronger immune systems.

So on this today and on every day-especially when your pet seems too demanding-remember that he or she is keeping you healthier and happier.

References:

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