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ADULT HEALTH BULLETIN

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: PETS AND YOUR HEALTH

If you have a pet, you may already know this: Pets can be our best friends. There is nothing that warms the heart more than coming home to a beloved animal. Although pets make excellent companions for most people, there are also some physical and mental benefits to having a furry friend at home with you.

Having a pet can:

- increase physical activity and socialization
- decrease blood pressure, depression, and stress

Pets can:

Increase physical activity — Your pet can make a great exercise buddy, a constant companion that will stay by your side no matter how fast or slow you go. The recommendation is that an average adult should get a minimum of 30 minutes of physical activity at least 5 days per week. If you have a dog that needs walking, 15 minutes in the morning and 15 minutes in the evening will assist you in achieving those recommendations. If you have cat, take a few minutes and stretch with the cat. Daily stretching is important for staying independent as you age.



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An animal companion can be more than just a pet, it can be a friend.

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Decrease blood pressure — This does not mean that just owning a pet will decrease your blood pressure. Watching your diet and including exercise in your daily routine are still critical for managing blood pressure. However studies have shown that having a pet can help you control blood pressure. Perhaps it is the calming effect of petting an animal or the increased activity you get when you are looking after a pet.

Decrease the chances of allergies for children — Many research studies have shown that when children grow up in a home with a cat or dog, they are less likely to have allergies to those animals.

The same is true for children who grow up on a farm or around large animals. Studies have also shown that these children often have stronger immune systems which help them to stay healthy for longer periods of time. More studies are currently being done to help understand why this seems to be the case.

Pets can increase physical activity and socialization and decrease blood pressure, depression and stress.

Decrease depression and stress — In many mild to moderate cases of depression, having another creature to take care of and love can assist in fighting depression. If you already have a pet perhaps you have already felt this benefit. After a long day you come home to a tail wagging or an animal calling out for your attention. Within a few minutes, you are feeling better. A pet can be an easy friend.

Increase socialization — If you are walking your dog, you are bound to run into neighbors you can talk with. If you go to a dog park, there will be other dog owners there with their pets. Talking about the pets is easy to do.

You already have something in common with the other person. This increased socialization can also help fight loneliness and isolation.

A pet does not have to be a cat or dog. Studies show that animals such as birds and even guinea pigs have positive effects on their owners. If you are thinking of getting a pet, make sure to consider all parts of pet ownership. Owning a pet does take a lot of commitment. An animal companion can be more than just a pet, it can be a friend.



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