

Does interaction between humans and animals provide significant health benefits?

Many pet owners say that their animals provide company, happiness, and other emotional fulfillment.

In addition to medical benefits, assisting with daily activities and working with us, animals can help us emotionally, psychologically, and socially. They help us:

Adjust to serious illness and death

Children often turn to their pet for comfort if a friend or family member dies or leaves the family. Grieving adults who did not have a close source of human support were also found to have less depression if they had a pet.

Be less anxious and feel more safe

Pet owners tend to feel less afraid of being a victim of crime when walking with a dog or having a dog in the home.

Relax and reduce everyday stress

Pets can help us relax and focus our attention away from our problems and worries. We do not even need physical contact to appreciate this. Watching fish in an aquarium, or the activity of birds can be very soothing. Of course many of us with dogs and cats find ourselves absent-mindedly petting them, which is relaxing for both us and the pet.

Have physical contact

This ability to have something to touch and pet is very important. More and more studies show how important touch is to our physical and emotional health.

Lift our mood

Woman in a wheelchair petting a Greyhound
Pets decrease our feelings of loneliness and isolation by providing companionship to all generations. Certainly for residents of nursing homes this is true, but it is also true for the staff and volunteers there as well.

Residents of nursing homes are more apt to smile, talk, reach out to people and objects, be attentive and alert, and experience a greater sense of well-being and less depression if animals are present in the facility.

Feel less lonely

Pets can help ease the sense of loneliness or isolation we feel.

Have something to care for

Everyone needs to feel needed and have something to care for. Many elderly citizens or people living alone will tell you their pet gives them a reason for living.

Keep active

Having a pet can help us remain more active. We may not only get more exercise from walking a dog, but we also increase our activity through feeding, grooming, and otherwise caring for our pet.

Have consistency

Pets provide some consistency to our lives. Caring for a pet can significantly affect our routine and gives us something to do and look forward to each day. People may come and go, but our pets are pretty much with us day in and day out.

Have more and better social interactions

A man and woman, both in wheelchairs, looking at dog and talking. Families surveyed before and after they acquired a pet reported feeling happier after adding a pet to the family.

A study in a Veteran's Hospital showed that the residents had more verbal interactions with each other when a dog was present in the room than when there was no dog present. Dogs were also shown to increase socialization among persons with Alzheimer's disease in a Special Care Unit of a nursing home.

Residents in long-term care facilities were more likely to attend activity sessions when an animal was going to be present.

Summary

Pets can greatly influence how we feel about ourselves and life in general. They are teachers and healers of extraordinary talent.

More info about **Health Benefits of human-animal interaction:**

http://voices.nationalgeographic.com/2009/09/29/health_and_emotional_benefits_of_pets/

<http://www.animalplanet.com/pets/benefits-of-pets/>

<http://www.helpguide.org/articles/emotional-health/the-health-benefits-of-pets.htm>