



DELTA SOCIETY®

The Human - Animal Health Connection®

Benefits of Animal Companionship

Overview

Scientific research shows that people with pets can live healthier, happier lives. This is a sampling of recent research on the human-animal health connection.

Basic health benefits

Pet owners feel less afraid of being a victim of crime when walking with a dog or sharing a residence with a dog. (Serpel, 1990).

Pet owners have fewer minor health problems (Friedmann, 1990, Serpel, 1990).

Pet owners have better psychological well-being (Serpel, 1990).

Pets decrease feeling of loneliness and isolation (Kidd, 1994).

People who have AIDS who have pets have less depression and reduced stress. Pets are a major source of support and increase the perception of the ability to cope. (Siegel, 1999, Carmack, 1991).

Pet owners have better physical health due to exercise with their pets. (Serpel, 1990).

Heart Health

People with borderline hypertension had lower blood pressure on days they took their dogs to work. (Allen, K. 2001).

Pet owners have lower triglyceride and cholesterol levels than non-owners (Anderson, 1992).

Having a pet may decrease heart attack mortality by 3%. This translates into 30,000 lives saved annually (Friedman, 1980).

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Family / Children Benefits

Positive self-esteem of children is enhanced by owning a pet. (Bergensen, 1989).

Children's cognitive development can be enhanced by owning a pet. (Poresky, 1988).

70% of families surveyed reported an increase in family happiness and fun subsequent to pet acquisition. (Cain, 1985).

The presence of a dog during a child's physical examination decreases their stress. (Nadgengast, 1997, Baun, 1998).

Children owning pets are more involved in activities such as sports, hobbies, clubs or chores. (Melson, 1990).

Pets fulfill many of the same support functions as humans for adults and children. (Melson, 1998).

Companionship of pets (particularly dogs) helps children in families adjust better to the serious illness and death of a parent (Raveis, 1993).

Children exposed to pets during the first year of life have a lower frequency of allergic rhinitis and asthma. (Hesselmar, 1999).

Children with autism have more prosocial behaviors and less autistic behaviors such as self-absorption. (Redefer, 1989).

Senior Health

Animal-assisted therapy can effectively reduce the loneliness of residents in long-term care facilities. (Banks, 2002).

Medication costs dropped from an average of \$3.80 per patient per day to just \$1.18 per patient per day in new nursing home facilities in New York, Missouri and Texas that have animals and plants as an integral part of the environment. (Montague, 1995).

Pets in nursing homes increase social and verbal interactions adjunct to other therapy. (Fick, 1992).

Seniors who own pets coped better with stress life events without entering the healthcare system. (Raina, 1998).

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Reading/ learning

A 2002 study by Karen Allen, Ph.D., a researcher at the State University of New York at Buffalo, showed that the presence of a dog lowered the blood pressure of children reading aloud. According to a September 2002 article in the journal of Psychosomatic Medicine, this research demonstrates “that pets can buffer reactions to acute stress as well as reduce the perception of stress.” One reason Allen believes this is true is because animals are not seen as judgmental. Past studies have shown similar results.

Researcher Aaron Katcher notes that the presence of an animal can create a therapeutic environment if it:

- ✓ draws attention outward
- ✓ turns off anxiety, anger, depression
- ✓ creates safety
- ✓ creates intimacy
- ✓ increases positive expectations of both self and others

The American Library Association estimates there are 27 million functionally illiterate adults in the United States.

Approximately 44 million adults cannot read well enough to fill out an application, read a food label, or read a story to a child. These individuals lack the literacy skills needed to find and keep decent jobs, support their children’s education, and participate actively in civic life (National Adult Literacy Survey, 1992).

- Children acquire literacy better when they are actively involved in meaningful experiences with it (Slaughter-Defoe 1992).
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