

Benefits of Having a Pet: Why Keeping Pets Gives You Positive Energy

Pets can be a lot of work, but it's ultimately worth it when you understand the mental, physical, and social benefits they can bring. Here are just some of the benefits of having a pet.

Pets are hard work. Taking care of an animal is a financial investment, a time commitment, and sometimes a source of frustration. However, any pet owner can attest that their pet is worth all of the effort.

This is because pets, by nature, provide us with an influx of positive energy^[1] that we can't find anywhere else. Specifically, there are four important ways that pets provide positive energy that all pet owners should be thankful for.

1. They Support Your Mental Health

No matter what you're going through, a pet will be by your side to help you through it. With the spread of COVID-19, the emotional support of our pets is more important than ever. There is increased fear, anxiety, and depression as we all face the unknown, experience loneliness from social distancing, and watch the confirmed cases and deaths rise. Our pets can provide real, critical support in the face of all this turmoil.

Some specific ways that pets help your mental health include:

Companionship

There are many times in your life where you will feel alone. Maybe you're social distancing, you just moved to a new city, you're going through a break-up, or you recently lost a family member. A pet will be there for you and can provide a stable relationship even when other relationships are unstable.

A study of 148 college women proved this when it found that those who owned pets had lower loneliness scores on the UCLA Loneliness Scale^[2].

Stress Reduction

Life gets hard. Homework can pile up at school, projects can create tension at work, or deadlines can loom over your head. When these things happen, it's nice to have a pet to come home to.

Pets are carefree, and petting, walking, or playing with them can take a load off after a long, not-so-carefree day.

Having Something to Care for

Pets need constant attention. For instance, dogs always need to be walked, fed, and played with. Even smaller pets like a gecko need constant care: they need food, water, tank cleanings, tank temperature checks, and great care when handling.^[3] That's a lot to attend to!

Having someone to care for helps your mental state by giving you a sense of responsibility over another life and by making you feel needed and important. Truly, pets rely on us for everything, and that can give your life an added sense of meaning and purpose.

They're Cute!

Having an adorable little friend to come home to would put a smile on anyone's face. Whether you have a dog with floppy ears and a big smile, or a gecko with big bright eyes and tiny little toes, having such a cute creature to call your own brings joy and is a source of pride.

ESAs (Emotional Support Animals) are proof of the mental support that pets can provide. ESAs are helpful for people with more serious mental health conditions like panic disorders, major depression, or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder^[4]. Dogs, cats, birds, and even pigs can be ESAs and have helped support people with these conditions in ways that other humans cannot express.

2. They Support Your Physical Health

In addition to supporting our mental health, pets also provide positive energy by supporting our physical health. According to the National Center for Health Research, here are some of the ways dogs improve physical health ^[5].

Exercise and Fitness

Exercise and fitness come to mind first when we think about physical health. This benefit is seen most in dog owners, since dogs are high-energy. They frequently need to go on walks or runs, and if your dog is walking, then so are you.

Routine exercise can be hard for non-dog owners to commit to. However, as soon as you adopt a dog, you have another life who is depending on you to establish and maintain that routine.

Allergy Immunity

Believe it or not, research suggests that kids who grow up around animals are more likely to develop an immunity to bacteria and pet allergens. This is especially true for kids who grow up on farms with animals like dogs, cats, cows, horses, and chickens.

Reduced Cardiovascular Risk and Lower Blood Pressure

Pet owners have less cardiovascular problems and lower blood pressure. This could be a result of more exercise, higher emotional support in the face of stress, or a combination of both.

A recent study by Washington State University^[6] found that students who were able to pet an animal for just ten minutes significantly reduced the production of the stress hormone cortisol. Imagine how much you could reduce stress if you had an animal nearby all the time!

Less Medical Care

Studies have found that those who own pets, specifically dogs, seek general medical care less frequently than those who are non-pet owners. This makes sense considering the mental and physical benefits of owning pets. In a 1992 study, participants reported less general health complaints and a score improvement on the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-30)^[7].

Easing Pain

People who experience chronic pain, such as migraines or arthritis, have reported that owning a pet helps them deal with that pain. The emotional support and lower stress that pets provide is a possible explanation for this. A less active, quiet animal may also be more comforting for those dealing with chronic pain.

The physical benefits that pets provide have an added bonus: when you feel good on the outside, you tend to feel good on the inside, too! So, the physical benefits that pets provide can double as benefits to your mood and mental health.

3. They Provide Social Support

Pets provide social support by being our best friends. A lot of people feel that they can relate to their pets, and even have similar personalities. For instance, more active people may adopt energetic dogs, and the bond between them is often quite strong.

Pets also provide social support by helping you meet new friends. For instance, talking about your pet can be a great icebreaker when you're meeting new neighbors, classmates, or coworkers. In my own experience, people love hearing about your pets and seeing pictures, too! If the person you're sharing with also has a pet, you automatically have something in common that can help foster a new friendship.

Dogs provide an added social support because of their active nature. You can meet new people or strike up a conversation with your neighbors just by taking your dog on walks or bringing them to the dog park.

Once you've met new friends, you can get to know them better by having doggy play dates or by sharing advice about training, illnesses, or behavioral problems. If you're a cat owner, don't worry; some cats also like having play dates with new friends, and fellow cat owners will also be a great source of advice and support in caring for your own cat.

Having uncommon, exotic pets has social advantages, too. If you don't know many people who have the same type of lizard or bird that you do, for example, this gives you a unique connection to others who do have that kind of pet. Even if you don't know anyone nearby, there are forums and online groups for people who own specific pets, and these can be great sources of both information and personal connection. They may be long distance, but the connections can be just as real, and just as positive!

4. They Offer Unconditional Love

If you have a pet, you know what true love is. They care about you no matter who you are or what you've done, and you will always matter to them. Even if you feel unstable in your human relationships, you will never have to question the security of your relationship with your pet.

Even if you have a quieter pet like a gecko or mouse, you can be certain that they love you just as much as a bouncy dog or cuddly cat does. They may show it in different ways, but that doesn't make it any less real.

Pets are also an example of how to love better. If we showed the same empathy and compassion to everyone that our pets show us, then the world would be a much happier place. Not only that, but the world would also be a whole lot better if we loved everyone to the same degree that our pets love us.

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