

The Benefits of Pets & Pet Therapy

For Mental Health

- The simple act of petting releases an automatic relaxation response
 - Humans interacted with their pet dogs and found that stroking the animal promoted the release of serotonin, prolactin and oxytocin--all hormones that can play a part in elevating mood. (14)
- Lowers anxiety and helps people relax
 - Pet companionship can reduce loneliness, stress and anxiety and promote feelings of relaxation. (14)
 - Friendly animals can decrease anxiety and sympathetic nervous system arousal by providing a pleasant external focus for attention (4)
 - Heart patients' anxiety ratings dropped by 24% when visited by a dog and human volunteer. (1)
 - Patients' levels of epinephrine, a hormone the body makes under stress, dropped 17% when visited by a person and a dog. (1)
- Provides comfort
 - The hypothesis that friendly animals can decrease anxiety and sympathetic nervous system arousal by providing a pleasant external focus for attention, promoting feelings of safety and providing a source of contact comfort has been supported by much of the research conducted to date. (4b)
- Reduces loneliness
 - "Animals make former pet-owners who live in nursing homes feel less lonely. They are an integral part of folks' lives. Many people grew up with animals and feel they are missing something. The research shows what we have long suspected—the availability of pets fills a void." (11)
 - Loneliness is one of the most damaging risk factors in people recovering from heart disease. Studies have shown that patients who suffer heart attacks but own pets are likely to have five times the survival rate of patients who are not pet owners (7)
 - They can decrease loneliness and depression by providing companionship, promoting an interesting and varied lifestyle and providing an impetus for nurturing. (4)
- Reduces a child's distress in a doctor's clinic
- Reduces boredom
- Decreases feelings of isolation and alienation
 - Help people feel less lonely or depressed. (17)
 - In fact, loneliness is one of the most damaging risk factors in people recovering from heart disease. Studies have shown that patients who suffer heart attacks but own pets are likely to have five times the survival rate of patients who are not pet owners. (7a)
 - They can decrease loneliness and depression by providing companionship, promoting an interesting and varied lifestyle and providing an impetus for nurturing. (4a)
- Brightens emotional outlook
 - Humans interacted with their pet dogs and found that stroking the animal promoted the release of serotonin, prolactin and oxytocin--all hormones that can play a part in elevating mood. (14)

- Stimulates communication
 - An increase number of spontaneous communication initiations produced during sessions. (6)
- Increases mental stimulation
 - Assist in recall of memories and help sequence temporal events in patients with head injuries or chronic degenerative diseases of the brain such as Alzheimer's disease. (8)
- Provides physical contact
 - Promoting feelings of safety and providing a source of contact comfort has been supported by much of the research conducted to date.
- Decreases agitation in Alzheimer's units
 - Alzheimer's patients who have pets in their home are less likely to suffer outbursts of anxiety or agitation. (14)
- Can provide an escape or distraction from the mundane nature of hospitals and doctor's offices
- Can act as catalysts in the therapy process
 - May help to break the ice
 - May reduce the initial resistance that might accompany entering therapy (13)

For Physical Health

- Lowers blood pressure and improves cardiovascular health
 - Pets can lower blood pressure. In a study of 48 stockbrokers with high blood pressure, those who adopted a pet had significantly lower blood pressure readings in stressful situations than stockbrokers who did not own a pet. (14)
 - Pressure in the heart's top left chamber dropped 10 % and pressure in the pulmonary artery dropped 5% when heart patients were visited by a dog and person. (1)
 - Pet owners are shown to have a higher 1 year survival rate following a heart attack as well as lower cholesterol levels. (15)
- Reduces the amount of medications some people need
 - One multi-state study found that medication costs dropped an average of \$3.80 per patient, per day, in new nursing home facilities where animals were included in the environment. (10)
- Breathing slows in those who are anxious
- Releases many hormones such as Phenylethylamine which has the same effect as chocolate (but not as tasty!)
- Diminishes overall physical pain
- Good for the animal too!!
 - Not only does your heart rate slow down and your blood pressure decrease. But the animal's does as well! (7)

In Physical Therapy

- Encourages increased movement in joints & faster recovery
- Maintain & increase motor skills
- Exercise longer
 - Stroke patients walked up to 35% farther and 35% faster with pets than with their human therapists. (16)

- Relax more during exercise
 - Results of client-satisfaction questionnaire indicated the participants were motivated, enjoyed the therapy sessions more, and felt the atmosphere of the sessions was less stressful during AAT (Animal-assisted Therapy) (6a)
 - An increase number of spontaneous communication initiations produced during sessions. (6)
- May increase the benefits of occupational therapy
 - Occupational therapy participants continue doing therapeutic activities for a longer duration when animals are present, potentially increasing the benefits of therapy (12).

When Learning to Read (PAWS for Reading)

- Practice reading skills in a less stressful environment
- Read to someone who is non-judgmental
 - Ironically, these animals may be able to offer children unique and valuable support precisely because they are active and willing participants, but with the qualifier that it is outside of the realm of their communicative abilities to verbally criticize or judge the child's progress (5)
- Reduces self-consciousness and increases self-confidence

For Children with Autism

- Animal therapy may increase language use and social interaction
 - One study found that children with autism engaged in significantly greater use of language as well as social interaction in their occupational therapy sessions that incorporated animals compared to standard occupational therapy (Sams, 2006).
 - Many children with autism feel a deep bond with animals and feel that they are able to relate better to them. (3)
 - Zachary, 5 year old child with autism, was more self-assured, took on new activities with curiosity, was more aware of his surroundings and the needs of people after meeting Henry, an 8 year old Australian cattle dog, and building a bond with him. (2a)

Benefits of Pet Therapy - Reference List

1. Altman, Lawrence. K. (2005, November 15). Study Identifies Heart Patient's Best Friend. *The New York Times*.
Retrieved March 17, 2015, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/16/health/16dog.html>
 - a. 12 minute bedside visit with dog can help reduce anxiety levels by 24% in heart failure patients compared to a 10% drop when patients had a visit from a human volunteer alone, and no changes in anxiety levels for patients who had no visitors.
 - b. Researchers found that patients' levels of epinephrine, a hormone the body makes under stress, dropped 17 percent when visited by a person and a dog, and 2 percent when visited only by a human. Epinephrine levels rose an average of 7 percent in the unvisited group in the study.
 - c. Pressure in the heart's top left chamber dropped 10 percent after a visit by volunteer and dog. the same pressure rose 3 percent for those visited by a volunteer and 5 percent for unvisited group.
 - d. Pressure in the pulmonary artery dropped 5 percent during and after a visit by volunteer and dog, but rose in the other two groups.
2. Boral, Jen. (2007, March 1) Effects of animal-assisted therapy on a child with autism. *The Albuquerque Tribute*.
 - a. Zachary, 5 year old child with autism, was more self-assured, took on new activities with curiosity, was more aware of his surroundings and the needs of people after meeting Henry, an 8 year old Australian cattle dog, and building a bond with him.
 - b. Halfway through the research project, Zachary spoke his first sentence.
3. Colliton, Anna (2008, February 17). Dogs Warm to Children with Autism: Man's best friend offers safety, companionship. *Columbia News Service*
 - a. Many children on the autistic spectrum relate better to animals than to people. They have trouble making verbal exchanges and understanding complex social cues.
 - b. "Dogs are like half-steps, because kids with autism, words get in the way of their relationships."
 - c. Service dogs can also help parents control uncooperative children and, with specialized training can help ensure the safety of children who are inclined to run away. Parents are able to restrain a child without having to grab their arm. The lease is attached to the child's belt and the dog is asked to sit so the child has a natural strain from running away
4. Friedmann, Erika *The Waltham Book of Human-Animal Interactions: Benefits and Responsibilities*.
 - a. They can decrease loneliness and depression by providing companionship, promoting an interesting and varied lifestyle and providing an impetus for nurturing.
 - b. The hypothesis that friendly animals can decrease anxiety and sympathetic nervous system arousal by providing a pleasant external focus for attention, promoting feelings of safety and providing a source of contact comfort has been supported by much of the research conducted to date.
5. Friesen, L. (2009). Exploring Animal-Assisted Programs with Children in School and Therapeutic Contexts. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 261-267.
 - a. Educators tend to think of the word support as indicating direct and verbal involvement when working with children. Ironically, these animals may be able to offer children unique and valuable social and emotional support precisely because they are active and willing participants, but with the qualifier that it is outside the realm of their communicative abilities to verbally criticize or judge the child's progress (Friesen 2009b).
6. Macauley, B. L. (2006). Animal-assisted therapy for persons with aphasia: A pilot study. *Journal of rehabilitation research and development*, 43(3), 357. Results of client-satisfaction questionnaire
 - a. indicated the participants were motivated, enjoyed the therapy sessions more, and felt the atmosphere of the sessions was less stressful during AAT (Animal-assisted Therapy)
 - b. An unexpected benefit included an increase number of spontaneous communication initiations produced during sessions; dog may act as a unique catalyst to motivate client and provide an atmosphere of unconditional acceptance for disordered speech.

7. McLaughlin, Christine R. Furry Friends Can Aid Your Health. Retrieved July 25, 2008, from DiscoveryHealth.com
 - a. In fact, loneliness is one of the most damaging risk factors in people recovering from heart disease. Studies have shown that patients who suffer heart attacks but own pets are likely to have five times the survival rate of patients who are not pet owners, according to Sinatra.
 - b. The relaxation doesn't just affect people; it affects the animal, too. "We've shown that when you pet a dog, not just your heart rate slows down and blood pressure drops, but so does the animal's," Beck says. This indicates a true, mutual human-animal bond.
8. Roth, J. (2000), Pet therapy Uses with Geriatric Adults, International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation, 4, 27-39
 - a. assist in recall of memories and help sequence temporal events in patients with head injuries or chronic degenerative diseases of the brain such as Alzheimer's disease.
9. Sams, M., Fortney, E., & Willenbring, S. (2006). Occupational Therapy Incorporating Animals for Children With Autism: A Pilot Investigation. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 60(3), 268-274.
 - a. "Results indicated that the children engaged in significantly greater Use of ...and significantly greater Social Interaction...in the occupational therapy sessions incorporating animals than in the standard occupational therapy sessions" (p 272)
10. Soares, Christine Pet Therapy: Huggable Healthcare Workers. from DiscoveryHealth.com
 - a. One multi-state study found that medication costs dropped an average of \$3.80 per patient, per day, in new nursing home facilities where animals were included in the environment.
11. Solomon, Nancy (2002).SLU Researcher: "Pet Therapy Works".
 - a. "Animals make former pet-owners who live in nursing homes feel less lonely. They are an integral part of folks' lives. Many people grew up with animals and feel they are missing something. The research shows what we have long suspected—the availability of pets fills a void."
12. Velde, B., Cipriani, J., & Fisher, G. (2003). Resident and Therapist Views of Anima-assisted Therapy: Implications for Occupational Therapy Practice. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, 43-50.
13. Zilcha-Mano, S., Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. (2011). Pet In The Therapy Room: An Attachment Perspective On Animal-Assisted Therapy. *Attachment & Human Development*, 541-561.
14. "The pet connection." *Mind, Mood & Memory* 2.8 (August 2006): 5(1). General OneFile. Gale. University of Delaware Library. 23 July 2008 <<http://proxy.nss.udel.edu:2104/itx/start.do?prodId=ITOF>>.
 - a. Pet companionship can reduce loneliness, stress and anxiety and promote feelings of relaxation. Research suggests that stroking a familiar dog can lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol, and that Alzheimer's patients who have pets in their home are less likely to suffer outbursts of anxiety or agitation.
 - b. Pets can lift depression. University of Missouri-Columbia scientists measured hormonal changes that occurred when humans interacted with their pet dogs and found that stroking the animal promoted the release of serotonin, prolactin and oxytocin--all hormones that can play a part in elevating mood.
 - c. Pets can lower blood pressure. In a study of 48 stockbrokers with high blood pressure, those who adopted a pet had significantly lower blood pressure readings in stressful situations than stockbrokers who did not own a pet.
 - d. Pet owners have fewer risk factors for heart disease. An Australian study of 5,741 men and women found that in addition to having lower blood pressure, those who owned pets had lower levels of blood cholesterol and triglycerides than those who did not own pets.
 - e. Pet ownership is linked to longevity. A University of Maryland study of 392 heart attack patients found that those who had dogs were more likely to be alive a year later than those who had no pets.

15. "Bringing up Bowser," AARP. May/June '07, p 70
 - a. Pet owners are shown to have a higher 1 year survival rate following a heart attach, have lower cholesterol levels and have demonstrated a slowing in the deterioration from Alzheimer's when compared to people who do not own pets.
16. (2007, August 6). New Research Taking Pet Therapy to New Levels. Retrieved July 2, 2008, from News Channel 11 Web site: <http://www.kcbd.com/Global/story.asp?S=6895015>
 - a. Stroke patients walked up to 35 percent farther and 35 percent faster with pets, than with their human therapists.
17. (2005, May 1). Going to the Dogs: Pet Therapy Benefits Patients. Yahoo! Health.
 - a. Help people feel less lonely or depressed
 - b. Reduce stress-induced symptoms
 - c. Offer entertainment
 - d. Provide a welcome distraction for pain and illness
 - e. Bring out a person's nurturing instincts
 - f. Make people feel safe and unconditionally accepting
 - g. Brain tumor patients with weakness on the right side of their body might strengthen their right hand, by brushing a dogs coat or throwing a ball for a dog to fetch.