

Therapeutic Benefits of Pets

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Pets are a great addition to any household, and they bring tangible benefits to their owner, too – not only are they loyal and loving, but they encourage exercise, help develop social skills, and bring families together. The benefits of [adopting a pet](#) go beyond how adorable and playful they are; in fact, one of their biggest advantages often goes unnoticed. Pets, especially cats and dogs, have [therapeutic benefits](#) that reinforce just how special they are both to society and their individual owners.

Love

It sounds like a cliché, but it's true – pets bring love with them. In particular, dogs have such a strong sense of loyalty that they love with all their heart. It goes without saying that a strong, loving companion can lift the spirits of even the most cynical, and for many people pets offer a respite from loneliness and give them someone to greet in the morning or so good night to before bed.

Increased Social Interaction

One of the most common associations with depression is loneliness. Owning a pet, however, [actively increases social interactions](#) by becoming the conversation starter – in parks, dog training classes, or in a neighborhood. For people who suffer from social anxiety, pets can be invaluable in helping them overcome their problems as they are forced to interact in a safe and polite environment.

Staying Active

There comes a certain point in all our lives where we're simply not as active as we used to be. And studies have shown that spending too much time indoors can be a breeding ground for depression. Yet even the laziest of pets require daily exercise. Owning a pet almost mandates that the [owner get active themselves](#); whether it's an evening walk or down at the beach, most pets love to be outdoors and love even more when their owner joins them.

Routine and Responsibility

Doctors are often found telling patients suffering from depression that assuming responsibility and [a structured, daily routine](#) can go a long way in alleviating depression. Drug addicts, too, often need stability to overcome their addiction and move forward with their lives. Pets require responsibility and naturally bring routine. Dogs need to be fed at specific times and taken care of in the same manner as a new-born baby, and almost demand responsible owners to thrive. While many people suffering from depression or other illnesses often feel incapable of even feeding themselves, but it's amazing what people are capable of when they learn that there are others depending on them.

Physical Contact

All that stroking and patting on the head isn't just for the cat and dog. Humans are social creatures, and [crave physical contact](#) to give us a sense of belonging. Studies have shown that the simple act of physical contact with a living creature can give us the affection and interaction needed to decrease the symptoms of depression.

Overcoming Addiction

Pets have been shown to [help alcoholic and drug addicts](#) overcome their problems following successful intervention and [substance abuse rehabilitation](#), especially for users of synthetic drugs that are known to cause mood swings, such as krokodil. Studies have shown that spending time with pets, whether it's on a walk or simply sitting in a chair stroking their fur, is a natural way to reduce stress, which can be a trigger for addicts to relapse. They also provide a positive influence by bringing joy and happiness into an addict's life, showing them a simpler and happier side to life. Finally, pets can help alleviate boredom, which is another important factor in relapse cases; with so much time spent caring and playing with a pet, the addict's risk of relapse is reduced.

Conclusion

Pets aren't superheroes; they're not able to help people overcome their problems by themselves – it takes willingness from the owner for that. However, for the reasons listed above – and countless others not included here – they can be an invaluable part of the helping somebody overcome depression, addiction, or a range of other problems. While it's always important that a person be in a position to own a pet (the positives of pet ownership might be compromised if, for instance, a dog would cause more anxiety than it would help diminish), those that do will find a loving companion who asks for little but gives a lot.