Cats and dogs have been shown to improve the quality of life of people in long-term care facilities. A study conducted by the Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI) found that animal-assisted therapy (AAT) reduced depressive symptoms and improved cognitive function. Self-perceived quality of life was also greatly improved among those who participated in AAT. For example, a study of older adults with mental illness concluded that AAT reduced depressive symptoms and improve quality of life. For those who may not be able to own or live with a pet, there's good news! They can still experience the benefits of the human-animal bond. Research shows that pet ownership can aid in the recovery process and help alleviate stress, enhance social interaction, and improve mental health outcomes. Specifically, pet ownership can:
- Reduce feelings of loneliness among older adults.
- Improve physical activity.
- Facilitate rehabilitation.
- Reduce obesity.
- Encourage physical activity.
- Promote socialization.
- Improve mental health outcomes.
- Reduce stress levels.
- Improve resiliency against mental health disorders.
- Enhance social interaction.
- Improve self-esteem.
- Support cardiovascular health.
- Improve overall health.

**Pet Owners Live Longer**

Research has shown that pet owners, particularly dog owners, are more likely to engage in recommended physical activity, including walking. Studies have found that compared with non-dog owners, the odds of obtaining at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity were significantly higher for dog owners, and the odds of any physical activity were significantly higher among dog owners compared with non-dog owners. A study of 2,400 cat owners concluded that cat owners were significantly more likely (96.5%) to complete cardiac rehabilitation than non-owners, with six studies demonstrating a significant lower risk of death among dog owners. Other studies have shown that pet owners were significantly more likely to complete rehabilitation in the cardiac rehabilitation program.

**Pet Ownership Increases Physical Activity and Reduces Obesity**

Research has shown that pet owners, particularly dog owners, are more likely to engage in recommended physical activity, including walking. A study of 2,199 subjects noted significantly higher odds of completing physical activity among pet owners compared with non-owners.

**Pets Reduce Stress Levels**

Interactions between dogs and humans may be complex and involve several additional mental factors. One major contributing factor for the mental health benefits of pets is their ability to reduce stress levels. Studies have shown that the presence of pets or friendly animals can effectively reduce heart rate and blood pressure, or buffer increases in these variables. Additionally, pets can help reduce feelings of loneliness and improve mood and overall well-being.

**Non-Pet Owners**

For Non-Pet Owners

For those who may not be able to live with a pet, there is good news! They can still experience the benefits of the human-animal bond through virtual interactions. The HABRI offers virtual animal-assisted therapy (V-AAT) and virtual animal-assisted activities (VAAA) to help you connect with animals and improve your quality of life. For example, a study of caregivers with mild to moderate stress and those with severe stress and improved with virtual pets indicated that virtual pets can effectively reduce stress and improve quality of life. For more information about the health benefits of pets, visit www.habri.org.