

Top 5 Health Benefits of Cat Ownership

Do you have cats in your life or are you considering cat ownership? Scientific research demonstrates there are many health benefits of cat ownership for people of all ages! According to the Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI), science shows that cat ownership can:

1

Protect Against Allergies & Asthma

Research has demonstrated the positive impact of early childhood exposure to cats on the development of asthma and allergies later in life. A birth cohort study enrolling over 700 newborn participants found that, after an 18-year follow-up, those with an indoor cat in the first year of life had nearly half the risk of developing allergies to cats later in lifeⁱ. In a study of more than 350 infants born to mothers with a history of asthma, researchers found that exposure to a cat from birth significantly lowered the prevalence of asthma among these high-risk participantsⁱⁱ.

2

Assist Those with Autism & Their Families

Cat ownership may confer benefits to children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and their families. In a study surveying families with a child with ASD, most parents reported the family cat was affectionate with their child with ASDⁱⁱⁱ. In a separate study when families with children with ASD were asked about their family pet, most parents reported that the family pets, which included cats, were both closely bonded with their child with ASD, and that they also increased social behavior in the children^{iv}. Additionally, the calmer, quieter demeanor of many cats is theorized to be a better fit for children with ASD who have sensitivities that might be triggered by a loud, highly-active dog.

3

Improve Heart Health & Resiliency

Research suggests a relationship between cat ownership and resiliency against heart attacks and other cardiovascular diseases (CVD). A study of over 2,400 cat owners concluded there was a significantly lower relative risk for death due to cardiovascular diseases, including stroke and heart attack, in participants with past or current cat ownership, compared to those without cats as a pet at any time during a 20 year follow-up^v. A possible explanation for this is cats' ability to buffer the heart's responses to acute stress and to diminish perceptions of stress^{vi}.

4

Alleviate Social Isolation & Loneliness

Loneliness and social isolation are significant determinants of poor health^{vii}, especially for older adults. A cross sectional survey of 830 older adult primary care patients who lived alone found that those who owned a pet were 36 percent less likely to report loneliness than non-owners in the same group^{viii}. A study of high school students aged 13-19 found that those who reported owning pets, including cats, had significantly lower levels of loneliness compared to their non-pet-owning peers^{ix}. Social support has been shown to be an important factor in decreasing depression and enhancing resilience to stress,^x and science has found a correlation between pet ownership and enhanced social support.

5

Boost Mental Health

Research suggests that companion animals can improve self-esteem and self-image among adolescents, which may provide further benefits for individuals with anxiety and depression^{xi}. The calming presence of a cat has been found to help people manage a mental health challenge. The routine and care associated with cat ownership can help instill a stronger sense of identity and provide purpose, which contributes to better management of symptoms^{xii}.



For more information about the human-cat bond, please visit www.habri.org