Loneliness

Pets Reduce distinct attachment styles toward human caregivers.19 A 2017 study found that in comparison to food, toy and scent, cats most preferred human social interaction.20 Pets can provide people with the kind of social support that can help reduce loneliness and isolation.1 In a recent study, 97% of respondents (pet owners and non-owners) believe pet interaction can help reduce loneliness.6 Research has also demonstrated that pet owners scored higher on all aspects of meaningful existence, control and self-endorsement than non-pet owners.9 Pets also provided a distraction for those living alone against mental health disorders, which is likely to be achieved through the provision of a meaningful activity, engaged social interaction and increased socialization. These benefits may also increase resilience and a sense of purpose in older adults.7 Pets may positively influence their mental health outcomes. A study involving 217 people found that pet owners were less fearful and less preoccupied than non-owners.6 Research has further demonstrated that those with pets had significantly lower heart rate and blood pressure in response to stress. In one study involving 381 participants, those with dogs or cats had significantly lower heart rate and blood pressure and faster recovery of these parameters to baseline after cessation of stress.1

Pets Improve Mood & Fight Depression

Pets can provide people with the kind of social support that can help reduce loneliness and isolation.1 In a recent study, 97% of respondents (pet owners and non-owners) believe pet interaction can help reduce loneliness.6 Research has also demonstrated that pet owners scored higher on all aspects of meaningful existence, control and self-endorsement than non-pet owners.9 Pets also provided a distraction for those living alone against mental health disorders, which is likely to be achieved through the provision of a meaningful activity, engaged social interaction and increased socialization. These benefits may also increase resilience and a sense of purpose in older adults.7 Pets may positively influence their mental health outcomes. A study involving 217 people found that pet owners were less fearful and less preoccupied than non-owners.6 Research has further demonstrated that those with pets had significantly lower heart rate and blood pressure in response to stress. In one study involving 381 participants, those with dogs or cats had significantly lower heart rate and blood pressure and faster recovery of these parameters to baseline after cessation of stress.1

The Oxytocin System

One is undoubtedly a recognized reason for the positive health benefit provided by pets is the activation of the oxytocin system. Oxytocin is a hormone that plays a powerhouse in bonding, trust and attachment between a mother and her infant. Oxytocin causes many physiological changes, including decreases in heart rate and blood pressure, decreasing blood pressure, inhibiting stress responses, slowing heart rate and breathing, decreasing blood pressure, inhibiting stress responses. Oxytocin, commonly known as the ‘bonding hormone’, plays a powerful role in bonding, trust and altruism between human and non-human primates, including humans.20 Oxytocin helps support the neural basis of social attachment and affiliative behavior. Oxytocin has also been shown to promote pair-bonding in non-human species, including humans, who experience a stronger preference for their own species.21 Oxytocin is also involved in the regulation of emotional responses, such as empathy and social bonding.

Pets Provide Long-Term Support for Those with Mental Health Challenges

In good times and in bad, we can turn to our pets for comfort, joy and support. HABRI hopes that in sharing this information, more people will benefit from the human-animal bond as a source of support in this time of need. For more information about the health benefits of pets, visit www.mhanational.org.

TOP 5 MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS OF HAVING A PET

1 Pets Alleviate Stress

2 Pets Improve Mood & Fight Depression

3 Pets Reduce Loneliness

4 Pets Improve Wellbeing

5 Pets Provide Long-Term Support for Those with Mental Health Challenges