

Do it Well

Easy ways to achieve health and wellness

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Pets can decrease your:

- Blood pressure
- Cholesterol levels
- Triglyceride levels
- Feelings of loneliness

Pets can increase your:

- Opportunities for exercise and outdoor activities
- Opportunities for socialization

Source: Centers for Disease Control. www.cdc.gov. Accessed Nov. 5, 2014.

Can Pets Help Keep You Healthy? Exploring the Human-Animal Bond

You take good care of your pet, but what's your pet done for you lately? Scared intruders from your door? Given you a loving nuzzle? People have lots of reasons for owning pets. Now a small but growing body of research suggests that owning or interacting with animals may have the added benefit of improving your health.

People and animals have a long history of living together and bonding. Perhaps the oldest evidence of this special relationship was discovered a few years ago in Israel—a 12,000-year-old human skeleton buried with its hand resting on the skeleton of a six-month-old wolf pup. "The bond between animals and humans is part of our evolution, and it's very powerful," says Dr. Ann Berger, a physician and researcher at the NIH Clinical Center in Bethesda, Maryland.

Today, animal companions are more popular than ever. The pet population nationwide has been growing dramatically for nearly a half century, with two-thirds of U.S. households having at least one pet.

"When you see how long we've had pets in our lives, and how important they are to us today, I think it's amazing that the study of human-animal interactions is still so new," says Dr. Sandra Barker, Director of the Center for Human-Animal Interaction at Virginia Commonwealth University. "Researchers have only recently begun to explore this wonderful relationship and what its health benefits might be."

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“Can Pets Help...” continued

“The general belief is that there are health benefits to owning pets, both in terms of psychological growth and development, as well as physical health benefits,” says Dr. James Griffin, a scientist at NIH’s Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. “But there have been relatively few well-controlled studies. That’s the state of the science, in a nutshell.”

Some of the largest and most well-designed studies in this field suggest that four-legged friends can help to improve our cardiovascular health. One NIH-funded study looked at 421 adults who’d suffered heart attacks. A year later, the scientists found, dog owners were significantly more likely to still be alive than those who did not own dogs, regardless of the severity of the heart attack.

Another study looked at 240 married couples. Those who owned a pet were found to have lower heart rates and blood pressure, whether at rest or when undergoing stressful tests, than those without pets. Pet owners also seemed to have milder responses and quicker recovery from stress when they were with their pets than with a spouse or friend.

Several studies have shown that dog owners may get more exercise and other health benefits than the rest of us. One NIH-funded investigation looked at more than 2,000 adults and found that dog owners who regularly walked their dogs were more physically active and less likely to be obese than those who didn’t own or walk a dog. Another study supported by NIH followed more than 2,500 older adults, ages 71-82, for three years. Those who regularly walked their dogs walked faster and for longer time periods each week than others who didn’t walk regularly. Older dog walkers also had greater mobility inside their homes than others in the study.

Man’s best friend may also help you make more human friends, too. Several studies have shown that walking with a dog leads to more conversations and helps you stay socially connected. And studies have clearly shown that people who have more social relationships tend to live longer and are less likely to show mental and physical declines as they grow older. “It’s hard to walk a dog and not have someone talk to you or interact with you, compared to walking alone,” says Barker.

Other research suggests that pet ownership may hold special benefits during childhood. “When children are asked who they talk to when they get upset, a lot of times their first answer is their pet,” says Griffin, an expert in child development and behavior. “This points to the importance of pets as a source of comfort and developing empathy. In fact, therapists and researchers have reported that children with autism are sometimes better able to interact with pets, and this may help in their interactions with people.”

“I think we’re just at the tip of the iceberg in terms of what we know about the human-animal bond and its potential health benefits,” Barker says. “This area is primed for a lot of research that still needs to be done.”

National Institutes of Health. www.nih.gov. Accessed Oct 21, 2014.

Be Prepared to Stay Safe and Healthy in Winter

Winter storms and cold temperatures can be hazardous, but if you plan ahead, you can stay safe and healthy.

Take these steps for your home

Many people prefer to remain indoors in the winter, but staying inside is no guarantee of safety. Take these steps to keep your home safe and warm during the winter months.

- Winterize your home:
 - Install weather stripping, insulation and storm windows
 - Insulate water lines that run along exterior walls
 - Clean out gutters and repair roof leaks
- Check your heating systems:
 - Have your heating system serviced professionally to make sure it is clean, working properly and ventilated to the outside
 - Inspect and clean fireplaces and chimneys
 - Install a smoke detector and test batteries monthly
 - Have a safe alternate heating source and alternate fuels available
 - Prevent carbon monoxide (CO) emergencies
- Install a CO detector to alert you of the presence of the deadly, odorless, colorless gas. Check batteries regularly
- Learn symptoms of CO poisoning: headaches, nausea and disorientation



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“Be Prepared...” *continued*

Don't forget to prepare your car

Get your car ready for cold weather use before winter arrives:

- Service the radiator and maintain antifreeze level; check tire tread or, if necessary, replace tires with all-weather or snow tires
- Keep gas tank full to avoid ice in the tank and fuel lines
- Use a wintertime formula in your windshield washer
- Prepare a winter emergency kit to keep in your car in case you become stranded. Include:
 - blankets
 - food and water
 - booster cables, flares, tire pump and a bag of sand or cat litter (for traction)
 - compass and maps
 - flashlight, battery-powered radio and extra batteries
 - first-aid kit
 - plastic bags (for sanitation)

Equip in advance for emergencies

When planning travel, be aware of current and forecast weather conditions.

Be prepared for weather-related emergencies, including power outages.

- Stock food that needs no cooking or refrigeration and water stored in clean containers
- Ensure your cell phone is fully charged
- When planning travel, be aware of current and forecast weather conditions
- Keep an up-to-date emergency kit, including:
 - Battery-operated devices, such as a flashlight, a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio and lamps
 - extra batteries
 - first-aid kit and extra medicine
 - baby items
 - cat litter or sand for icy walkways

Take these precautions outdoors

Work slowly when doing outside chores.

Many people spend time outdoors in the winter working, traveling or enjoying winter sports. Outdoor activities can expose you to several safety hazards, but you can take these steps to prepare for them:

- Wear appropriate outdoor clothing: layers of light, warm clothing; mittens; hats; scarves; and waterproof boots
- Sprinkle cat litter or sand on icy patches
- Learn safety precautions to follow when outdoors:
 - Be aware of the wind chill factor
 - Work slowly when doing outside chores
 - Take a buddy and an emergency kit when you are participating in outdoor recreation
 - Carry a cell phone

- Protect your family from carbon monoxide:
 - Keep grills, camp stoves and generators out of the house, basement and garage
 - Locate generators at least 20 feet from the house
 - Leave your home immediately if the CO detector sounds, and call 911

Do this when you plan to travel

When planning travel, be aware of current and forecast weather conditions.

- Avoid traveling when the weather service has issued advisories
- If you must travel, inform a friend or relative of your proposed route and expected time of arrival
- Follow these safety rules if you become stranded in your car:
 - Stay with your car unless safety is no more than 100 yards away, but continue to move your arms and legs
 - Stay visible by putting bright cloth on the antenna, turning on the inside overhead light (when engine is running) and raising the hood when snow stops falling
 - Run the engine and heater only 10 minutes every hour
 - Keep a downwind window open
 - Make sure the tailpipe is not blocked

Above all, be prepared to check on family and neighbors who are especially at risk from cold weather hazards: young children, older adults and the chronically ill. If you have pets, bring them inside. If you cannot bring them inside, provide adequate, warm shelter and unfrozen water to drink.

No one can stop the onset of winter. However, if you follow these suggestions, you will be ready for it when it comes.

Source: Centers for Disease Control. www.cdc.gov. Accessed Nov. 5, 2014.

Exercising in Cold Weather

Exercise has benefits all year, even during winter. But before you brave the cold, take a few extra steps to stay safe. If you want to walk, ski, ice skate, shovel snow or do other outdoor activities when it's cold outside:

- Check the weather forecast
- Watch out for snow and icy sidewalks
- Warm up your muscles first; try walking or light arm pumping before you go out
- Wear several layers of loose clothing as the layers will trap warm air between them
- Avoid tight clothing, which can keep your blood from flowing freely and lead to loss of body heat
- Wear a waterproof coat or jacket if it's snowy or rainy as well as a hat, scarf and gloves

Source: National Institute on Aging. www.nia.nih.gov. Accessed Jul 18, 2014.

Get Going: Burpees



How to do Burpees:

1. Squat
2. Kick feet back into a push-up position
3. Drop your chest to the floor and do a push-up
4. Return to squat
5. Jump into the air as high as you can

Benefits:

Burpees are a full body exercise that you can complete anywhere. Because you engage several muscles to complete a burpee, your strength to perform everyday activities increases. They also help boost your endurance and are a great addition to any workout. Check out burpee challenges online for the ultimate burpee workout and challenge your friends and family to do it with you.

Conscientious Cuisine: Carrot Soup with Orange and Ginger

This warm, spiced soup is just the dish to chase the first winter chill away. A subtle combination of carrots, citrus and fragrant ginger, it can be served as a colorful appetizer or alongside a light sandwich for a leisurely lunch. Beta-carotene from carrots, vitamin C from orange juice and gingerol from ginger all provide beneficial antioxidant properties.

- 1 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
- 4 cups chopped carrots, peeled, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 1 cup chopped yellow onions
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 cups low-sodium chicken broth (vegetable stock or broth may be substituted)
- 4 large strips orange zest
- 1 tsp. finely minced fresh ginger
- 1/2 cup orange juice
- 1 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice, optional
- Salt and ground black pepper to taste
- 1/4 cup chopped chives (dill may be substituted)

In large pot, heat oil over medium-high heat and add carrots and onions. Sauté about 7-8 minutes. Add garlic and sauté additional 2 minutes.



Add broth and orange zest strips. Cover and bring to a boil. Reduce heat, uncover and simmer until carrots are tender, about 10-12 minutes. Let mixture cool for several minutes. Discard orange zest strips.

Working in batches, in food processor or blender purée mixture until velvety smooth. Return soup to pot. Stir in ginger and orange and lemon juices. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Over low heat, let soup simmer for 5 minutes for flavors to mingle. Garnish with chives and serve.

Makes 4 servings.

Per serving: 150 calories, 5 g total fat (1 g saturated fat), 23 g carbohydrate, 6 g protein, 4 g dietary fiber, 140 mg sodium.

Source: American Institute for Cancer Research. www.aicr.org. Accessed Nov. 14, 2014.

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