



On International Cat Day: Columnist Shares Mental Health Benefits of Pet Ownership

by Lynda Killoran
August 8 2022 4:39 PM

Today is International Cat Day, and there are many other days in August to celebrate your furry best friends! Centerstone's Lynda Killoran provides insight into how great it is and how challenging it can be to care for our pets. Still, the best benefit is a decrease in mental health struggles—as it releases the "happy hormones" known as oxytocin, dopamine and serotonin!

After a bad day at school or work, many people look forward to being home with someone or *something* they love. Coming home to a beloved pet can be truly comforting. Cats, dogs...a multitude of animals are often considered best friends - they are loyal, loving, and can often sense when their human is feeling a little low.



Studies show that pets can make us happier by lowering blood pressure and releasing the "happy hormones" known as oxytocin, dopamine, and serotonin.

"Having a pet also makes people feel less lonely," says Lynda Killoran, therapist at Centerstone. "For those who struggle with sadness or addiction, it can help them be less likely to relapse or have depressive episodes. Pets often give them a sense of purpose and connection."

On the other hand, it's important to remember that pet ownership requires commitment and costs. If you go out of town a lot, or you have a family member with pet allergies, and your budget can't withstand the extra food, veterinary bills or occasional chewed up furniture, there are other ways to enjoy pets. You can volunteer at a local animal shelter, have fun with friends and family at an animal café or even temporarily pet-sit or foster an animal to see if you might want that!

If you are considering owning a pet, here are some benefits that our favorite furry friends might provide to you:

- Animals rely on us for feeding, exercise, and other basic needs like playtime and support. Being responsible for another living thing also makes us feel good by feeling needed and loved by them.
- We are more apt to care for ourselves when something or someone else also relies on us. Pets bring a strong sense of responsibility into the owner's life.
- Not only do you feel connected to your pet, but you might also begin to feel connected to other pet owners! You can talk about your pets as an icebreaker. Who doesn't want to brag about their pets?
- Studies show that animals provide a sense of comfort and closeness. "When someone feels anxious or depressed, animals might sense that and hop into our laps and activate the senses," says Killoran. "We can feel the animal, see the animal, hear the animal, etc. It allows us the opportunity to feel grounded in our senses and might even lower our stress and anxiety."
- **Physical Activity.** "Pets promote exercise," says Killoran. "Most pets require outside time to potty or to exercise, and it influences us to get up and get moving for them."
- "Some animals are trained to be service animals to help recognize stress situations, to help someone navigate, or to be aware of signs of mental distress," says Killoran. "Service animals are trained to meet the needs of their owners—prompts to take medications, reminders to breathe when anxious, and much more."

Owning a pet may have some challenges, but the rewards may be priceless!

If you or someone you know is struggling with their mental health, Centerstone can help. Call [1-877-HOPE123](tel:1-877-HOPE123) (1-877-467-3123) for more information.

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