

# TOP 5 BENEFITS

## of the human-animal bond from the Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI)



### Pets Alleviate Stress

Owning a pet is linked to significantly lower heart rate and blood pressure in response to stress. In one study of cardiovascular reactivity to stress, those with pets had significantly lower resting baseline heart rates and blood pressure and faster recovery of these parameters to baseline after cessation of stress.<sup>1</sup>

A national poll of older adults (50-80) conducted by the University of Michigan asked about the health benefits of pets. The majority of pet owners believed that animals connect them to other people, provide companionship, reduce stress, help them be physically active, and cope with physical and emotional symptoms, including pain. Many respondents reported that their pets positively contribute to their health and well-being. Among pet-owning respondents, 79% reported reduced stress, 73% reported a new sense of purpose, 65% reported easier connections with others, and 64% reported they are more physically active.<sup>2</sup>

### Pets Fight Depression

According to a [HABRI survey of family physicians](#), 87% said their patients' mood or outlook had improved as a result of pet ownership. Another study found that pets, through serving as a distraction from typical symptoms and encouraging activity, helped people cope with depression and other long-term mental health issues.<sup>3</sup>

Research has also demonstrated that pet owners laugh more – one study found that those with dogs or cats laughed more in their daily lives than people without pets. Pet owners reported laughing more on a daily basis, including reactions to their pet and spontaneous laughter, compared to non-pet owners.<sup>4</sup>



### Pets Address Social Isolation & Loneliness



Pets can provide people with the kind of social support that can help reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation. A [survey](#) commissioned by HABRI and Mars Petcare<sup>5</sup> found that 85% of respondents (pet owners and non-pet owners) believe pet interaction can help reduce loneliness and 76% agree human-pet interactions can help address social isolation.

A 2016 study explored the role of pets in the social networks of people managing a long-term mental health problem. The study found that pets contributed to individuals developing routines that provided emotional and social support.<sup>6</sup>

In older adults, the role of pet ownership may provide a sense of purpose and meaning, reducing loneliness and increasing socialization. These benefits may also increase resilience in older adults against mental health disorders, which may positively influence their mental health outcomes.<sup>7</sup>

### Pets Improve Physical Fitness & Encourage Activity

Research demonstrates that owning a dog can lead to lower rates of obesity and increased weekly exercise. One study<sup>8</sup> analyzed data from the 2005 Michigan Behavioral Risk Factor Survey to assess the overall impact of dog walking on the level of total walking and leisure-time physical activity, including exercise and recreational activities. Results found that dog walking was associated with a significant increase in walking activity and physical activity. Compared with non-dog owners, the odds of obtaining at least 150 minutes per week of total walking were 34% higher for dog walkers, and the odds of doing any physical activity were 69% higher.



### Pets Facilitate Healing & Resiliency

Several studies have demonstrated an association between pet ownership and a lower risk of cardiovascular diseases and heart-related health issues.<sup>9</sup> Dog ownership has been associated with a lower incidence of cardiovascular disease and a reduced risk of mortality.<sup>10</sup>

Pet ownership has also been linked to increased coronary artery disease survival.<sup>11</sup> In a study of individuals with one or more cardiac risk factors, pet ownership was associated with greater adaptability to disturbances in the cardiovascular system.<sup>12</sup> A study of 2,400 cat owners concluded there was a significantly lower relative risk for death due to cardiovascular diseases, including stroke and heart attack, compared to non-owners during a 20-year follow-up.<sup>13</sup>



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.habri.org](http://www.habri.org).