



Why You Should Consider Getting a Pet if You're Dealing With Depression

Considering how much we love our pets, it's no surprise that [98 percent of owners](#) consider their furry friend a member of the family. Just as someone you love has a positive influence on your psyche, so does your pet. Case in point: Data indicates that 74 percent of pet owners experience improvements in mental health, including decreased feelings of loneliness, social isolation, anxiety, stress, and depression. On a deeper level, studies indicate that pets can help manage these symptoms when they're chronic, too. If you've been struggling with some form of depression—and you're not already one of 80 million U.S. households to own a pet—consider incorporating pet therapy into your treatment plan.

The Power of Pets

There are [specific reasons](#) why pets can boost your mood:

- **Have a Soothing Presence:** Whether you're petting your cat or dog or watching fish in an aquarium, research shows interacting with pets can lower blood pressure to a noticeable degree. Even more impressive, the simple presence of a pet can help heart attack survivors recover more quickly.

- **Provide Unconditional Love:** Not only do pets not judge, but oftentimes, they can detect when something is wrong and offer support in the form of a cuddle, paw, or lick—even just a simple look. Pets have the power to alter our behavior even if we had a terrible day. This is one of the reasons why therapy animals are so effective in hospital and nursing home environments.
- **Are a Welcome Distraction:** If you've ever been working at your computer and your cat comes over and walks (or sits) on your computer keys, it's likely that you become part frustrated and part amused. It's these moments that distract us from mundane or stressful activities that adversely affect our mood.
- **Encourage a Healing Touch:** Research suggests that interacting with animals (and humans) can decrease levels of the hormone cortisol while producing the hormone oxytocin—both of which can reduce stress while boosting the immune system and lowering blood pressure.
- **Keep Us on Our Toes:** According to psychologist-backed research, taking care of a pet is a full-time responsibility that can improve one's mental state and self-esteem, which can be assets in other areas of life such as a job. Looking after a furry friend also forces structure, thus helping with sleep patterns and one's daily schedule.

Best Breeds to Help Fight Depression

While any pet has the potential to help you fight depression, there are some specific breeds of [cats](#) and [dogs](#) that are known for being strong emotional support animals, such as:

- **Cats:** American shorthair, Siamese, Maine coon, ragdoll, American bobtail, Persian, Russian blue, sphynx, bengal, and manx.
- **Dogs:** Pug, labrador retriever, vizsla, dachshund, boxer, Newfoundland, cocker spaniel, Welsh corgi, and Staffordshire bull terrier.

Best Mood-Boosting Activities

Spending time outdoors with your pet—especially a dog—is mentally and physically good for both of you. If you're [in recovery](#), the extra boost of vitamin D from the sun coupled with activity with your pet can boost mood, reduce stress, improve sleep, provide relief from depression, and present opportunities for socialization—all of which can help you avoid a relapse. Take things a step further from walking by signing the two of you up for an agility training course, hitting the beach, meeting other dogs and their owners at a dog park, or obtaining a therapy animal certification to volunteer at a local hospital or assisted living home where others are in need of a boost.

The presence of animals in your life can have both short-term and long-term health benefits. If you're already in therapy for depression or substance abuse issues, owning a pet can help reinforce your treatment. Just make sure you're able to take care of a pet before adopting.

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