



# Pets and Mental Health

## The Paw-sitive Impact: How Having Pets Affects Your Mental Health

In an increasingly fast-paced world where stress and anxiety are often unwelcome companions, the presence of a furry friend can make all the difference. The bond between humans and animals is a special one, and research has shown time and again that having pets can significantly impact mental health in numerous positive ways.

- **Stress Reduction and Emotional Support**

Pets, whether they're cats, dogs, rabbits, or even smaller critters like hamsters, offer a unique form of companionship that can alleviate stress and provide emotional support. The simple act of petting a dog or stroking a cat can trigger a relaxation response, reducing levels of cortisol, the stress hormone, and increasing the production of serotonin, a neurotransmitter associated with feelings of well-being.

- **Combatting Loneliness**

Feelings of loneliness and isolation can take a toll on mental health, but having a pet can combat these emotions. Pets offer unconditional love and companionship, providing a constant source of comfort and support. They don't judge, and their presence can fill an empty space in a person's life, fostering a sense of belonging and connection.

- **Increased Physical Activity**

Dogs, in particular, are excellent motivators for physical activity. The daily routine of walking a dog not only provides exercise for the pet but also encourages the owner to get outside and move. Regular physical activity is essential for maintaining good mental health, as it helps to reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression and promotes overall well-being.

- **Sense of Purpose and Routine**

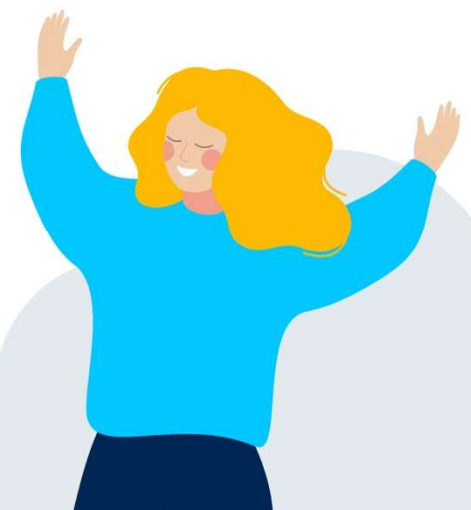
Caring for a pet gives individuals a sense of purpose and responsibility. Pets rely on their owners for food, shelter, and love, and fulfilling these needs can give people a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment. Establishing a routine centered around pet care can also provide structure to the day, which can be especially beneficial for those struggling with mental health issues.

- **Social Interaction**

Pets can also facilitate social interaction and help people build relationships with others. Whether it's chatting with fellow dog owners at the park or sharing stories about beloved pets online, animals can serve as a common ground for connecting with others. This social support network is crucial for mental well-being and can help combat feelings of loneliness and isolation.

- **Emotional Regulation**

Pets are incredibly attuned to their owners' emotions and can provide comfort during difficult times. They offer a non-judgmental ear to listen and a shoulder to lean on when life gets tough. Simply having a pet nearby can provide a sense of security and reassurance, helping individuals regulate their emotions and cope with stress more effectively.





## Care first Webinar Article

The benefits of having pets on mental health are undeniable. From reducing stress and loneliness to promoting physical activity and social interaction, the positive impact of furry companions is far-reaching. Whether you're a dog person, a cat person, or a lover of smaller critters, the bond between humans and animals is a powerful force for improving mental well-being. So, the next time you're feeling overwhelmed, take a moment to snuggle up with your furry friend and bask in the paw-sitive vibes they bring into your life.

### REMEMBER

Having a pet is a serious commitment and not something to do on a whim. You'll need to have the time, money and energy for a pet, as well as a calm home environment with routine and consistency. Fostering a pet or helping a friend with theirs can help you see whether having your own is right for you.

When you're ready to think about getting a pet, consider:

- How much outdoor space do you have
  - How active you are
  - How much time do you have to spend with your pet
  - How much money do you have for vet's bills, insurance, food, toys, etc.? Some charities offer low-cost vet care, but they are limited to certain areas and have financial criteria
- Animal charity PDSA has other key things to think about too.

### What if I can't have a pet?

If you can't afford a pet, live somewhere you're not allowed one, or you're worried about having times where you're too unwell to care for a pet, there are other options.

The simplest option may be spending time with friends' pets, whether that's walking their dogs, stroking their cats or cuddling their guinea pigs. They might be glad to have someone to pet sit for them while they're on holiday. You can also consider signing up as a house sitter: you look after someone's home, garden and pets in return for free accommodation.

If you miss having a dog in your life, you could sign up with one of the walking services. Vets/animal care companies also need people to foster pets while their owners are in hospital.

Contact a rescue centre near you to see what volunteering opportunities they may have. They may need volunteers to exercise, care for and socialise their pets. You could consider fostering an animal if you can have a pet on a short-term basis but can't commit to one long-term. Some shy or scared animals need the peace and quiet of a home while waiting to be adopted.

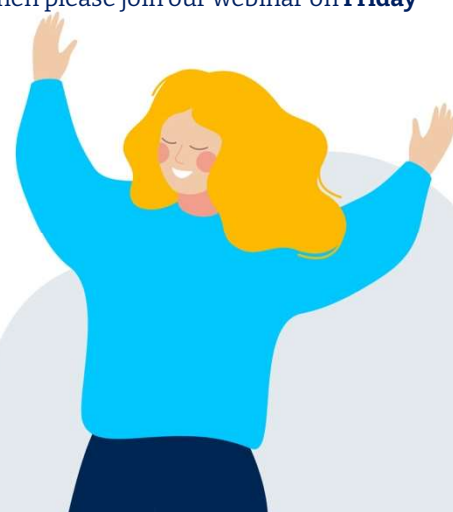
Cats Protection and Dogs Trust both need people to provide temporary foster care for pets belonging to people fleeing domestic violence who may not be able to take their pets into a refuge with them.

If you would like to learn more about '**Pets and Mental Health – What are the Benefits**' then please join our webinar on **Friday 1st March at 12pm** using the details below –

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/5812866624786795611>

If you are unable to join the webinar live, a recording of the session can be accessed using the same link above after the webinar has taken place.

If you wish to contact the Care first telephone counselling and information line then please don't hesitate to call the Freephone number provided by your organisation and you can speak to a professional in confidence.



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