Top 5 Health Benefits of Owning a Pet

By Sarah Grace Mccandless

<http://www.animalplanet.com/pets/benefits-of-pets/>

An apple a day may or may not actually keep the doctor away, but what about an animal a day? Now, that's a different story. In fact, when it comes to pet ownership, there are a number of proven health benefits for people, including physical, mental and emotional improvements, from enhancing social skills to decreasing a person's risk of heart attack. Keep reading to find out five reasons to open your home to a furry friend, and why doing so might be just what the doctor ordered.

If the idea of cuddling with a pet to help ward off allergies seems a little backwards to you, the following may come as a surprise: University of Wisconsin-Madison pediatrician James E. Gern has conducted a number of studies that demonstrate having a pet in the home can actually lower a child's likelihood of developing related allergies by as much as 33 percent. In fact, his research -- as published in the Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology -- shows that children exposed early on to animals tend to develop stronger immune systems overall. While this might not mean much for adults who are already struggling with longstanding allergies, it is good news for families in which this isn't already an established issue, but rather just a concern about what could happen down the road.

One of the fringe benefits of taking on the responsibility of pet ownership is that animals can be an instant icebreaker, whether they're with you or you're just using them as a topic of conversation. Of course, few people would suggest getting a pet solely for this purpose, but it's hard to overlook the fact that pets provide a great means for improving your socialization skills across the board, especially in terms of meeting and interacting with other pet owners. Though people sometimes may have a hard time getting to know each other, pets can be the common denominator that helps them connect -- even among people who don't seem to be very much alike.

Places to Mix and Mingle with your Pet

**Training classes:** Many instructors offer group classes such as puppy kindergarten, where you'll find others trying to master the same pet parenting skills.

**Dog parks:**A great opportunity for both you and your dog to play and interact with other dogs and owners alike. Just be sure your dog is properly socialized and up to date on all shots before introducing it into the mix.

**Outdoor cafes:** Many restaurants with outdoor seating options are also pet-friendly, and some even offer dog-specific items on the menu as well.

**Online:** Dogster.com, Catster.com and Petpop.com are just a few examples of popular pet-focused social networking sites that provide an instant, fun way to trade tips, trends and more.

Many pet owners would agree that a pet can fill your heart with love. So maybe it's only fitting that the presence of a pet can help improve the overall health of that organ, too. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institute of Health (NIH) have both conducted heart-related studies on people who have pets. The findings showed that pet owners exhibit decreased blood pressure, cholesterol and triglyceride levels -- all of which can ultimately minimize their risk for having a heart attack down the road. For those who have already experienced a heart attack, research also indicates that patients with a dog or a cat tend to have better recovery rates. These benefits are thought to be connected with pets' tendency to help reduce or at least control their owners' overall stress levels.

Fun Ways to Stay Fit with Fido:

If you're a dog owner who needs more of a workout than walking can provide, here are a few ideas:

* Jogging or running
* Biking
* Hiking
* Doga (i.e. Yoga for Dogs)
* Agility Training (Obstacle course-based dog sport)

Need a little motivation in the exercise department? Dogs can act as the perfect personal trainer, if only because most of them need to be walked several times a day. According to studies like those conducted by the Wellness Institute at Northwest Memorial Hospital, as long as you're the one holding the leash, you'll reap the rewards, which can include losing -- or at least maintaining -- weight. Research conducted by the National Institute of Health also supports this claim -- including one study of more than 2,000 adults, which found that dog owners responsible for walking their pups are less likely to be obese than dog owners who pass the duty off to someone else or those who don't own dogs at all.

Pets are a great way to beat the blues. Not only are they known to they offer unconditional love, but they may also give their owners a sense of purpose, which can be crucial for those feeling down in the dumps. Pets also combat feelings of loneliness by providing companionship, which can boost your overall mood and even bring you feelings of joy and happiness. This is particularly apparent among groups -- including the sick and elderly -- who may be on the receiving end of Animal-assisted Therapy (AAT) or Pet-facilitated Therapy (PFT). Many hospitals and nursing homes use these types of programs on a regular basis.

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**Breed ambassadors**

[**http://www.dogsbite.org/dangerous-dogs-pit-bull-owners.php**](http://www.dogsbite.org/dangerous-dogs-pit-bull-owners.php)

According to the Tufts study, the most public way in which pit bull owners managed breed stigma was to become a fierce advocate for the breed. These owners seek to "educate" the public -- often through their own well-behaved pets -- by discounting stereotypes and promoting the finer qualities of the breed. For instance, to help deflect the fear that pit bulls incite about children, one respondent kept a photo handy that showed three children rubbing her pit bull's tummy.**15**

Examples of breed ambassador imagery is easily found on the Internet, like the YouTube video, "[Pit Bull Viciously Attacks Child](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vL1trl1FMUw)," which depicts happy babies lying near pit bulls. Some breed ambassadors, however, take activism of the "Pit Bull Cause" to reckless levels. Despite warnings from pit bull experts to "avoid dog parks at all costs,"**16** such persons purposely visit dog parks to show other dog owners that pit bulls are safe, reliable dogs that are merely "misunderstood."

Breed ambassadors are also the most common pit bull advocates to appear at public hearings determining whether or not a city should adopt a pit bull law. A common tactic is to present their dog as a "therapy" dog ([which is not a "service" dog](http://blog.dogsbite.org/2010/08/department-of-justice-axes-monkeys.html)) that cuddles with senior citizens in rest homes. In a famous example of a trained "therapy" pit bull reverting back to genetic pit bull animal-aggression, Anna Klafter's pit bull, Nettie, unleashed an attack upon a mounted police horse.

Sergeant David Herrera was bucked off in the 2003 incident and suffered neck and back injuries. Klafter suffered a fractured skull after the horse kicked her in the face. At the time, Klafter had been trying to gain control of her "extensively trained" animal assisted therapy dog. Klafter had adopted the dog from the San Francisco SPCA, where she volunteered as a dog trainer.**17** The horse, AAA Andy, was bitten in the legs and belly and never worked another day of service duty.**18**

# Pit Bulls: What's Hype, What's Not

Do pit bulls get a bad rap? Experts weigh in.

By Pamela Babcock

<http://pets.webmd.com/dogs/features/pit-bulls-safety#4>

Doberman pinschers, rottweilers, and German shepherds topped lists of [dogs](http://pets.webmd.com/dogs/default.htm) some considered dangerous in the not-too-distant past.

These days, pit bulls often make headlines and it’s rarely good news. If it isn’t about an attack on a child or a shooting by police, it’s a tale of neglect or abuse. The heat of such reports has forged a frightening image of the pit bull as having a hair-trigger temper and a lock-jawed bite.

But pit bull advocates and some experts say the dogs get a bad rap. They say the dogs are not inherently aggressive, but in many cases suffer at the hands of irresponsible owners drawn to the dog's macho image who encourage [aggression](http://pets.webmd.com/dogs/guide/aggression-dogs) for fighting and protection.

Indeed, the ASPCA web site gives the breed an endorsement that could fit a golden retriever. It says, “A well-socialized and well-trained pit bull is one of the most delightful, intelligent, and gentle dogs imaginable.”

In general, pit bulls aren’t aggressive with people but are “less tolerant” of other dogs than many other breeds, says Pamela Reid, PhD, vice president of the ASPCA’s Animal Behavior Center in New York. They also have “great tenacity. They put their mind to something, and they do it. That’s what makes them great dogs for sports like weight pulling. They are very strong, athletic animals," Reid says.

Owning a pit bull should not be taken lightly. Some cities and towns have banned the breed. You also may face rising insurance rates or cancellation of your policy, difficulty renting, and the watchful eye of neighbors and passersby.

**Origins and Nature**

The American Pit Bull Terrier is technically the only true pit bull, although the American Staffordshire Terrier and Staffordshire Bull Terrier are often referred to as pit bulls. So are a handful of other breeds and mixed breeds.

Pit bulls were originally used for bull- and bear-baiting, and later were bred to fight dogs in an arena. They had “a fabulous reputation early on and were considered the ideal family pet because they were so good with people,” Reid says.

“Petey” from *The Little Rascals* was a pit bull. Helen Keller, President Theodore Roosevelt, and Fred Astaire all had the breed as family pets.

But the tide turned in the late 1990s, when pit bulls became popular among people who "weren’t focused on the positive attributes of the breed - they were looking for a strong, scary-looking dog," Reid says.

**National Attention**

The abuse of pit bulls drew national attention in 2007, when Atlanta Falcons quarterback Michael Vick pleaded guilty to running a dog-fighting operation. He spent nearly two years in federal prison.

Jim Gorant, a *Sports Illustrated* senior editor and author of *The Lost Dogs,* a book that documents Vick’s dogs and their path to redemption, says pit bulls are caught in a self-perpetuating cycle of incrimination and bad ownership.

“Every dog is an individual,” Gorant says. “Pit bulls are just dogs and if they are not raised properly and socialized and treated right, they can have behavior problems. But they aren’t any more problematic than any other breed by nature.”

**Bites, Bans, and More**

Opponents argue that pit bulls are more likely to attack. But the ASPCA, the American Veterinary Medical Association, and some other groups have recommend against breed-specific laws. They cite a study published in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Association* on Sept. 15, 2000.

The study, which focused on fatal dog attacks, notes difficulties identifying various breeds (particularly mixed breeds) and in calculating a bite rate. The researchers noted that there isn’t consistent data on breed populations and bites, especially when the [injury](http://pets.webmd.com/dogs/dog-sprains-strains) isn’t serious enough to require an ER visit.

Reid says many things can lead to a tendency toward aggression. That includes breeding dogs for protection, dog  fighting, social status, or financial gain. Abuse, neglect, chaining, tethering, and inadequate obedience training and supervision also make the list.

**Myths About Pit Bulls**

Here are three myths about pit bulls:

**They have locking jaws.** There’s nothing anatomically different about a pit bulls’ jaw - “they cannot lock,” Reid says. But like other terriers, “they are more likely than other breeds to grab a hold of something and to shake.” It doesn’t mean they won’t let go, but owners need to know how to break up a fight.

**They can tolerate huge amounts of pain.** “Pit bulls are incredibly wimpy in many respects - they don’t like to go in the cold and rain,” Reid says. But when aroused or agitated, they may be less responsive to pain.

**They’re unpredictable.** The popular notion is that pit bulls can be fine their entire lives and suddenly snap and turn on their owner. Reid says that’s no more likely to happen with pit bulls than it is with any other breed.

**Considering a Pit Bull?**

You’ll need to do more than the average dog owner to counteract negative perceptions. Socializing the dog with people and other animals is key. Here are some other tips:

* If your pit bull is friendly with other dogs, maintain that socialization by meeting up with friends or going to the [dog park](http://pets.webmd.com/dogs/guide/dog-park-behavior-know-risks-rewards), if your dog doesn’t get too rowdy in such settings.
* Monitor your dog’s play and be prepared to distract your dog if she gets too intimidating. “The ones that are friendly with other dogs are sort of the life of the party, but they can play rough sometimes because they are so strong,” Reid says.
* If your dog isn’t friendly with other dogs, make sure he’s on a leash and there are no unleashed dogs around.
* When it comes to other pets, Reid says some pit bulls “are absolutely lovely with other animals - cats and bunnies,” but others are not. Take introductions slowly. “The more you know about the dog, the better off your are,” Reid says.

Responsible pet ownership includes spaying or neutering your pet. That will help decrease some undesirable behavior, such as male dominance aggression.

## Looking Ahead

Awareness about pit bulls is growing and more are being adopted, says Stacey Coleman, executive director of the Animal Farm Foundation Inc., a Bangall, N.Y. pit bull advocacy group.

“It has gotten much better for the dogs,” Coleman says. “People have seen that these dogs are out there and deserve help right now.”

Of the 51 pit bulls seized from Vick’s kennels, about 17 have been adopted. About a dozen of those adopted dogs have passed their AKC Canine Good Citizen test and several have become therapy dogs.

Among them is Hector, a dog that is covered with physical scars but is "just great with other dogs, great with kids, and great with people,” Gorant says. Hector frequently visits hospitals, nursing homes, and schools.

If there’s an upside to the Vick case, Gorant hopes it helps sway public opinion because it helps people see pit bulls as victims. But he admits, there’s still “a long way to go.”

“On any given day, probably 10 people get bit by a dog,” Gorant says. “But it’s only news when it’s a pit bull.”

## [WHITE HOUSE](http://www.foxnews.com/category/politics/executive/white-house.html)

# Dr. Manny Alvarez: Mr. Trump, it's time for you to get a dog

<http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2017/08/11/mr-trump-its-time-for-to-get-dog.html>

President Harry Truman once supposedly said: “If you want a friend in Washington, get a dog.” Just about all presidents before and since have taken that advice – until President Trump. There’s even a book about the presidential pets, titled [“First Dogs, American Presidents and Their Best Friends.](https://www.workman.com/products/first-dogs)”

President Trump could sure use a good friend right now. I can only imagine all the tough, challenging decisions he is facing. I am still very bullish in supporting his agenda for our country. I still believe that he is a man who is thinking, working hard and keeping his promises to the American people.

Over the years, we have had many presidents who have worked very hard and have faced many challenges. As a physician, I have witnessed how pressure, long hours, and commitment to their country have placed a toll on their health and overall levels of stress. When they leave their presidencies, they seem to have aged from the burden of leading our country.

One way that presidents have decompressed is to have a furry friend. In fact, my research shows that possibly over 200 pets have resided in the White House. All the presidents have had some sort of dog or cat, and amazingly those pets developed a following.

*From a physician’s point of view, I can tell you that pets do generally improve your health, especially dogs.*

For example, Teddy [Roosevelt](https://www.nps.gov/thrb/learn/historyculture/the-roosevelt-pets.htm), who was intimately connected with land preservation and the creation of national parks, had enough animals for a small a zoo in the White House. The president’s pets and subsequent involvement in preserving land and national parks made him more human and connected with the American people. For this reason, President Trump should think about a pet.

From a physician’s point of view, I can tell you that pets do generally improve your health, especially dogs. To me, one of the greatest benefits they bring is keeping you fit and active. In [a study of dog owners](https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-017-4422-5) published this year by BioMed Central, dog owners typically walked an extra 20 minutes each day, the recommended length of a normal workout.

Thus, if the president had a dog and didn’t delegate dog-walking duty to an aide, he would be walking outside more. The exercise would help to keep his weight in check. At the same time, he would definitely improve his heart health by lowering his blood pressure and even controlling some of the blood chemistries.

For the president’s sake, the most important benefit of pets is that they reduce stress. According to [a report in Scientific American](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/pets-help-us-achieve-goals-and-redu/), researchers found that pet owners felt more confident and productive in their goals than their peers, even when the owners just thought about their pets. The pet owners also had lower blood pressure than their pet-less friends during a high-stress time.

In America, we doctors and health professionals have made dogs part of our health team, and for good reason. We bring them into hospitals, and we can see the magical changes the dogs create as a sick person spends time with them.

In addition, dogs definitely improve a person’s dopamine, oxytocin and serotonin levels. In one Japanese [study](http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2015/04/how-dogs-stole-our-hearts), researchers realized that dog owners who spent a lot of time staring into their dogs’ eyes increased levels of oxytocin (the bonding hormone) by up to 300 percent. By spending quality time with your dog or other pet, you will ease tension, improve your thinking, learn how to trust, and receive unconditional love.

In this crazy world of ours, where North Korea is threatening America with nuclear weapons, where terrorists are trying to kill civilians in the name of crazy ideology, and where economic ruin is sometimes unpredictable, we might just need a moment to reflect on what paths to take to achieve a better future.

For all these reasons from health benefits to relief from stress, I urge President Trump to get a dog or other pet.

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**How much can dogs really understand humans? Video by Fox News Channel.** [**https://www.youtube.com/embed/qz1hFGWxiH8**](https://www.youtube.com/embed/qz1hFGWxiH8)

**How can we identify bias?**

Video

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| Observations/Notes | Evidence | Questions/Wonders |
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Pictures

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Article(s)

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| Observations/Notes | Evidence | Questions/Wonders |
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Synthesize the evidence. What do you learn about bias? What should you look out for?