

Surprising health benefits of owning a pet

From boosting our activity levels to elevating our moods and staving off loneliness, the benefits of companion animals on our health have been well documented. Here, Dr Roy Page, executive director of the South African Companion Animal Council (SACAC), established in 2008 to raise awareness around responsible pet ownership, suggests four further benefits to owning a furry friend.

Pets can help...

...you connect with others: Pets are excellent companions but they can also coax less sociable owners out of their shells. Walks in the forest or to a park mean more opportunity for social interaction, with your pet acting as a handy ice-breaker.



Dogs and cats are sentient beings and provide comfort and companionship all their lives - enriching yours. What's more, they couldn't care less whether you're pretty, or pretty ugly, tall or short, fat or thin... their companionship comes without conditions. (Image: Orlovic, via Wikimedia Commons)

...reduce allergies in children: Conventional wisdom suggests that pets increase children's risk of developing allergies, however, according to a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, children who grow up with pets have a reduced risk of developing pet allergies as well as allergies to pollen and mould. The study also found that children exposed to pets were at less risk of developing asthma.

...reduce blood pressure: A study in the US found that stockbrokers who owned a pet had lower blood pressure readings during times of stress than those who did not. But pets don't only benefit the highly-strung. Owning a companion animal can help to reduce stress and hypertension in anyone. In turn, this helps to reduce the risk of a heart attack and heart disease.

...detect illness: Some animals can alert their owners to illness. Dogs with an acute sense of smell and awareness can detect cancer and predict epileptic seizures. In fact in the UK certain charities provide dogs to epileptics to act as early warning signs. It has been suggested that these animals pick up on changes in the smell or behaviour of their owners.

About the SACAC



The South African Companion Animal Council (SACAC) is the only industry-wide non-profit organisation promoting socially responsible pet ownership (RPO) in South Africa. The SACAC's members believe in the positive experience of owning a pet and that anyone who is able and willing to responsibly care for one should be given the opportunity to experience the many benefits.

The SACAC has compiled a list of the basic requirements of RPO - The Ten Points of Responsible Pet Ownership (see below) - and believe that if these simple steps are applied by all pet owners, or those thinking about getting a pet, the well-being of companion animals and the people of South Africa will be improved. Currently the council consists of representatives from The Pet Food Industry Association of Southern Africa (PFI), The South African Veterinary Association (SAVA), The South African Animal Health Association (SAAHA), The South African Pet Traders Association (SAPTA), The Southern Africa Cat Council and The Cat Federation of Southern Africa (SACC & CFSA).

Dr Roy Page

Dr Roy Page is the executive director of the South African Companion Animal Council. After completing his pre-graduate studies in 2002, he received the qualification of Bachelor of Veterinary Science (BVSc) from the University of Pretoria and has been working in companion animal general practice in the UK and South Africa ever since.

The ten points of responsible pet ownership

1. Make provision for the care of your pet for its entire lifespan.
2. Choose your pet carefully to match your lifestyle and home environment.
3. Interact positively with your pet every day.
4. Provide adequate shelter and protection from harm.
5. Feed a specifically prepared pet food to meet your pet's nutritional needs and provide fresh, clean drinking water.
6. Take your pet to a veterinarian for a wellness examination at least once a year.
7. Ensure that your pet receives regular vaccinations at your local veterinarian throughout its life.
8. Always choose an approved preventive treatment against external (fleas and ticks) and internal (worms) parasites and treat your pet regularly
9. Responsible breeders register their breeding pets with a recognised breeders' association
10. All male and female pets should be sterilised if they are not intended to be bred.