

# Can pets lower stress?

Many people have a non-human companion at home. Pets are good company, but they may also lower stress.

## HOW DO PETS HELP WITH STRESS?

Most people enjoy petting their dog or cat or taking care of a fish, rabbit or lizard. Interacting with animals may decrease levels of a stress hormone called cortisol. It may also lower blood pressure, according to some research.

Having a pet can also reduce loneliness and boost mood. Many pets have unconditional love for their owner. This can bring a sense of calm. Watching fish swim around or a hamster run in its cage can be relaxing too.

## HELPER IN HOSPITALS

Many of us have seen service dogs that help people who have impaired vision. They may also help those who have hearing impairments, mobility issues, diabetes, epilepsy and other illnesses.

But therapy dogs may be able to help with mental health too. They can bring comfort and support to people who need it. Some dogs work in nursing homes to decrease residents' stress and anxiety. Others visit children in the hospital.

## CLASSROOM BUDDIES

Children get stressed too – and therapy dogs can help kids at school. Some research suggests that dogs can help children with ADHD. They may help with certain behavior challenges, like trouble focusing or participating in class.

Another study found that children with autism felt calmer after playing with guinea pigs. They had less anxiety and better social interactions. But more studies need to be done to confirm these findings.

## BEFORE YOU GET A PET

Having a pet is not for everyone. Taking care of an animal each day may be too much for people who are very busy or who have trouble with memory or responsibilities.

It also costs money to feed and care for the animal. This may not be a good choice for a person who has financial challenges.

Some people may also have allergies or health conditions that don't work well with pets. Ask a doctor if you're not sure.



Source: National Institutes of Health