# How Pets Can Improve Your Mental Health

Pets are furry companions that can provide unconditional love to their owners. Spending time with pets or animals can improve our mental health in a plethora of ways. Pets can become members of our family and can change the overall well-being of our lives.

* Spending time with animals can be a relaxing and comforting activity. When a person engages in petting their pet, their body’s levels of [cortisol](https://news.wsu.edu/press-release/2019/07/15/study-demonstrates-stress-reduction-benefits-petting-dogs-cats/) are lowered. Cortisol is a stress hormone that is present in the body. Spending time with pets also releases the chemical [oxytocin](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/the-friend-who-keeps-you-young), which is referred to as the “happy” hormone. The changes in these chemicals decrease stress and increase happiness. By decreasing stress, blood pressure
* Pets can help people who struggle with feeling lonely or living alone. Adopting a pet can provide the companionship that people crave to have in their lives. Pets can provide unconditional love, which can be a powerful force for someone dealing with loneliness.
* Adopting a pet can improve a person’s mental health by giving them the responsibility of something to take care of. If someone is struggling with depression, having a pet forces them to have some sort of routine or structure. For people who struggle with depression or existential thoughts, pets can help to provide a sense of purpose. While pets are not able to cure [depression](https://habri.org/research/), they can certainly help alleviate some of the symptoms it brings while also getting professional help.
* Pets can also improve a person’s mental health by boosting their self-esteem and confidence. As we have mentioned previously, pets provide unconditional love, which can help the pet-parent feel needed and loved. Having a sense of purpose (taking care of a pet) can help to improve self-worth and confidence.
* We can learn a lot from pets in how they love and how they show up in our lives. One thing pets can teach us is how to practice mindfulness. We can observe animals and see how Pets are always living in the moment, and they can remind us to do the same.

Pets are a great way to improve a person’s life in almost every area of their life. Spending time with animals can decrease stress, increase oxytocin, help loneliness, provide responsibility and structure, improve self-esteem, and teach [mindfulness](https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/mindfulness-and-your-dog). Adopting a pet is a unique way to improve our mental health in addition to other treatments if needed. If a person isn’t sure about adopting a pet they can try fostering pets. Fostering pets can be a way to incorporate animals into their lives even if they aren’t ready to commit to adoption. If fostering isn’t an option, people can try volunteering at an animal shelter to spend time with pets.

If you are interested in starting your healing journey, we are here for you. You can [reach out to us](https://michiganpsychologicalcare.com/contact.php). If you do have a furry friend and would like to do therapy from home, we also offer online counseling.

**References**

<https://news.wsu.edu/press-release/2019/07/15/study-demonstrates-stress-reduction-benefits-petting-dogs-cats/>

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/the-friend-who-keeps-you-young>

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