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Get a pet—your health may depend on it

No one loves you like your pet, but Fido and Fluffy may be more than just constant companions. Owning a dog or cat can actually improve your health. Here's what some experts say about the health benefits of pet ownership:

- **Blood pressure.** Simply petting your cat or dog can lower your blood pressure—and your animal's, as well. One study of New York stockbrokers, for example, found that those who adopted dogs or cats experienced better blood pressure and heart rates than those who didn't.
- **Physical activity.** Owning a dog almost forces you into taking two or three walks a day. The exercise can improve an owner's physical health and bring you into contact with fellow pet owners, relieving loneliness and stress.
- **Heart attack recovery.** The odds for surviving a heart attack seem to improve dramatically if you own a pet, and pet ownership apparently contributes to an increased one-year survival rate for people who have been hospitalized for heart problems.
- **Alzheimer's disease.** Some studies suggest that elderly people with Alzheimer's disease have fewer outbreaks of anxiety with an animal companion nearby. A dog or cat can also help relax a patient's primary caregiver, who's also at risk of stress-related ailments.