

# CATS ARE GOOD FOR YOUR HEALTH

Emily Fowler looks at the health benefits your cat gives you, and how pets can be used as therapy



**A**s cat owners we all know how strong the human/animal bond can be and we've probably all read the statistics that show that having pets is good for our health. In fact, a 2002 study that looked at exactly how much pet ownership improves health suggested that, in the UK, pet ownership saves the NHS approximately £600 million each year.

## Physical benefits

A cat's purr soothes and relaxes but did you know that it registers at between 20-140hz, a range that's medically therapeutic for a number of ailments? Pets also

encourage physical activity and although taking your dog for a walk might seem more likely to improve your fitness, cats can help too. Playing interactively with cats, using things like fishing rod toys to keep them moving, also helps to keep you moving and helps boost the bond between you.

## Emotional benefits

Studies have shown that pets reduce anxiety. The calming effect of stroking your cat or your dog, or even just being around them, can lower blood pressure and reduce stress. Your pets will also always be on your side in times of stress

or worry – you don't always need to have a two-way conversation to unload your troubles, after all.

## Social benefits

Pets are a wonderful way of improving the quality of life of elderly or ill people in care settings, who might feel isolated, bored or lonely. The unwavering support and non-verbal comfort that pets give can really make a difference to someone needing extra social support. They also require veterinary care and check-ups, meaning that someone who is isolated will have an option to get out and see other people or have other people visit them.

## Pets as therapy in the community

It's not only our own pets that act as therapy; there are a number of initiatives that use pets as therapy in order to help both people and animals. In fact, the National Office of Animal Health (NOAH) has adopted one of these initiatives as its charity for 2015. TheraPaws, a community initiative run by The Mayhew Animal Home in London, encourages human/animal interaction and promotes emotional and physical wellbeing by bringing pets into care settings (particularly dementia and palliative care).

NOAH Chair Catherine (Cat) Sayer, said: "NOAH's Pet Event, with its theme of Pets and the Elderly and held in the House of Lords in January, highlighted how important companion animals are, supporting the health, wellbeing and quality of life of older people. TheraPaws exhibited at that event and the value of its work left a big impression. The programme enables people to feel the benefit that animals can bring, even when they are unable to keep an animal themselves." 🐾



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### Adam's story

When photographer Adam J Chambers had a stroke on August 27th 2014 it was a massive shock, particularly as he was a fit and active 37-year-old at the time - not your typical stroke patient. Recovering in a hospital ward meant being away from his cat Freckles and he missed her a great deal. As Adam said: "After two weeks of asking how Freckles was and asking my family to hold the phone up to her so I could talk to her and hear her, I decided to ask my consultant if I could go home, even just for a few hours, to see her. The doctors agreed with me that being around her would lower my blood pressure, essential for stroke patients, so agreed that I could have ward leave to see her. Unfortunately I had an invasive procedure due that day and I was told if I had sedation, I wouldn't be able to go home." Not wanting to miss out on the opportunity to see Freckles, Adam asked to have the procedure without sedation. "It was uncomfortable to say the least," he said, "but it meant I could see my cat, so it was worth it."

Adam's determination to get his life back to normal after his stroke didn't end there and Freckles has continued to be a huge help to him, both emotionally and physically. The physical therapy and exercises he has needed to do to regain his strength have been gruelling and building strength in his affected arm and wrist has been one of his priorities. The fact that he's now built up enough strength in his arm to balance himself on the floor and flick Dreamies for Freckles to chase (see picture) is a great achievement in terms of his recovery and shows just how much Freckles helps with his physical therapy.

While the psychological effects of his stroke meant that Adam has occasionally had dark times, the comfort and companionship he gets from Freckles have given him the determination and mental strength he's needed to push forward with his recovery. As a photographer he was keen to get back to his craft as soon as was physically possible and Freckles made a wonderful model before he was able to get out and about with his camera.



### Laugh out loud

It's not only cuddles from our pets that make us feel better - they often make us laugh and of course, 'laughter is the best medicine' especially when we're feeling down. YouTube and Facebook are full of video clips of cats and other animals doing the funniest things or simply just being cute. If you can't get online, try to take a photo of your cat next time they are doing something that makes you chuckle, so you can look back at it when you need cheering up.

Who could resist putting a smile on their face if one of these adorable felines greeted you each day?

