

Friends With Benefits

Your dog, cat—even goldfish—may be just what the doctor ordered.

A quick break with your pet can lift your mood by reducing the stress hormone cortisol. Make time for playing, which elevates dopamine levels, helping you stay calm and relaxed.

An animal's unconditional love makes it easy to smile and banish negative thoughts. Dogs in particular have this effect, ramping up the feel-good hormone oxytocin.

Pets increase longevity by lowering pulse and blood pressure rates and may reduce your risk for heart disease. Cat owners are also one-third less likely to die from a stroke or heart attack.

Strolling with your pooch makes you more likely to get the recommended level of physical activity. People without canine companions are twice as likely to be overweight.

Regular walks ease joint pain and stiffness in knees, hips and ankles.

