

NATIONAL PET MONTH 2019 – CELEBRATING 30 YEARS

This year the Pet Food Manufacturers Association looks at how pets improve mental health

It is time to celebrate the 30th anniversary of National Pet Month (NPM), running from 1 April to 6 May, which this year is focusing on the value of pets to our mental health.

PFMA alongside NOAH (National Office for Animal Health) are the charity trustees and during NPM we will be celebrating the joy of pet ownership, as well as talking about the importance of caring for a pet responsibly.

So, with National Pet Month in full swing, here are some key facts about how pets support our mental health – and it's our role together to help keep them healthy, to enable them to do this. Use these to put pets in the spotlight.

- 1. Pet owners make fewer visits to the doctors** – pet owners are healthier, for example in Germany pet owners have been calculated as making 15% fewer visits to doctors – a saving of €5.9bn pa. Pensioners that own a dog visit their doctors 21% less than non-dog owners.
- 2. Pets help reduce blood pressure, heart rate and stress** – just stroking pets or watching fish swim in an aquarium leads to reduced blood pressure and lower anxiety. The presence of a pet can reduce the heart rate even in stressful situations.
- 3. Pets increase social engagement and cohesion** – dogs in social settings encourage more social interactions. Other workers have found an effect with rabbits or turtles. Pets may also reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation.
- 4. As we get older** – pets in care homes can ameliorate loneliness. Aquariums have been found to improve behaviour and staff satisfaction in dementia units. An aquarium in the dining room has been shown to make people more interested and inclined to eat, thus improving appetite among residents.
- It is not just older people that can feel **lonely**, as shown by the fact we need a **Campaign against loneliness**. With our increasingly single-person households, pets can offer support, where keeping them is practical. This can mean particularly people who are, for example, housebound, geographically isolated, or have challenges such as mental health problems or learning disabilities that make contact with people hard.
- Pets can be a lifeline for **people living on the streets** (with amazing support from organisations such as StreetVet and others who help keep these animals healthy). They give purpose and can help ease the early stages of alcohol or drug rehabilitation becoming a solid support for those who have entered recovery, animals have a lot to offer those struggling from addiction.
- Children with ADHD** can benefit from working with and keeping a pet. Responsibility for a pet's good health, and the routine of caring for it properly, together with the 'feel good' of playing (as pets need to play) and letting off steam in a constructive way helps them relax at night.
- Pets are completely non-judgemental** – they are great listeners and do not criticise. This can help reluctant readers (with some schools welcoming 'reading dogs') and help with self-confidence.



- Some charities, such as Dogs for Good, have highlighted how animals can help **children with autism**. From sensory support to road safety, through to just playing and being a best friend, benefits come from both specially trained assistance dogs and support for existing family pets.

WHY GET INVOLVED IN NPM?

It's a great opportunity for animal health advisers to show how they can support and advise pet owners on providing good care. How you can get involved:

- Organise fun and educational events in store about pet care
- Share National Pet Month's Top 10 Tips in store or on social media
- Turn your event into a fundraiser for a local pet charity
- Follow National Pet Month on social media www.fb.com/NationalPetMonth, www.fb.com/JoinScratchingPost (cat fans), www.fb.com/JoinParkBench (dog fans) and on Twitter @NatPetMonthUK

#PetCareAware

National Pet Month is not just about the month of April: it's a unique educational charity working throughout the year for the benefit of pets and their owners. Now there is also a year-round #PetCareAware initiative, designed to bring pet friendly organisations together to discuss pet health and welfare issues and promote the responsible pet care message throughout the year, see www.nationalpetmonth.org.uk/pet-care-aware/. 🐾

