

Message from the Parish Nurses

Lynn Dunlevy, BSN, RN, Faith Community Nurse

Barbara Mueller, RN, Faith Community Nurse

May 2018

PETS CAN IMPROVE OVERALL HEALTH & WELL-BEING

Have you ever noticed that you feel better when you're around your pets? When nothing seems to be going right. Everything causes fits of frustration. It is often your pets that throw you a lifeline and pulls you out of the gravitational grip of your bad day.

Research shows that having a pet you love is good for your physical, mental, and emotional health and well-being.

PHYSICAL BENEFITS

Exercising, caring for, and just being around pets can boost your overall physical health.

- **Increase physical activity and functioning:** People who own pets often have better physical health due to the need to exercise and care for their pets. If you have dogs their need to exercise is a powerful motivator get out and walk.
- **Improve heart health:** Pet owners are more likely to have lower resting heart rates and blood pressures than those that are pet-free. Having a dog can increase the odds for survival in persons who have had a heart attack. Cats are particularly good for your circulation and cardiovascular health.
- **Lower cholesterol and triglycerides:** People with pets have been found to have lower cholesterol and triglyceride levels. There are also animals who alert their owners to episodes of hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), which allows the owner to correct the level before serious symptoms develop.
- **Predict seizures:** Dogs can be specially trained to recognize some type of change prior to a seizure. These dogs are called "seizure-alert" or "seizure-response" dogs. They are trained to signal their owner from 15 to 45 minutes prior to a seizure.
- **Children build up stronger immunity:** Research shows that children who grow up in a household with dogs, cats, or even on a farm with livestock are less likely to have allergies. It has to start early, ideally before a baby is 6 months old. Babies have shown to have fewer colds and ear infections in their first year of life.
- **Reduce chronic pain:** Research is unclear as to why pets appear to make it easier to cope with some painful conditions such as arthritis and fibromyalgia.

EMOTIONAL BENEFITS

The most common reason people get pets is to make you feel good. They are cute and cuddly and give unconditional support. They shower you with sloppy kisses and attentive purrs.

- **Gives you stability:** Knowing that you have someone who loves you at home – even if it's your pet – can keep you grounded enough to cope when it seems that all the world is in chaos.
- **Have physical contact:** The ability to have something to touch is very important. Studies show how important touch has to our physical and emotional well-being
- **Be less anxious and feel safer:** Pet owners tend to feel less afraid of being a victim of crime when walking with a dog or having a dog in the house.
- **Lifts our mood and feel less lonely:** A pet is a great companion. They decrease our feeling of loneliness and isolation by providing companionship to all generations.
- **Have consistency:** Pets can provide some consistency to our lives. Caring for them can affect our daily routine and gives us something to look forward to.
- **Helps children develop empathy:** Parents that use pets to teach their children the responsibilities of physically taking care of someone else improves the child's emotional intelligence. Children who have higher emotional intelligence tends to be more successful later in life.

MENTAL BENEFITS

A pet can be a great source of comfort, companionship and motivation for their owners.

- **Boost cognition in seniors:** In older adults, having a pet can help keep memory and other functions intact longer. A study by the University of Richmond found that dog owners over the age of 65 performed better on cognitive and memory test than those their age who didn't have dogs.
- **Provides forms of therapy:** Children with autism show they are able to be more social and less anxious when they have therapy animals nearby. For children with ADHD can benefit from working with and keeping a pet. Taking charge of the jobs on a pet care schedule, helps the child learn to plan and be responsible.

By Barbara Mueller, RN, Faith Community Nurse

More information can be found at:

<https://askthescientists.com/top-2017>

The Whole Chihuahua: Owning Pets Can Improve Overall Health

Visit: www.StAgnesShepherdstown.org

For "Diseases Can Be Shared Between People and Pets" Click on Parish Health Newsletter

DISEASES CAN BE SHARED BETWEEN PEOPLE AND PETS

There is a right pet out there for everyone, but not all pets are right for all people. Every year, tens of thousands of Americans will get sick from diseases spread between animals and people. These are known as zoonotic diseases. Because these diseases can cause sickness or death in people, CDC is always tracking and reporting them.

PEOPLE AT HIGHER RISK FOR ILLNESS

Anyone can become sick from a zoonotic disease. However, some people may be more at risk. These groups of people include:

- Children younger than 5
- Adults older than 65
- People with weakened immune systems

HOW GERMS SPREAD BETWEEN ANIMALS AND PEOPLE

Because people and their animals have such a close connection, it's important to know the common ways people can get infected. These can include:

- **Direct contact:** Coming into contact with the saliva, blood, urine, mucous, feces, or other body fluids of an infected animal. Examples include petting or touching animals, and bites or scratches.
- **Indirect contact:** Coming into contact with areas where animals live and roam. Examples include aquarium tank water, pet beds, chicken coops, plants and soil, as well as pet food and water dishes.
- **Vector-borne:** Being bitten by a tick, or an insect like mosquito or a flea.
- **Foodborne:** Eating contaminated food or drinking something unsafe. Examples include unpasteurized milk, undercooked meat and eggs or raw fruits and vegetable that are contaminated with feces from an infected animal.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY

Adults and children can come in contact with infected animals in many places like at home, petting zoos, fairs, parks, schools and stores. Insects, like mosquitoes, fleas, and tick bite people and animals day and night. To protect yourself and your family:

- Always wash your hands after being around animals, even if you didn't touch the animals.
- Wash your hands with soap and clean running water.
- If soap and water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol to

clean hands. Hand sanitizers do not eliminate all types of germs, it is important to wash your hands as soon as soap and water are available.

- Prevent bites from mosquitoes, fleas, and ticks.
- Learn more about ways to handle food safely for yourself, your family, your pets, or other animals.

HOW TO DECIDE ON THE BEST PET FOR YOUR FAMILY

When thinking about adding a pet to your family, consider which animal is the best fit for everyone in the family. Involve all family members in the discussion making. There are many animals to consider. Such as: dogs, cats, rabbits, hamsters, goats, chickens, cows, horses, hermit crabs, or even a lizard.

- Do you and/or your family have time to properly care for the pet?
- What does the pet eat?
- What type of habitat or environment does the pet need to stay healthy?
- How large will the pet get and how much exercise it need?
- Do you have young children or other higher risk individuals at home?
- Do you or anyone in your family have allergies to any animals, chronic illness or a weakened immune system?
- What is the pet's life span and are you committed to caring for the pet for its entire life?
- How much will veterinary care cost?

By Barbara Mueller, RN, Faith Community Nurse

More information can be found at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/health-benefits/index.html>