



June 2019

Positive Paws



We're back with more tips on healthy living for the month of June! [Sixty-eight percent of U.S. households, or about 85 million families, own a pet, according to the 2017-2018 National Pet Owners Survey conducted by the American Pet Products Association \(APPA\).](#) This month we will be focusing on how pets affect our health.

- There are many health benefits associated with owning and caring for a pet.
- It is important to follow certain rules to keep you, your pet, and your home safe and healthy.

- Service dogs are specially trained to assist people with disabilities to improve their daily living.
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Health Benefits

Pets Strengthen Your Immune System

- Having a pet in the home can actually lower a child's likelihood of developing related allergies by as much as 33 percent.
- Research published in the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology* shows that children exposed early on to animals tend to develop stronger immune systems overall.
- This can't help someone who already has allergies, [but there are plenty of pet options for those with pet allergies.](#)

Pets Keep Our Hearts Healthy

- Pet owners exhibit decreased blood pressure, cholesterol and triglyceride levels, all of which can ultimately minimize their risk for having a heart attack.
- For those who have already experienced a heart attack, research also indicates that patients with a dog or a cat tend to have better recovery rates.
- These benefits are thought to be connected with pets' tendency to help reduce or control their owners' overall stress levels.

Dogs Help Us Control Our Weight

- Dogs can act as the perfect personal trainer, if only because most of them need to be walked several times a day.
- According to studies like those conducted by the Wellness Institute at Northwest Memorial Hospital, as long as you're the one holding the leash, you'll lose weight or at least maintain a healthy weight.
- Research conducted by the National Institute of Health also supports this claim, which found that dog owners responsible for walking their pups are less likely to be obese than dog owners who pass the duty off to someone else or those who don't own dogs at all.

We Can Exercise Together

- Pets need exercise to stay healthy, just like people! There are many activities one can do alongside their pet to stay active.
- Walking, Jogging or running, Biking, and Hiking are common activities for dog owners.
- Agility Training, an obstacle course-based dog sport, is great for very active dogs.
- You can even try Doga (Dog yoga!)
- [You can even train a cat to go on walks to give them the mental stimulation and physical exercise without letting them loose as an outdoor cat.](#)

Pets Keep Us Happy

- Pets are a great way to stay healthy mentally.
- Not only are they known to they offer unconditional love, but they may also give their owners a sense of purpose, which can be crucial for those feeling down.
- Pets also combat feelings of loneliness by providing companionship, which can boost your overall mood and even bring you feelings of joy and happiness.

Pets Help Us Connect

- Animals can be an instant icebreaker, people love to talk and show off their pets!
- Pets can be the common denominator to connect people who don't seem to be very much alike.

Pets Help Us Find Places to Socialize

- Training classes: Many instructors offer group classes such as puppy kindergarten, where you'll find others trying to master the same pet parenting skills.
- Dog parks: A great opportunity for both you and your dog to play and interact with other dogs and owners alike. Just be sure your dog is properly socialized and up to date on all shots before introducing it into the mix.
- Outdoor cafes: Many restaurants with outdoor seating options are also pet-friendly, and some even offer dog-specific items on the menu as well.
- Online: Dogster.com, Catster.com and Petpop.com are just a few examples of popular pet-focused social networking sites that provide an instant, fun way to trade tips, trends and more.

SOURCE: <http://www.animalplanet.com/pets/no-5-breathe-easier/>



Keeping a Healthy Household

Pick The Right Pet

- Before adopting a new pet, make sure that it is the right one for you and your household. Do some research beforehand about the specific needs of the animal. Ask yourself these questions before getting a pet:
 - How long will this animal live?
 - What does the pet eat?
 - How much exercise does the pet need?
 - How large will it become?
 - How much will it cost for veterinary care?
 - Do I have enough time to properly care for and clean up after the pet?
 - What type of habitat does this pet need to be healthy?
 - What type of exercise does this pet need?
 - Are pets allowed in my house, apartment, or condominium?
 - Are there young children, older people, or people with weak immune systems who will care for or be around the pet?

Pets Aren't For Everyone

- Households with children 5 years of age and younger should not have pet reptiles (turtles, lizards, snakes), amphibians (frogs, toads), or backyard poultry because of the risk of serious illness from harmful germs spread between these animals and young children.
- People with weakened immune systems should take extra precautions when choosing and handling pets. Talk to your veterinarian for help picking the best pet.
- Pregnant women should avoid adopting a new cat or handling stray cats,

especially kittens. Cats can carry a parasite that causes toxoplasmosis—a disease that can cause birth defects. If you are pregnant, you do not need to give up your current cat, but you should avoid changing cat litter.

- Pregnant women should avoid contact with pet rodents to prevent exposure to lymphocytic choriomeningitis virus, which can cause birth defects. If you're pregnant and have a pet rodent, avoid direct contact and have someone else clean its habitat.

How to Interact with Animals

- Never touch a pet that you don't know. Always ask for permission first, the animal may not be friendly or used to strangers.
- Be gentle and careful when petting and playing with pets, especially very small animals or those that may get aggressive.
- Be careful not to spread any germs. Try not to rub your eyes or put your hands near your mouth after directly handling animals.
- Make sure to wash your hands right after playing with animals or anything in the animals' environment (cages, beds, food or water dishes).

Practice Good Pet Hygiene

- In addition to hand washing, practicing good pet hygiene can help prevent the spread of germs between pets and people. Keep pets and their supplies out of the kitchen, and disinfect pet habitats and supplies outside the house when possible.
- Never clean supplies in the kitchen sink, food preparation areas, or the bathroom sink. Pets can contaminate surfaces in your home with germs—you don't have touch pets to get sick from their germs.
- Always remove your dog's feces (poop) from your yard and public places by using a bag, and dispose of it in proper areas. Dog and cat poop can contain parasites and germs that can be harmful to people.
- Keep children away from areas that might contain dog or cat poop to prevent them from getting roundworms and hookworms.
- Cover sand boxes so cats don't use them as a litter box.
- Clean the cat's litter box daily to lower the chances of exposure to harmful parasites.

Keep Wildlife Wild

- Although they may look cute, avoid touching wild animals to reduce the risk of illness and injury. Don't encourage wild animals such as raccoons, prairie dogs, or wild rodents to come into your home by feeding them.
- You might find a young animal that appears to be abandoned and want to rescue it, but often its parent is close by. If you are concerned about the safety of a wild animal, [contact a local wildlife rehabilitation facility](#).

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



Service Dogs

What is a Service Dog?

- People with disabilities can augment all aspects of their lives with service dogs,

who execute crucial aid depending on the disability of their owner.

- [The Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) stipulates that service dogs are specially trained to assist a person with disabilities in their tasks and daily life.
- The tasks that service dogs perform are essential actions, like guiding people with visual impairments, signaling certain sounds for those who are deaf, retrieving items for people with mobility issues or alerting about impending cardiac episodes or seizures.

Benefits of Service Dogs for Physical Issues

- Benefits of Service Dogs for People in Wheelchairs
 - For people who have limited mobility, service dogs provide physical support. Mobility assistance dogs can open doors for those in wheelchairs, manipulate light switches and pick up objects off the ground or retrieve them from other spots.
 - Some other capabilities of service dogs are paying cashiers, pressing handicapped accessible buttons and pressing elevator buttons.
- Benefits of Service Dogs for Epilepsy
 - Seizure alert dogs have an innate ability to detect the onset of a seizure.
 - When they sense an imminent seizure, the dogs give their owners a signal like pawing, pacing, intense staring or placing their head or nose on their owner. During a seizure, service dogs will lie down close to the person having the seizure.
 - If the alert is seen in time, individuals with epilepsy can prepare themselves and get to somewhere safe, such as on a soft surface or on the floor, before the seizure happens. After the seizure is over, the dog may go and seek additional help if it's needed.
- Benefits of Service Dogs for People with Physical Challenges or Fatigue Issues
 - For individuals with disabilities that cause fatigue, pain, trouble walking, or limited mobility, service dogs can help. Like the mobility tasks for wheelchair users, service dogs can also help people regain balance and prevent falling.
 - The dog can carry items if the individual is too weak to move or hold them. Because service dogs are allowed by law in public places for the benefit of their owners, this means they can perform these assistive tasks in the grocery store, on the sidewalk and other public areas.

Emotional Benefits of a Service Dog

- Companionship
 - A service dog can help and accompany you in many situations, and many service dogs can keep you accountable if you neglect proper management of their chronic illness or disability. This sense of security and consistent care will take some of the burden of your illness or disability off of you.
 - It's very easy to feel isolated when a condition limits your ability to complete everyday tasks, but a dog provides companionship that can ease feelings of loneliness.
- A Greater Feeling of Independence
 - You can rely less on other humans for help with tasks such as carrying something or opening a door. Instead, you can transfer your needs to your service dog, who is constantly available to assist and ready to be helpful.
 - The toll of relying on other people for daily tasks can wear on you after a while, and despite eager family members and others who will step in, you may feel you are restricted and dependent on others. A service dog reduces or eliminates that feeling and brings back a sense of freedom.
- Increased Confidence in Social Settings
 - Because you have your companion, you feel more comfortable in situations that you might previously have expected to be tiring or be unable to participate in.
 - You may also notice you'll get attention from passersby. Though your dog is always on duty, and strangers cannot interact with your dog, this scenario is another way conversations and positive social interactions can be initiated.
 - Even relationships with relatives are improved by the presence of service

dogs. They are less worried about the person with a disability when they are absent. Home life with family members is less stressful with the aid of a service dog, too.

- More Motivation
 - Experiencing pain and challenges every day weighs many people with disabilities down, and fluctuations in health are taxing. Service dogs can help you regain motivation to handle the potential challenge of daily chores and bring some joy in day-to-day activities.
 - A service dog still requires care from their owners, too, so that dependence and connection between dog and human creates a reason to keep going.
- Self-Improvement
 - A service dog allows many people with disabilities to do things they did not think were possible and to frequent public places with less worry. The hope for new possibilities and further improvements that a service dog brings is comforting.
 - The benefits of service dogs for individuals with disabilities include many positives, but an optimistic view of the future is a significant one.

Should You Get a Service Dog?

- If you are a person with a disability that service dogs are trained to assist with, then a service dog may be right for you. Some disabilities that they commonly are trained to help with are:
 - Mobility impairments and balance disorders
 - Trouble using arms or hands
 - Chronic fatigue conditions
 - Epilepsy
 - Cardiac syncope conditions
 - Diabetes
- If you're not sure your disability is extreme enough to have a service dog, decide whether your day-to-day life would become significantly easier and safer with the help of a dog.
- Getting a service dog does not happen immediately, as there must be a good fit between you and the dog as well as one that is trained specifically to cater to your disability. Service dogs also go through training for obedience, advanced disability service and personalized needs. This takes time, but if you are willing to invest in the system and training, you will have a trustworthy companion and service provider in your dog.
- [Each US State has laws regarding service animals, be sure to be familiar with New Jersey's service dogs laws.](#)

REMEMBER:
Service dogs are working animals. Don't pet them without permission or they may get distracted from their job!



Let's Stay Healthy Together!



Looking to learn more about healthy living?
We can hold a Healthy Lifestyles Workshop at your
location!



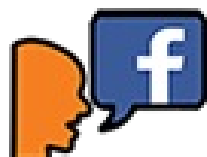
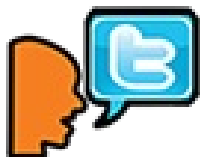
Don't see what you're looking for? We'll make it for you!
E-mail NJSAP@ArcNJ.org or call 732-749-8514 to schedule a training at your location!



The Horizon Foundation for New Jersey

The Healthy Lifestyles Project (HLP) is a program of The Arc of New Jersey and receives funding through a grant awarded by The Horizon Foundation for New Jersey.

For more information on HLP and NJSAP follow us on social media!





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