

Five Reasons Why Bonding with Your Pet is Good for You

Pet owners across North America love to dote on their dogs and cats, often referring to their furry companions as 'best friends' or 'family members'. Did you know that more than half of all U.S. dog owners say they are more attached to their pets than to at least one other human being, and from 4-13 million say they are as attached to their dogs as they are to their best friend, children, or spouse?

Whether you can relate, or you think these indulging pet owners are a bit fanatical, recent studies show having a strong relationship with pets is good for pet owners, improving their physical and mental health and even keeping their waist lines slim. Read on to find out why, including tips from *The Dog Whisperer*, Cesar Millan.

Ever feel guilty for spoiling your pet? Next time you feel that way consider that pet owners who play with and dote on their pets may actually be healthier due to benefits received from having a strong, loving relationship with their dog or cat. If you are a pet owner, think about all the things your dog or cat does for you as a companion who loves you unconditionally. Then think about how you show appreciation. If you are not showing enough appreciation with exercise and love, you could be missing out on some great benefits of a strong pet-people bond.

The key to having a beneficial relationship is being able to focus on your pet with love and attention, and indulging them with playtime and exercise to create a strong, healthy relationship. Doing this takes the focus off your own emotional or physical stress as you form a closer bond to your pet. Your pet certainly will be grateful for the affection!

Here are five great reasons to start (or continue) pampering your pet and building a stronger relationship.



Photo: Courtesy of Erin Vey

1) A good relationship with your pet can improve your emotional and psychological state of being

Having a strong companionship with your pet can help you cope during difficult times. Treating your pet as your best buddy can be a great help during challenging emotional times or when you are feeling lonely. A recent survey of students at a large university and other adults in the area found that students who lived with at least one dog, one cat, or a combination of the two were less likely to report feeling lonely and depressed; something they directly attributed to their beloved pet. Your pet can fulfill a significant role for you during stressful times, offering friendship without judgment.

2) Pets are good for your health and for other family members – especially kids

Get closer to your pet by spending more time with them and get healthier at the same time. Research has suggested that a relationship with pets can lower your risk of heart disease, lower use of family doctor services, and reduce the risk of asthma and allergies in young children. Kids have reported that having a relationship with their pet assists them in making friends and improves their relationship with other family members. It takes more than just living with a pet, it is important that you get closer to your pet by spending sufficient time with them and showing them appreciation with touch, playtime and praise.

3) Bonding with dogs can help you lose weight and improve your mood

Bond with your dog by treating them to a play session outside or a long walk. This is a great way to show affection and you'll find your pet motivating you to get moving. Getting off the couch, out of the house and into the backyard or park for a game of fetch or tug will bring you closer to Fido and provide you with

aerobic exercise as well. Walking in your neighborhood or hiking a nearby trail is a great treat for your pet, exposes you to new people and places, and is a great mood-booster after a stressful day.

4) Bonding with your dog creates a better behaved dog and a less stressful life for you

Cesar Millan, professional dog trainer (star of his TV series, *The Dog Whisperer*), advocates for building a strong relationship with your pet primarily for training purposes. Love, praise and playtime will help you connect with your pet. Having that connection will make it easier to train your dog. Positive reinforcement training begins with leveraging that bond by giving or taking away attention. If you have a good relationship with your pet, they will crave your attention and training away behavior issues will be easier and less stressful for your both.

5) Showing pets affection with touch helps reduce human stress levels and can even lower cholesterol

Studies have shown that just a few minutes of stroking your pet prompts a release of "feel good" hormones in humans, including serotonin. In addition, studies show petting helps lower the level of the stress hormone cortisol, which is responsible for regulating appetite and cravings for carbohydrates.



Photo: Courtesy of Erin Vey

Giving affection is an important way to bond with your pet, and as you can see, it has many benefits for you. Just remember there is a right time to give praise and affection. According to Cesar Millan, "... anytime you give affection you reinforce the behavior preceding it. Share your love and affection after a dog has exercised and eaten, changed an unwanted behavior into a behavior you asked for, responded to a rule or command, or entered a calm-submissive state."

Just owning a pet will not necessarily enhance your health, rather a strong, long-term relationship with your pet will improve your quality of life in many ways. So, don't be shy, say 'good dog', shower your pet with affection (at the right time) and get outside and play!

About the Author

Written by The DenHaus Design Team, with photography courtesy of Erin Vey

DenHaus (<http://www.denhaus.com>) is a Seattle-based firm designing dens that function as furniture for you and homes for pets.

Erin Vey (<http://www.erinvey.com>) is a Seattle-based dog photographer, specializing in the creation of custom, fine art dog photography products for your home.

Dens are a great way to show your pet you care. An emerging trend in pet care, dens appeal to dog's natural instincts to seek out den-like enclosures. Organic in shape, DenHaus Dens satisfy this desire while keeping your pet and home safe. A den provides your pet with her own 'room' in the house where she feels comfortable to sleep, chew away on her toys and calm down. It also functions as place to secure your pet when necessary. See why pets love dens at <http://www.denhaus.com/why-dens/>