

Pets may help reduce your risk of heart disease

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Having a pet might lower your risk of heart disease, according to a new American Heart Association scientific statement.

The statement is published online in the association's journal *Circulation*.

"Pet ownership, particularly dog ownership, is probably associated with a decreased risk of heart disease" said Glenn N. Levine, M.D., professor at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas, and chair of the committee that wrote the statement after reviewing previous studies of the influence of pets.

Research shows that:

- Pet ownership is probably associated with a reduction in heart disease risk factors and increased survival among patients. But the studies aren't definitive and do not necessarily prove that owning a pet directly causes a reduction in [heart disease risk](#). "It may be simply that healthier people are the ones that have pets, not that having a pet actually leads to or causes reduction in cardiovascular risk," Levine said.
- Dog ownership in particular may help reduce cardiovascular risk. People with dogs may engage in more physical activity because they walk them. In a study of more than 5,200 adults, dog owners engaged in more walking and physical activity than non-dog owners, and were 54 percent more likely to get the recommended

level of physical activity.

- Owning pets may be associated with [lower blood pressure](#) and [cholesterol levels](#), and a lower incidence of obesity.
- Pets can have a positive effect on the body's reactions to stress.

"In essence, data suggest that there probably is an association between [pet ownership](#) and decreased cardiovascular risk," Levine said. "What's less clear is whether the act of adopting or acquiring a pet could lead to a reduction in cardiovascular risk in those with pre-existing disease. Further research, including better quality studies, is needed to more definitively answer this question."

Even with a likely link, people shouldn't adopt, rescue or buy a pet solely to reduce [cardiovascular risk](#), Levine said.

Provided by American Heart Association

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