

Owning a pet does not seem to influence signs of aging

December 13 2017



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Owning a pet does not appear to slow the rate of ageing, as measured by standard indicators, suggest the authors of a study published in the Christmas issue of *The BMJ*.

There are long standing claims that animal companionship might be linked to [human health](#), and with around half of UK households owning

a pet, it could be concluded that many people believe interaction with animals is life enhancing.

Studies have suggested there are potential positive and [negative health consequences](#) of pet ownership. These include the grief and distress felt after a pet's death, alongside the benefits of improved psychological health from a sense of companionship provided by pets, or increased physical activity from regular walks with a dog that could influence weight regulation and heart health.

With more than 10% of [older adults](#) indicating that pet ownership is their major source of companionship, there is an obvious need to examine if pet ownership influences biomarkers of healthy ageing.

A team of researchers from University College London and the University of Cambridge therefore set out to examine these relationships in older people.

They used data from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) - an ongoing, longitudinal study of a representative sample of men and women who, when recruited in 2002-03, were aged 50 or more and living in England.

The researchers analysed data on more than 8,700 adults with an average age of 67. Data have been collected every two years using personal interviews, self-completion questionnaires, and a nurse assessment of physical functioning.

A third of participants owned a pet, with 18% owning a dog, 12% a cat, and 3% another animal.

After taking into account a range of relevant variables such as smoking and drinking, the researchers found no evidence of a strong association

of any type of [pet ownership](#) with walking speed, lung function, standing up from a chair, grip strength, leg raises, balance, nor three blood inflammatory markers, memory, or depression.

And these results held true after separate analyses of male and female pet owners.

The researchers point out that this is an observational study, so no firm conclusions can be drawn about cause and effect, and they outline some limitations that could have affected the results.

Nevertheless, they conclude: "At least in the present cohort study of older adults in England, animal companionship seems to confer essentially no relation with standard physical and psychological biomarkers of ageing."

More information: Associations of pet ownership with biomarkers of ageing: population based cohort study, *BMJ*, www.bmj.com/cgi/doi/10.1136/bmj.j5558

Provided by British Medical Journal

Citation: Owing a pet does not seem to influence signs of aging (2017, December 13) retrieved 4 July 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-12-pet-aging.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.