

Four-legged friends can have heart issues, too

April 11 2018



Many Americans spend their lives with their pets—sharing habits, walks and sometimes even the bed.

To help celebrate National Pet Day on April 11—yes, it's an actual holiday—here are seven heart-health facts about [dogs](#), cats and the humans who love them:

1. Nearly half of American adults are at risk for major health problems because of high [blood pressure](#), an issue that also can impact our furry best friends. For humans, hypertension accounts for more cardiovascular deaths than any other cause other than smoking. For cats and dogs, the study of hypertension is still in the earlier stages, but studies have shown it can be associated with damage to the eyes, heart, brain and kidneys.
2. Optimal blood pressure for humans is 120/80 and below, while for dogs and cats the range is much broader with values of 110-150/80-105 and below.
3. Humans sometimes feel anxious in a medical environment and get abnormally [high blood pressure](#) readings known as "[white coat hypertension](#)." Imagine how dogs and cats feel about it. Vet visits can be so stressful for some animals that the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine guidelines on dog and cat hypertension caution that handling and measurement devices for cats and dogs need to be considered when making a hypertension diagnosis.
4. Dog breeds can show some "notable" differences in [blood pressure levels](#). For instance, greyhounds and deerhounds have higher normal readings than other breeds. Breed doesn't seem to matter much for cats.
5. Studies don't indicate an increased [hypertension](#) risk for overweight cats and dogs, as there is for people. "It doesn't seem to be overtly associated with obesity in our pet population," said veterinarian Dr. Sonya Gordon, an associate professor of cardiology at Texas A&M's College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences in College Station. But being overweight can hurt pet health in other ways, she cautions. Extra pounds can

aggravate orthopedic and arthritis issues and there is a negative interaction with airway diseases for small, older dogs. Just like in people, "obesity is a whole-body issue since it's linked to so many aspects of wellness," Gordon said. "It's as big of a challenge for our pet population as our human population."

6. Pets can help improve their owners' health. Studies have shown that having a pet can help increase fitness levels, relieve stress, [lower blood pressure](#) and cholesterol levels and boost overall happiness and well-being.
7. Most U.S. households have at least one pet. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends regular vet visits to keep your critters in good health. "Veterinarians aren't people you should just visit when your animal is sick. Early diagnosis of many diseases when there are no apparent clues that your pet has disease is important because we can make a difference with early treatment in many situations," said Gordon.

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Citation: Four-legged friends can have heart issues, too (2018, April 11) retrieved 28 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-04-four-legged-friends-heart-issues.html>

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