

Pets are major pandemic stress reducers

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(HealthDay)—June is time for people to bond with their pets, the American Heart Association says.

Throughout the month, the AHA encourages people to make pets part of their workday as routines shift during the coronavirus pandemic.

Although your contact with other people may be limited, your pet can provide some of that missing emotional and mental support that can keep you healthy.

Here, the association offers five reasons pets can help mental health:

- Pets help lower work-related stress. For 2 out of 3 employees, work stresses them out, and for 40% their job affects their health. Pets at work may help reduce stress, increase productivity and boost employee satisfaction.
- Pets can help increase productivity. A dog in a meeting increases trust, team cohesion and camaraderie.
- Pets help manage anxiety. They provide companionship and unconditional love.
- Pets keep pet people active. Dog owners are likely to be more fit than those who don't have a dog. Social distancing keeps people at home all day, but pets and their need for regular walks and exercise get owners outside for fresh air and activity.
- Pets give a sense of togetherness. Bonding with a pet helps you not to feel alone. Seeing, touching, hearing or talking to animals can bring a sense of goodwill, joy, nurturing and happiness.

"Cardiovascular disease remains the No. 1 killer of all Americans. To turn the tide, we must tackle the problem in innovative ways," said Dr. Glenn Levine, a volunteer medical expert for the American Heart Association's Healthy Bond for Life.

Last year, the AHA began a campaign to bring your pet to work once a week, called "Best Friend Fridays."

"The Best Friend Fridays concept is simple—human and pet interaction can lead to better physical and mental health," Levine said in an AHA news release. "Studies have shown that pet ownership is associated with increased exercise and fitness levels, [lower blood pressure](#) and cholesterol levels, decreased stress and greater overall happiness and well-being."

"If you're feeling down or struggling with your [mental health](#), your pet companion can help," Levine said. "Spend some time with them playing or just petting them. You may find that you feel better, and your pet will love the bonding time, too."

More information: For more on pets and mental health, head to the [Anxiety and Depression Association of America](#).

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