

Americans note overwhelming positive mental health impact of their pets in new poll

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Heartworms are a deadly disease in both dogs and cats, but can be prevented with medication and mosquito control. Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

The findings of the latest edition of the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) [Healthy Minds Monthly Poll](#) are clear: in addition

to feeling like part of the family, Americans' furry friends offer many mental health benefits.

Among the [survey respondents](#), half (50%) said they had [dogs](#), 35% said they had [cats](#), and a third (31%) said they did not have any pets at home. About 3% identified other pets including fish, birds, turtles, and more.

Among [pet owners](#), a strong majority (86%) said their pets have a mostly positive impact on their mental health. Dog owners (87%) and [cat owners](#) (86%) were equally likely to say so, while other pet owners (62%) were less likely. A strong majority (88%) of pet owners said they consider their pets a part of their family. The poll was fielded by Morning Consult Feb. 10–12, 2023, among a sample of 2,200 adults, with a margin of error of plus or minus two percentage points.

"People recognize that there is something special about bonds between humans and their pets," said APA President Rebecca Brendel, M.D., J.D. "The animals we bring into our lives and our families play many roles from non-judgmental companions that we love to key partners in reducing our stress and anxiety. Americans clearly recognize that our relationships with our pets can have noticeable benefits for our overall mental health."

Those who said their pets positively impact their [mental health](#) cited several key benefits, including:

- Help reduce stress and anxiety (69%).
- Provide unconditional love and support (69%)
- Offer companionship (69%).
- Provide a calming presence (66%).
- Are true friends (63%).

Cat owners were more likely than [dog owners](#) to say their pets offer

companionship, provide a calming presence and help reduce stress and anxiety. Dog owners were twice as likely as cat owners to say their pet encourages them to be physically active.

When asked how much they worried about various stressors related to pets, pet owners were most worried about their pets aging or passing away (71%) and their pets' health conditions (66%). Over half also worried about arrangements while traveling (56%) and health care related expenses (58%).

Non-pet-owners said that they were most likely not to own one because they couldn't afford it (29%) or that they did not have time to take care of a pet (22%). About 11% were mourning a deceased pet.

"The benefits of pet ownership to many Americans seem to outweigh the stressors," said APA CEO and Medical Director Saul Levin, M.D., M.P.A. "If pets are not an option for your family, but you are seeking that connection, there are many opportunities to volunteer with animals that may also benefit your life."

Provided by American Psychiatric Association

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