

## **Gresham Animal Hospital's Health and Wellness Discussion**

**A man named Anatole France once said, "Until one has loved an animal, a part of one's soul has remained unawakened." An increasing number of people own pets or want to own pets. As stated in News in health.Com, About 40 million cats and dogs were owned as pets in 1967. In 2006 that number increased to more than 160 million. About two-thirds of U.S. households now own at least one pet. I've always had pets. Matter of fact, at one point my home housed seven cats. It currently holds 4 dogs and 2 cats. Dr. James Griffin told the News in Health newsletter, "When children are asked who they talk to when they get upset, a lot of times their first answer is their pet." This points to the importance of pets as a source of comfort and developing empathy. Surprisingly, animals have a more positive impact in homes, than many people think. Owning any kind of animal is helpful in making us healthy, happy, and social.**

**First, Most of us have learned or noticed that people get their exercise in by running on the sidewalk or in the local park with man's best friend. In other words, a dog. They are good motivators to get people out there and get moving, but recent studies have shown that dogs aren't the only ones keeping people healthy. Many animals have been proven to help people suffering from heart problems. WebMD says that "Research has shown the long-term benefits of owning a cat include protection for your heart. Over the 20 years of one study, people who never owned a cat were 40% more likely to die of a heart attack than those who had. Another study showed that dog owners had a significantly better survival rate one year after a heart attack". According to renegade health, a study from the Minnesota Stroke Institute shows that, those who owned a cat were 30 percent less likely to suffer a heart attack over a period of 10 years. Animals do not only help with heart problems, they also help prevent and cure other illnesses. A different article from WebMD says "Your dog may make you less likely to get heart problems. Dog owners walk more and have lower blood pressure than people who don't have dogs. They were also less likely to suffer other types of cardiovascular disease, including stroke, than people without domestic pets". "Other studies have shown that pet owners have lower levels of cholesterol, and triglycerides than those who don't own pets."**

**Second, Not only can your pets make you healthy, they also improve your happiness. Recent research has revealed that depression is decreased when owning a pet. A study in 2005 as stated on renegadehealth.com, demonstrates that playing with a pet raises levels of the "good mood" neurotransmitters serotonin and dopamine and decreased the stress hormone cortisol, said by c n c a health, "Numerous studies have shown that owning a pet can relieve feelings of depression, loneliness, stress and anxiety". Relating back to the fact that children go to their pets when they are upset, shows that pets are here to comfort people. C n c a health states Owning a pet (particularly a dog) helps children adjust better to serious illness or death of a parent, as well as enhances self-esteem, cognitive development and nurturing behavior. Scientists at the University of London conducted a study that revealed dogs truly do respond to human tears and will naturally try and reassure a distressed person. It also turns out dogs will try and comfort anyone who cries, not just their owner. Researchers filmed 18 dogs of various breeds at the homes of their owner. One of the researchers ignored the dog and started to either talk, hum loudly or**

**pretend to cry. Fifteen of the dogs stopped what they were doing and went over to the crying person and displayed submissive behavior when approaching.**

**Third, I'm sure most of us have seen a cute dog on the streets with his or her owner, and said, "Aww, can I pet it?" Animals actually have a way of getting people together, and actually making us more social. Pets in general, but specifically dogs, can often act as icebreakers. 9/10 men failed at getting a girl's number without a dog, but 1/3 succeeded when they did have a dog. Many people take their dogs to dog parks and end up socializing with other people. Some go to let their own dogs play, while others go to watch other people's dogs have fun. It's an easy way to meet new people and make new friends. Not only are pets there to break the ice, they also help people create better social skills. According to Gale database, prison inmates who care for animals tend to be less violent and have better social skills than pet-free inmates. Huffington Post states that dogs may be particularly beneficial for kids with autism, acting as a "social lubricant" that helps them build assertiveness and confidence in their interactions with others, according to new research from the University of Missouri.**

**In conclusion, owning animals is overall very beneficial. Having pets improves your health, makes you happier, and increases your social life. They are extremely important in the lives of people of all types. From newborns to people living their last few days, from the healthy to the sick, animals often play a very important role. Everyone could use some kind of animal in their lives, and most of us have one or more. "Until one has loved an animal, a part of one's soul has remained unawakened."**