

Cats add life



Having cats as pets adds life to
our own lives in so many ways.



As companions and friends

There's no emptier place than a dwelling without animals. What a difference it makes to people living on their own, the elderly, or those with hectic lifestyles, to come home to the warm welcome of a feline friend.

Most pet-owners state that the reason they have animals is for companionship. Today, pets are widely recognised as an essential part of the human social support system. In fact, pet cats may provide the only stable and loving relationship some people ever experience, providing company and affection with few demands. 'Low-maintenance' and independent, cats also make the perfect companion for those with a modern or working lifestyle.



Recent studies have proved that the animal-human bond provides positive physiological, psychological and health benefits to humans. This is particularly valuable for needy groups such as the elderly, lonely and depressed. Cats can do much to alleviate the loneliness and isolation such people feel, providing them with a sense of comfort and support.

Given the opportunity, other disadvantaged or marginalised groups such as the physically disabled, elderly in institutions, children in hospitals, patients in hospices, and prisoners, can all benefit from interacting with animals.

As esteem enhancers

Studies have shown that pet owners have better self-esteem, as well as more caring and more empathy toward other people, than non-pet owners.

Looking after a pet boosts the self-esteem of the elderly, giving them a sense of being needed and useful. At Cats Protection, we often hear from elderly people who tell us that the only reason they get out of bed every day is to feed the cat.



Children, too, acquire a sense of achievement when they help out with the cat. By entrusting children with pet-related chores such as feeding, grooming or even cleaning out the litter tray, the young are made to feel that they are contributing something worthwhile, gaining in personal growth and development.

The National Curriculum recommends that children learn the lessons of taking and sharing responsibility by looking after animals well. Engaging with animals can teach pupils how to nurture, care and love all life, thereby learning to respect and relate to peers, parents and teachers.

Research carried out by Jonica Newby, from the PetCare Information and Advisory Service in Australia, found that the presence of cats in the learning environment not only improved children's knowledge of responsible pet ownership, but also increased class cohesiveness and the general atmosphere. It also discovered that the cats generated a calm, orderly environment, modified disruptive behaviour and reduced friction. There were also examples of lower achievers having a better understanding of mathematical concepts when they were able to relate them to the cat.

As stress busters

Medical research has shown that stroking animals is therapeutic for stress as well as for many health problems.

One surefire remedy against stress is the following: sit in a chair and place a cat in your lap, then start stroking. In no time, tension and stress will be released from your body. Sensitive and gentle, cats naturally seek quiet and are unfailing in their ability to induce calm.

As health boosters

A September 1999 article by Ian Murray, medical correspondent for *The Times*, claims that the NHS could save £1 billion a year if more people had pets. Such are the known health benefits of having a pet.

Research compiled by the Society for Companion Animal Studies shows that owning and caring for pets can reduce blood pressure and stress and boost chances of surviving life-threatening illnesses. On the whole, dog and cat owners are healthier: they make fewer visits to the doctor and are less likely to be on medication for heart problems and sleeping difficulties than non-owners. There is evidence of the beneficial effects pets have on people's cardiovascular systems. It has also been discovered that owning or even having access to an animal helps people to recover more quickly from illness.

Cats assist people psychologically as well as behaviourally and are known to be therapeutic for those with dementia or Alzheimer's disease. In addition, studies reveal that cats as pets aid those with mental health problems, those who are withdrawn, and reduce aggression in people with violent tendencies.

As socialisers

Owning pets has a direct effect on a child's social skills. One study found that pet-owning adolescents were both more popular and had better person-perception skills than non-pet-owning adolescents. By learning how to look after an animal, children develop qualities such as giving, caring, and a sense of responsibility; it also teaches them about forming relationships. However, when asked why they had cats, the answers often mentioned fun, love, affection and companionship.



**To find out more about how
cats can add life to your life,
or about how you can support
the charity, phone our
Cats Protection Helpline
on: 08702 099 099**



Cats Protection would like to thank
The Society for Companion Animal Studies
for its contribution to this leaflet.



17 Kings Road Horsham
West Sussex RH13 5PN
Helpline: 08702 099 099
(Calls charged at national rate)
Fax: 08707 708 265

E-mail: cpl@cats.org.uk
Web: www.cats.org.uk
Charity No. 203644
January 2001
581