

THE BENEFITS OF PET OWNERSHIP

1. Over half the nation's households (52.3%) share their lives with an animal¹, with dog and cat ownership rising by almost 12% in the period 2000-04.

2. The health benefits of pet ownership

- Research shows that dog owners made 8% and cat owners 12% fewer visits to the doctor than non-pet owners in the previous year.²
- Pet owning pensioners make up to 21% fewer visits to the doctor than non-pet owners³.
- Children from households with pets have stronger immune systems and took fewer days off sick from school, receiving up to 18 extra half days schooling per year. This was most pronounced in age groups 5-8⁴
- Exposure to pets in the first year of life lowers the prevalence of allergic rhinitis and asthma in school children⁵
- Pet ownership is associated with lower levels of stress⁶
- Results of a three-year study of 5,741 people showed that pet owners had lower blood pressure and triglyceride and cholesterol levels than non-owners, a result that could not be explained by such personal differences as cigarette smoking, diet, weight or socioeconomic profile.⁷

Benefits such as these led to savings in NHS expenditure of 1.5% from 2000-04, which cumulatively amounted to over £3bn.⁸

3. Benefits on child development

Parents often obtain a pet because they consider them to be good for their children. In a study conducted by the University of Edinburgh, parents stated that pets:

- Are educational
- Teach responsibility
- Are important for moral development
- Are good companions

Pets in the home instil responsibility, encourage social as well as environmental awareness and have positive health benefits on children. (source: The Society of Companion Animal Studies (SCAS), University of Edinburgh)

Research suggests that children and young people benefit physically, emotionally and socially from living with, caring for, or having regular contact with companion animals:

¹ Source: Pet Food Manufacturers Association (PFMA), 2004 – www.pfma.org.uk

² Jennings G. L: Animals and Cardiovascular Health - paper presented at the 7th International Conference on Human-Animal Interactions, *Animals, Health and Quality of Life*, Geneva, Switzerland, September 1995.

³ Siegel, J. M. Stressful life events and use of physician services among the elderly: The moderating role of pet ownership. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 1990

⁴ McNicholas, J – University of Warwick, 2002

⁵ Hesselmar, B – Does early exposure to a cat or dog protect against later allergies developing, 1999.

⁶ Allen, K, Blascovich J, Mendes W: Cardiovascular reactivity and the presence of pets, friends and spouses. The truth about cats and dogs. *Psychosomatic Medicine* 64, 2002

⁷ Anderson W: Does pet ownership reduce your risk for heart disease? Baker Medical Research Institute, Melbourne, Australia. Originally published in *InterActions*, Vol. 10, No. 3., pp 12-13, 1992

⁸ Figures based on a study published in the *Australian Social Monitor* Vol 5, No. 4, Nov 2002, using national health expenditure data in the UK from 2000-04, and pet-owning households data for those years sourced from PFMA

- Contact with pets develops nurturing behaviour in children who may grow to be more nurturing adults: children who have pets in the home are involved in a range of regular caregiving activities such as feeding, walking, grooming, playing, cleaning living quarters⁹. This may well help to teach children about responsibility, and build their self-esteem by enabling them to feel competent.
 - It has also been shown that children with pets are better socially integrated, have wider social networks and are more popular with their classmates.¹⁰
 - Research indicates that children's power of language improves through interaction with animals¹¹
 - Young children with a strong bond with a family pet score highly on social competency and empathy scores¹²
 - In a study conducted with a class of primary school children aged 7-8 years old, 90% listed their pets in their top 10 special relationships¹³
4. The pet care industry has a turnover of more than £4bn. It employs over 47,500 people in 13,300 care businesses of which 52% are sole proprietors¹⁴
 5. A pet shop MUST obtain permission to trade from its local authority (LA) before it is permitted to sell animals.
 6. Training is of vital importance to pet retailers. Pet shops and many local authorities follow the Local Government Association's model standard conditions that stipulate that for new applications at least one member of staff working at the licensed premises must hold the City & Guilds 7760 qualification, known as the Pet Store Management Course, or equivalent. This is a level 3 qualification, equivalent in status to the Veterinary Nursing qualification. For those retailers dealing with fish and other aquatic organisms, the Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association runs equivalent courses. The guidelines further state that no animal should be stocked or sold unless at least one member of staff is familiar with the care and welfare of the animals stocked and has a recognised qualification.
 7. Pet shops are a visible source of companion animals, and large numbers of the public enter pet shops freely each day – they keep an eye on standards too. No other animal related business is open to as much scrutiny by officials and the public.
 8. Most pet shops are small businesses established by people who enjoy 'talking pet'. There are some larger chains that are also staffed by people who enjoy 'talking pet'. All business' need profit but that is not the driving force for people to work there. Retailers who want an easy life do not sell live pets.
 9. Pet shops are essential to the social fabric of local communities. They provide free expert advice on pet health and welfare in a way that supermarket staff cannot. In many cases they are one of the specialist retailers on the high street that are under threat in some areas.

⁹ Melson G F: Fostering Inter-Connectedness with Animals And Nature: The Developmental Benefits For Children. Originally published in *People, Animals, Environment*, Autumn 1990.

¹⁰ Endenburg N. and Baarda B.: The role of pets in enhancing human well-being: Effects on child development. In *The Waltham Book of Human-Animal Interaction: Benefits and Responsibilities of Pet Ownership*, 7-17, ed. I. H. Robinson. Exeter: Pergamon, 1995.

¹¹ Condoret, A: Speech and companion animals, experience with normal and disturbed nursery school children. In *New Perspectives in our Lives with Companion Animals*, 1983.

¹² Poresky, R. H. and Hendrix, C: Differential effects of pet presence and pet-bonding on young children, 1990.

¹³ McNicholas, J, Collis, G M: Child Care Health and Development as "Children's Representations of Pets in their Social Networks", 2000.

¹⁴ Sources: Mintel (the market research organisation) www.mintel.com and Lantra www.lantra.co.uk (the skills and business council for the environment and land-based sector)

10. Despite some sections' opposition to animals being bought in pet shops, up to 99% of pet-owning households do in fact look after their pets well¹⁵. Some organisations are keen to highlight the number of abandoned animals – most of which are dogs and cats. However, the vast majority of dogs and cats are not sold by pet shops, so pressure to stop pet shops trading in live animals are misplaced.
11. The current system of trading in live animals ensures that the process remains organised and controlled. Banning sales through pet shops would drive business underground, which in turn would compromise animal welfare.

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¹⁵ Figures based on household numbers from 2001 Census and 2006 RSPCA complaints data