

Human



Animal

Bond



A research
compilation on
#PetPower

**PetAlliance
Europe** 

#PetPower is our way of talking about human-animal interactions, the bond between our species, and the many benefits that can be drawn from close relationships between people and animals, particularly companion animals.

It's another way of talking about animal-assisted interventions and the human-animal bond. And it refers to any situation where there is interchange between humans and animals at an individual, community or cultural level.

#PetPower

What's it all about?



Why #PetPower matters

#PetPower, or the human-animal bond, is important as it is a mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and animals. Influenced by behaviours linked to health and well-being, #PetPower creates favourable emotional, psychological, and physical interactions between people and animals, positively shaping societies and communities. There is even some evidence that it can have positive economic impacts on healthcare systems.

The science behind #PetPower

There is a long history of anecdotal and observational evidence of the mutual benefits of the human-animal bond. Internationally, the depth and quality of evidence and research on the substantive benefits to people and pets is growing.



Many peer-reviewed studies illustrate the myriad beneficial effects of pet ownership to people, with positive impacts on areas such as: **physical wellbeing and mental health promotion, early child development, healthy ageing and social inclusion for marginalised and disadvantaged people.**



Findings to date confirm the significant social and societal potential that the human-animal bond offers in directing national and regional priorities for healthcare policies, healthy aging policies, education policies, etc.



We have selected a few key findings from studies carried out in Europe

PHYSICAL HEALTH



 A UK study showed: Dog owners often have higher activity levels and shorter sedentary time even on days when the weather is bad.

 A study in Italy showed: For cancer patients animal-assisted activities during chemotherapy reduces feelings of depression and increases arterial oxygen saturation.

 A study in England showed: The odds of dog owners meeting current physical activity guidelines of 150 mins per week were four times greater than for non-dog owners. Children with dogs also reported more minutes of walking and free-time activity.

 A study in Sweden showed: Within 1 year after an acute heart attack the odds of death were lower in dog owners than in non-owners. Dog ownership was also associated with lower risk of a recurrent heart attack 30 days or later after the initial attack. Risk of death among pet owners following a stroke was also recorded as lower.

 A Czechia study showed: Young women with 3 or more animals reported higher levels of moderate physical activity. Owners of dogs, horses and other domestic animals are more likely to be active, due to carrying out a lot of physical exercise with them. In particular horse owners had significantly higher levels of activity than non-animal owners.



MENTAL HEALTH

 A UK review of studies found that: Pets provided calming support and were perceived to have a 'sense' of when it was needed. People were able to confide in their pets when they were unable to open up to other people.

 An Austrian paper reported: Dogs can boost the self-esteem and agency of their human partners and are excellent "social lubricants," thereby connecting people.

 A UK study showed: Pets constituted a valuable source of support for managing feelings through distraction from symptoms and upsetting experiences. Pets provide a mechanism for engagement with the social world through having to care for them no matter how you feel, and creating a sense of purpose considered fundamental to wellbeing.

 Study from the Netherlands: Companion animals were reported to alleviate loneliness. Owning a companion animal has been associated with lower levels of depression and with higher levels of life satisfaction.





CHILD DEVELOPMENT

 Studies in Norway and Switzerland showed: Exposure to pets reduces the risk of developing allergy-related diseases in early childhood. Childhood exposure to pets including cats was associated with reduced allergies to cats in adulthood.

 A UK review of studies reported: Companion animal ownership may facilitate language acquisition and potentially enhance verbal skills in children. The long-term presence of pets at home can have tangible influences on children's cognitive development and educational outcomes.

 A study in Croatia showed: By taking responsibility for the well-being of a pet, children learn through experience about the importance of empathy in responding to others' feelings and needs, as well as appropriate forms of prosocially oriented behaviour.

 A survey of Scottish children showed: A childhood attachment to pets significantly predicts positive attitudes towards animals in general. Children involved in pet care behaviour may have positive outcomes in terms of better well-being and quality of life.

HEALTHY AGING



🐾 A Spanish review of studies reported: Animal presence or therapy stimulates increased rates of social contact amongst older adults in homes or institutions, and reduced behavioural disturbances in people with dementia. Elderly pet owners also had fewer doctor visits that were attributable to stressful life events.

🐾 A UK study showed: Owning a dog, may motivate older adults to engage in appropriate levels of physical activity supporting healthy and active aging.

🐾 A study in Italy showed: People with Alzheimer's receiving animal-assisted therapy showed an improvement in both cognitive function and mood.

🐾 A Dutch/Swiss review of studies showed: Pets foster feelings of being protected and safe, both inside and outside the home for elderly pet owners. Dogs are viewed as providers of safety, security, and protection, with older adults perceiving themselves to be safer when walking accompanied by a dog or when at home.

🐾 A joint US/UK review of studies showed: There is an increasing body of evidence suggesting that pets may offer a range of health benefits supporting older adults to retain their physical and mental health, independence, social connectedness and engagement. Older adults having contact with dogs reported reduced levels of loneliness and improved mental functioning.



OTHER SPECIFIC ISSUES

 A Netherlands study showed: Knowledge that an assistance dog is present and able to respond during a seizure can be reassuring for people with epilepsy, which may reduce seizure worry, stress and onset, meaning decreased seizure frequency. Such support dogs lead to administering of rescue medication on time and decreasing the likelihood of sequential seizures.

 A study in Italy showed: Equine assisted therapy for children with autism spectrum disorders showed an improvement in social functioning and executive ability. Horse-riding activities also show improvement in motor skills.

 A UK study showed: For many people who are homeless, having a pet is an important and valued activity. The psychological benefits of pet ownership can modulate some of the negative consequences of the homelessness experience.



At a European-level there remains significant gaps in the evidence base. There is also a lack of harmonised guidelines for animal-assisted activities and for the care of animals involved in interventions or service.

Our alliance believes this would be an important focus area for Horizon Europe research funding projects. Particularly given increasing isolation, older adults now forming around 20% of our population, and rapid urbanisation and the associated social challenges.

Suggested areas for further research include:

- 🐾 evidence relating to healthcare economics
- 🐾 animal assisted primary prevention
- 🐾 ongoing care for older adults, people with disabilities or others in need of ongoing care
- 🐾 benefits for professionals who work in traumatic or conflict situations such as hospital staff or security forces
- 🐾 the benefits the bond bestows in return on companion and working animals





animalhealtheurope.eu

AnimalhealthEurope represents companies that research, develop and manufacture veterinary medicines in Europe. It represents innovators and generics alike, as well as large, medium-sized and small companies. AnimalhealthEurope's membership covers 90% of the European market for veterinary products.



fediaf.org

FEDIAF represents the European pet food industry. While we work sustainably every day to provide safe products that benefit pets, our work goes beyond pets, and goes beyond pet food. Our work is also about society. Because we believe that pet ownership has the potential to enhance the lives of all Europeans.

Annex

The following studies and reviews were considered for our booklet highlighting key human-animal bond research findings

Physical health

• **Wu, Y.T., Luben, R. and Jones, A.**

Dog ownership supports the maintenance of physical activity during poor weather in older English adults: cross-sectional results from the EPIC Norfolk cohort. *J Epidemiol Community Health.*

• **M. Orlandi, K. Trangeled, A. Mambrini, M. Tagliani, A. Ferrarini, L. Zanetti, R. Tartarini, P. Pacetti, M. Cantore.**

Pet Therapy Effects on Oncological Day Hospital Patients Undergoing Chemotherapy Treatment.

• **Hayley E. Christian, Carri Westgarth, et al.**

Dog Ownership and Physical Activity: A Review of the Evidence. *in Journal of Physical Activity and Health.*

• **Carri Westgarth, Christopher Jewell, Rob Christley (Dogs Trust), Alexander J German**

Dog owners are more likely to meet physical activity guidelines than people without a dog: An investigation of the association between dog ownership and physical activity levels in a UK community.

• **Hielscher, Benedikt; Ganslosser, Udo; and Froboese, Ingo.**

"More Than 'Just' Walking: An Observational Study of Dog-Related Physical Activities." *People and Animals: The International Journal of Research and Practice.* Vol. 3 : Iss. 1.

• **Mwena Mubanga, Liisa Byberg, Agneta Egenvall, Erik Ingelsson, Tove Fall**

Dog Ownership and Survival After a Major Cardiovascular Event: A Register-Based Prospective Study.

• **Kristýna Machová, Klára Daďová, Helena Chaloupková & Ivona Svobodová**

Does having a pet influence the physical activity of their young female owners?

Mental health

• **Helen Louise Brooks, Kelly Rushton, Karina Lovell, Penny Bee, Lauren Walker, Laura Grant, and Anne Rogers**

The power of support from companion animals for people living with mental health problems: a systematic review and narrative synthesis of the evidence.

• **Helen Brooks, Kelly Rushton, Sandra Walker, Karina Lovell, Anne Rogers**

Ontological security and connectivity provided by pets: a study in the self-management of the everyday lives of people diagnosed with a long-term mental health condition.

• **Kotschal, Kurt**

"How Wolves Turned into Dogs and How Dogs Are Valuable in Meeting Human Social Needs." *People and Animals: The International Journal of Research and Practice.* Vol. 1 : Iss. 1

• **Mayke Janssens, Jannes Eshuis, Sanne Peeters, Johan Lataster, Jennifer Reijnders, Marie-Jose Enders-Slegers & Nele Jacobs**

The Pet-Effect in Daily Life: An Experience Sampling Study on Emotional Wellbeing in Pet Owners

Child development

• **Borgi, M., Loliva, D., Cerino, S., Chiarotti, S., Venerosi, A., Bramini, A., & Cirulli, F.**

Effectiveness of a standardized equine-assisted therapy program for children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders.* 48(1): 1-9.

• **Rebecca Purewal, Robert Christley, Katarzyna Kordas, Carol Joinson, Kerstin Meints, Nancy Gee, and Carri Westgarth**

Companion Animals and Child/Adolescent Development: A Systematic Review of the Evidence

• **Vlasta Vizek Vidović, Vesna Vlahović Štetić & Denis Bratko**

Pet Ownership, Type of Pet and Socio-Emotional Development of School Children

• **Roxanne Hawkins, Joanne M. Williams**

Childhood Attachment to Pets: Associations between Pet Attachment, Attitudes to Animals, Compassion, and Humane Behaviour

• **HP Roost, N Künzli, C Schindler, D Jarvis, S Chinn, A P Perruchoud, U Ackermann-Liebrich, P Burney, B Wüthrich**

Role of current and childhood exposure to cat and atopic sensitization.

• **P. Nafstad, P. Magnus, P. I. Gaarder, J. J. K. Jaakkola**

Exposure to pets and atopy-related diseases in the first 4 years of life.

• **Cristiano Scandurra, Antonio Santaniello, Serena Cristiano, Fabrizio Mezza, Susanne Garzillo, Rosa Pizzo, Lucia Francesca Menna, and Vincenzo Bochiochio**

An Animal-Assisted Education Intervention with Dogs to Promote Emotion Comprehension in Primary School Children—The Federico II Model of Healthcare Zooanthropology.

• **Philippe-Peyrouat, Claire and Grandgeorge, Marine**

Animal-Assisted Interventions for Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Survey of French Facilities. " *People and Animals: The International Journal of Research and Practice.* Vol. 1 : Iss. 1

Healthy aging

• **Javier Virués-Ortega, Roberto Pastor-Barriso, Juan M. Castellote, Adolfo Población & Jesús de Pedro-Cuesta**

Effect of animal-assisted therapy on the psychological and functional status of elderly populations and patients with psychiatric disorders: a meta-analysis.

• **Philippa Margaret Dall, Sarah Lesley Helen Ellis, Brian Martin Ellis, P Margaret Grant, Alison Colyer, Nancy Renee Gee, Malcolm Howard Granat & Daniel Simon Mills**

The influence of dog ownership on objective measures of free-living physical activity and sedentary behaviour in community-dwelling older adults: a longitudinal case-controlled study.

• **Marie Jose Enders-Slegers, Karin Hediger**

Pet Ownership and Human-Animal Interaction in an Aging Population: Rewards and Challenges.

• **Antonio Santaniello, Susanne Garzillo, Alessia Amato, Mario Sansone, Annalisa Di Palma, Annamaria Di Maggio, Alessandro Fioretti, and Lucia Francesca Menna**

Animal-Assisted Therapy as a Non-Pharmacological Approach in Alzheimer's Disease: A Retrospective Study.

• **Andrea Beetz, Kerstin Uvnäs-Moberg, Henri Julius, and Kurt Kotschal**

Psychosocial and Psychophysiological Effects of Human-Animal Interactions: The Possible Role of Oxytocin.

• **Alfonso Soffarelli, Elisa Gianferrari, Manuela Alfieri, Giovanna Artioli, Chiara Taffurelli**

Pet therapy: an effective strategy to care for the elderly? An experimental study in a nursing home

• **McCune S and Promislow D**

Healthy, Active Aging for People and Dogs.

Specific issues

• **Valérie Wester, Saskia de Groot, Tim A Kanters, Louis Wagner**

Evaluating the Effectiveness and Cost-Effectiveness of Seizure Dogs in Persons With Medically Refractory Epilepsy in the Netherlands: Study Protocol for a Stepped Wedge Randomized Controlled Trial (EPISODE)

• **Parker, Lana; Boland, Leonie; and Warren, Alison**

"She's Me": An Exploration of Pet Ownership from the Perspective of People Who Are Homeless." *People and Animals: The International Journal of Research and Practice.* Vol. 3 : Iss. 1

Issues arising from studies, etc.:

• **Kerulo, Greta; Kargas, Niko; Mills, Daniel S.; Law, Graham; VanFleet, Rise; Faa-Thompson, Tracie; and Winkle, Melissa Y.**

Animal-Assisted Interventions: Relationship Between Standards and Qualifications. " *People and Animals: The International Journal of Research and Practice.* Vol. 3: Iss. 1

• **Schuurmans, Lonneke G. J. A.; Noback, Inge; Schols, Jos M. G. A.; and Enders-Slegers, Marie-Jose**

An Animal-Assisted Intervention Study in the Nursing Home: Lessons Learned. *People and Animals: The International Journal of Research and Practice.* Vol. 2 : Iss. 1

• **Simonato, Martina; De Santis, Marta; Contalbrigo, Laura; Benedetti, Daniele; Finocchi Mahne, Elisabetta; Santucci, Vincenzo Ugo; Borrello, Silvio; and Farina, Luca**

The Italian Agreement between the Government and the Regional Authorities: National Guidelines for AAI and Institutional Context." *People and Animals: The International Journal of Research and Practice.* Vol. 1 : Iss. 1

• **Marie Jose Enders-Slegers, Karin Hediger**

Pet Ownership and Human-Animal Interaction in an Aging Population: Rewards and Challenges

<https://www.fedfiag.org/pets-in-society/health-benefits.html>

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