

Your own beloved cat can be a healthy pleasure



The study titled “Does cat attachment have an effect on human health? A comparison between owners and volunteers”, published in the first issue of *Pet Behaviour Science* (Dinis and Martins, 2016 | Vol.1 | 1 - 12), shows that for both owners and volunteers, cardiovascular measures such as blood pressure and heart rate decrease in the presence of a cat. This reduction is more consistent and larger for owners at home than for volunteers at a cat rehoming centre. Volunteers only showed a comparable reduction in systolic blood pressure. In addition, the calming effect, or the reduction in cardiovascular measurements, was greater the more attached the owner reported to be to the cat.

The reported attachment to cats was not different for both groups of participants, showing that both owners and volunteers have an affinity for the cats. Length of ownership was very important for attachment, showing that the longer owners had the cat, the stronger the attachment was to them and potentially the greater the health benefit.

Can the presence of a cat calm the owner's stress? What about if the cat is not your own but you have an affinity for cats?

These results lend support to the body of evidence that shows that pets can be a healthy pleasure. The importance of this study is that it particularly focused on cats (rather than dogs, a pet that tends to have healthier owners due to dog walking). So, cats can also help owners unwind and this effect is stronger for owners who have had their cats longer than 2 years.

The study also raises an interesting possibility that it is the ‘family pet and the home environment’ that generates the health benefits and that tactile contact with a cat that is not very familiar in the work set-up yields fewer health benefits. Further research should focus on the importance of place of interaction as well as the quality of interaction between cats and humans.



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