

THE HUFFINGTON POST

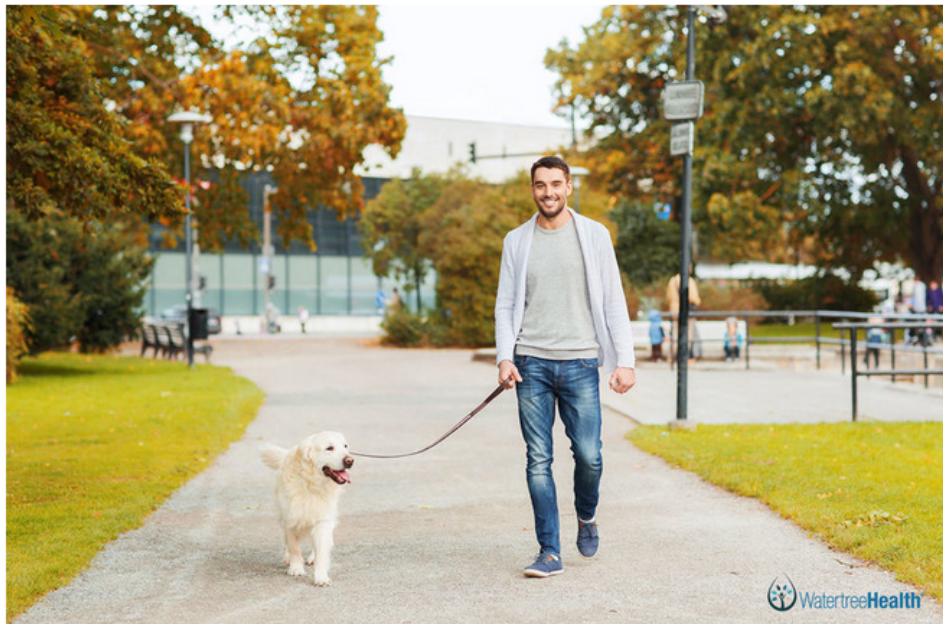
CONTRIBUTOR

Pet Owners Live Healthier & Happier Lives

© 08/02/2016 12:38 pm ET



Like 0



Lisa Chau Watertree Health Digital Strategist Published in Forbes. TED-Ed Lesson Creator.

Fitbit Blaze, Under Armour HealthBox, Gymwatch Sensor, iFit NordicTrack Escape, Emfit QS Sleep Monitor... These are some of the [health and fitness gadgets you'll want from CES 2016](#).

Technology is amazing, exciting and cool. But it won't put a smile on your face the way a cat or dog might. Sometimes, there's nothing better for your physical health than a pet.

According to WebMD, research has shown that animals can positively impact mood and help with stress. Pets provide companionship without the emotional complications human interactions typically bring. Plus, the physical contact of petting a cat or dog can be incredibly soothing. Cleveland Clinic notes that

[certain illnesses such as diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, ulcers or heart disease can get worse with stress.](#)

[One NIH study](#) found that dog owners who had suffered a heart attack were more likely to survive, regardless of the attack's severity! In another study, married couples with pets had lower blood pressure and heart rates.

Increased exercise may be an extra contributor to the improved health of dog owners. An NIH investigation revealed that adults who regularly walked their dogs were less likely to be obese because of higher rates of physical activity. A second NIH study found that older adults who regularly walked their dogs had more mobility at home, walked faster and for longer durations.

Pets can also be the first step in combatting loneliness. As we reported in May, [recent suicide rates have skyrocketed in part because of social isolation](#). A dog or cat can be a constant companion, and can make a meaningful difference. Eventually, pet owners may connect with other animal lovers during daily walks or casual conversation. Pets provide a safe topic for discussion as well as regular opportunities for socialization.

In addition, pet owners may find new purpose in providing a healthy household for their dog or cat. Daily responsibilities associated with animal care refocuses energies and reminds owners of their capabilities, value and worth. They benefit physically and mentally – pet owners are motivated to exercise more and live healthier.

[In Psychology Today](#), Dr. Azadeh Aalai wrote,

Dog owners exhibit greater benefits than non-owners on dimensions as far ranging as [self-esteem](#), physical fitness, sociability, [happiness](#), and overall health (McConnell et al., 2011). Moreover, dog ownership has also been implicated in helping to alleviate symptoms of [depression](#) among terminally ill patients,

the elderly, and veterans suffering from [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder](#) (PTSD). In fact, many innovative therapies today targeting our returning veterans specifically integrate canine [therapy](#), with some resources referring to the presence of dogs as "life-savers" for these veterans (e.g. Colin, 2012).

The mental and physical benefits of owning a cat or dog can be tremendous – increasing happiness and healthiness. Can your Fuelband do that?

Co-authored with Shane Power, President of [Watertree Health](#), where Lisa works in communication and business development. Both love dogs and cats.