

The UCONN Buzz



THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF PETS

The unconditional love of a pet can do more than keep you company. Pets may also decrease stress, improve heart health, and even help children with their emotional and social skills. An estimated 68% of U.S. households have a pet. Over the past 10 years, NIH has partnered with the Mars Corporation's WALTHAM Centre for Pet Nutrition to look at what the potential physical and mental health benefits are for different animals.

Possible Health Effects

Research on human-animal interactions is still relatively new. Some studies have shown positive health effects, but the results have been mixed. Interacting with animals has been shown to decrease levels of cortisol (a stress-related hormone) and lower blood pressure. Other studies have found that animals can reduce loneliness, increase feelings of social support, and boost your mood.

The NIH/Mars Partnership is funding a range of studies focused on the relationships we have with animals. For example, researchers are looking into how animals might influence child development. They're studying animal interactions with kids who have [autism](#), [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder \(ADHD\)](#), and other conditions.

"There's not one answer about how a pet can help somebody with a specific condition," explains Dr. Layla Esposito, who oversees NIH's Human Animal-Interaction Research Program. "Is your goal to increase physical activity? Then you might benefit from owning a dog. You have to walk a dog several times a day and you're going to increase physi-

cal activity. If your goal is reducing stress, sometimes watching fish swim can result in a feeling of calmness. So there's no one type fits all."

Animals Helping People

Animals can serve as a source of comfort and support. Therapy dogs are good at this. They're sometimes brought into hospitals or nursing homes to help reduce patients' stress and anxiety. "Dogs are very present. If someone is struggling with something, they know how to sit there and be loving," says Dr. Ann Berger, a physician and researcher at the NIH Clinical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. "Their attention is focused on the person all the time." Researchers are studying the safety of bringing animals into hospital settings because animals may expose people to more germs.

[Another study](#) found that children with autism spectrum disorder were calmer while playing with guinea pigs in the classroom. When the children spent 10 minutes in a supervised group playtime with guinea pigs, their anxiety levels dropped. The children also had better social interactions and were more engaged with their peers. The researchers suggest that the animals offered unconditional acceptance, making them a calm comfort to the children.

"Animals can become a way of building a bridge for those social interactions," Griffin says.

Animals may help you in other unexpected ways.

[A recent study](#) showed that caring for fish helped teens with diabetes better manage their disease. Researchers had a group of teens with type 1 diabetes care for a pet fish twice a day by

feeding and checking water levels. The caretaking routine also included changing the tank water each week. This was paired with the children reviewing their blood glucose (blood sugar) logs with parents.

Researchers tracked how consistently these teens checked their blood glucose. Compared with teens who weren't given a fish to care for, fish-keeping teens were more disciplined about checking their own blood glucose levels, which is essential for maintaining their health.

While pets may bring a wide range of health benefits, an animal may not work for everyone. [Recent studies](#) suggest that early exposure to pets may help protect young children from developing allergies and asthma. But for people who are allergic to certain animals, having pets in the home can do more harm than good.

Remember that animals can feel stressed and fatigued, too. It's important for kids to be able to recognize signs of stress in their pet and know when not to approach. Animal bites can cause serious harm. "Dog bite prevention is certainly an issue parents need to consider, especially for young children who don't always know the boundaries of what's appropriate to do with a dog," Esposito explains.

Researchers will continue to explore the many health effects of having a pet. "We're trying to find out what's working, what's not working Esposito says.

Source: NIH News in Health

HAPPENINGS AROUND TOWN

[3rd Annual JDRF TypeOne Summit for the type 1 diabetes\(T1D\) community](#). Sunday, March 4th, CT Convention Center Hartford.

Learn about research advances, discussions with experts & meet other individuals, families affected by T1D. Keynote Kyle Cochran, 4-Time Ninja Warrior participant, living with T1D since 1993. This free event is from 12:30-5pm.

[Special Olympics Penguin Plunge](#) - Saturday, March 24th. Patriots Park, 124 Lake Street Coventry. The Special Olympics is celebrating its 50th anniversary with a plunge in the lake. To join in, participants must raise a minimum of \$50 & be at least eight years old. Costumes & team outfits are encouraged. Check-in is set to begin at 11 am & the Plunge will take place at 1 pm.

[Mansfield Annual EGGSTRAVAGANZA Egg Hunt](#), Saturday, March 24. Suggested donation of \$2.00 per child. Children should bring a basket for their goodies. The event begins at 1:00 PM at the Mansfield Community Center with three waves- for ages 1-3, 4-6, and 7-10. Rain date March 31.

[Columbia 7th Annual Easter Egg Hunt](#) - Sunday, March 25 at Yeomans Hall at noon Grades Pre-K through Grade 4. There will also be a Lions sponsored pediatric eye screening. Please bring your own basket or bag for collecting eggs. Starts at noon.

Broccoli Frittata 2 Servings

INGREDIENTS

- ◆ 1/4 cup non-fat cottage cheese
- ◆ 1/2 tsp olive oil
- ◆ 1/4 cup diced onion
- ◆ 1 cup frozen chopped broccoli
- ◆ 3 eggs
- ◆ 1/4 tsp dried dill

DIRECTIONS

1. Mix cottage cheese and eggs; set aside.
2. In large non-stick frying pan over medium heat, sauté onions in oil for 5 minutes, or until soft. Add broccoli and dill; sauté for 5 minutes, or until broccoli mixture softens.
3. Add egg and cheese mixture to pan with vegetables; rotate pan so that eggs are evenly distributed.
4. As eggs set around the edges, lift them to allow uncooked portions to flow underneath. Turn heat to low, cover the pan, and cook until top is set. Invert onto a serving plate and cut into wedges.



Be Well is an employee wellness program provided through the Eastern Highlands Health District with funding from The CT Department of Health. The goal of the program is to make the healthy choice the easy choice.



Sources: Autism Speaks, Eastern Highlands Health District, Face Foundation, National Institutes of Health, National Poison Control Center, University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public

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NATIONAL POISON PREVENTION WEEK - MARCH 18-24

Poisoning is the #1 cause of injury-related death in the U.S. The third week in March each year is designated as [National Poison Prevention Week](#), a week dedicated to raising awareness about the burden of poisoning and highlighting specific ways to prevent it.

In 2015, just under half of exposure cases managed by [poison control centers](#) involved children younger than six. Two of the characteristics that we usually nurture and encourage in our kids — intelligence and curiosity — can be disastrous when it comes to keeping them safe.

Poisoning can happen via the eyes, skin and lungs. Keeping your kids safe from accidental poisoning is not

about getting everything that might be toxic out of your house. Rather, effective poisoning prevention is about taking precautions when it comes to using, storing and discarding household substances, as well as being prepared in the event that the unthinkable happens. Here are four tips to see that through:

Practice safe storage habits

Substances that are dangerous for kids and should be stored up, away and out of sight. Also, try to keep poisonous substances in child-resistant cabinets or containers. Keep in mind that there is no such thing as a child-proof lock or container, and there is no substitution for adult supervision and vigilance.

Read and follow labels and directions

Make a habit of reviewing the label on anything that has one prior to use, especially before administering medications to children. Take care to follow not only usage directions, but the directions provided for safe storage and disposal as well.

Detect invisible threats

Install carbon monoxide detectors in your home.

BE PREPARED

Call poison control at 1-(800) 222-1222. Add this number to your emergency numbers list, save it in your phone and post it in your house. Calls are free, private and answered by experts 24/7 and visit Poisonhelp.org