



## Human Animal Interaction Fact Sheet

### The Benefits of Human-Animal Interaction

Study after study has shown that owning a pet has significant, tangible health benefits for humans. Interacting with pets helps people enjoy happier and healthier lives, and strengthens the communities in which we live. Whether it is increasing our level of physical activity, alleviating depression or improving a child's sense of self-esteem, having a pet is good for you!

Through its world-renowned WALTHAM® Centre for Pet Nutrition, Mars Petcare conducts and funds extensive research into the study of human-animal interaction. This research has shown that the benefits of having a pet are both physical and psychological, and that pet ownership can help strengthen communities.

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#### Physical

- *General Health:* Pet owners visit doctors less often and spend less money on medication.<sup>1</sup>
- *Physical Activity & Obesity:* Numerous studies have suggested that dog walking is a great way of increasing physical activity and may help reduce rates of obesity.<sup>2</sup>
- *Heart Health:* Having a pet reduces blood pressure and lowers the risk of heart disease and high cholesterol. Also, pet ownership can make a significant difference in the survival rates for heart attacks<sup>3</sup> – in one study, 28 percent of heart patients<sup>3</sup> with pets survive serious heart attacks, compared to only six percent without pets.<sup>4</sup>
- *Allergies and Asthma:* Pets have often been implicated as a possible cause of asthma and allergies; however, growing up with a dog during infancy helps to strengthen the immune system and reduce the risk of allergies linked to asthma.<sup>5</sup>

#### Psychological

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<sup>1</sup> Headey et al, Pets and Human Health in Germany and Australia: National Longitudinal Results, *Social Research Indicators*, Issue 80 Volume Number 2, January 2007, 297-311.

<sup>2</sup> Anna Timperio, Jo Salmon, Binh Chu and Nick Andrianopoulos Is dog ownership or dog walking associated with weight status in children and their parents? *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, April 2008 Volume 19, No 1

<sup>3</sup> Friedmann, E.; Thomas, S.A.; Son, H. & and McCune, S. *Pet's presence and owner's blood pressures during the daily lives of pet owners with pre-to-mild hypertension*, Oral Presentation at the International Society for Anthrozoology's 2010 Annual Conference, Sweden, 30 June 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Friedmann, E.; Thomas, S.A.; Son, H. & and McCune, S. *Pet's presence and owner's blood pressures during the daily lives of pet owners with pre-to-mild hypertension*, Oral Presentation at the International Society for Anthrozoology's 2010 Annual Conference, Sweden, 30 June 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Hesselmar, B.; Aberg, N. Aberg, B.; Eriksson, B. & Bjorksten, B., Does early exposure to cat or dog protect against later allergy development? Department of Pediatrics, University of Goteborg, Goteborg, Sweden. *Clinical Exp Allergy*, Volume 29, No 5, May 611-7.

- *Stress Reduction:* Pet ownership reduces stress levels, specifically in therapy sessions.<sup>6</sup> Pets are currently being used in Animal Assisted Therapy in a wide range of therapeutic and institutional settings.
- *Depression:* For those who have lost a spouse, pet ownership and a strong attachment to a pet is associated with significantly less depression.<sup>7</sup>
- *Mental Health:* People with pets feel less lonely than those without. Elderly people with pets live longer due to increased physical activity, socialization and mental function. Also, children who suffer from attention deficit disorder (ADD) are able to focus on a pet, which helps them learn how to concentrate.<sup>8</sup>
- *Improved Self-Esteem:* Self-esteem is higher in children and adolescents who own pets.<sup>9</sup>
- *Increased Empathy:* Children who grow up with pets demonstrate more empathy, are more popular with classmates and are more involved in activities such as sports, hobbies, clubs or chores.<sup>10</sup>
- *Security:* Pet owners feel less afraid of being a victim of crime when walking with a dog or sharing a residence with a dog.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the benefits to individuals and families, communities that foster pet ownership also enjoy significant advantages:

- *Increased Social Engagement:* The presence of dogs increases the number and length of peoples' conversations with others in the community.<sup>12</sup> Also, pets in nursing homes increase social and verbal interactions among the elderly.<sup>13</sup>
- *Social Cohesion:* Pets help people connect and allow them to form closer bonds that underpin successful, healthy communities. Increased social cohesion facilitated by pets and pet owners leads to increased community spirit, less crime, higher wealth and higher levels of education. This is particularly true in neighborhoods that foster communal areas such as dog parks, where pets and pet owners can socialize together.<sup>14</sup>

### **About Mars' Commitment to Pets and Enhancing the Human-Animal Bond**

At Mars Petcare, we love pets. Not only do pets create meaningful moments of joy for the people around them – interacting with pets delivers real, tangible benefits for individuals and communities. In turn, it is our responsibility to make the world a better place for the pets in our lives, by providing them with safe, healthy homes; good nutrition; and proper training and socialization. The bond between humans and their pets is unique and special, and we are dedicated to celebrating it through programs and partnerships that highlight the positive experience of having a pet.

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<sup>6</sup> Baun, M.M., Oetting, K., & Bergstrom, N. (1991). Health benefits of companion animals in relation to the physiologic indices of relaxation. *Holistic Nursing Practice*, Issue 5, pp. 16-23.

<sup>7</sup> Garrity, T; Stallones, L; Marx, M; & Johnson, T. Department of Behavioral Science, University of Kentucky College of Medicine, Lexington, KY, Pet Ownership And Attachment As Supportive Factors In The Health Of The Elderly, *Anthrozoos*, Vol. 3, No. 1 1989, 35-44.

<sup>8</sup> Love, Miracles and Animal Healing. Schoen, 1996

<sup>9</sup> Redefer, L.A. & Goodman, J.F. (1989). Brief report: Pet-facilitated therapy with autistic children. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, Issue 19, 461-467.

<sup>10</sup> Melson, G.F., Pet ownership and attachment in young children: Relations to behavior problems and social competence. Paper presented to the annual meeting of the Delta Society, Houston, TX, 1990.

<sup>11</sup> James Serpell PhD, Beneficial effects of pet ownership on some aspects of human health & behaviour, *Journal of Royal Science of Medicine*, Volume 84, December 1991.

<sup>12</sup> Jenkinson, S.; Harrop, P., *The UK's first dog-human activity trail: increasing fun, health and fitness for people and their dogs*. Oral presentation at the 12<sup>th</sup> International conference of the International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organisations, Sweden 1-4<sup>th</sup> July 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Fick, K. (1993). The influence of an animal on social interactions of nursing home residents in a group setting. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 47, 529-534.

<sup>14</sup> James Serpell PhD, Beneficial effects of pet ownership on some aspects of human health & behaviour, *Journal of Royal Science of Medicine*, Volume 84, December 1991.

Mars' commitment to pets stems from its commitment to its Five Principles of Quality, Responsibility, Mutuality, Efficiency and Freedom.

We will fulfill our responsibility to pets by continuing to:

- Pioneer some of the most important breakthroughs in pet health and well-being through our WALTHAM® Centre for Pet Nutrition;
- Provide important information about the pet population and health through BANFIELD®, The Pet Hospital, which maintains the only national pet health database;
- Help pet owners know and understand more about their canine companions through Mars Veterinary's Wisdom Panel™ dog DNA testing;
- Work to support the broadest possible community of pet owners, particularly through the PEDIGREE™ Foundation and Adoption Drives;
- Support shelters through education, in-kind gifts, monetary grants and food donations;
- Work to minimize the impact pets have on the environment by focusing on sustainable pet food production (e.g., sustainable fish sourcing); and
- Further the health, wellness and nutritional needs of pets with its broad range of high-quality products and services.