

Healthy Vibe

Healthy Body

Healthy Mind

Power of the Pooch

Your family mutt can do a lot more for you than just bark at the postman.

Research has long shown that living with a beloved pet can offer real health benefits, such as lower cholesterol levels, lower blood pressure, reduced stress levels and better mental health.

One of the reasons for this is that dogs make us more active than we might otherwise be – we take them for a walk or play a game of fetch with them. The benefits or exercise and fresh air not only make us healthier, with improved cardiovascular fitness, lower blood pressure and stronger muscles and bones; they also make us feel better, with decreased stress levels.

A recent Australian study found that dog owners walked 18 minutes more each week than non-dog owners. Another study (which includes a dog as one of the authors!) says that if all dog owners in Australia walked their dogs, the health benefits would be equivalent to giving up smoking.

As well as the exercise benefits a dog can bring, research has also shown that stroking or patting a pet can reduce stress. Also, the non-judgmental companionship and unconditional love that your pet can give you is known to have considerable mental health benefits for owners, including increased self-esteem.

The social interaction that dog owners enjoy when they're out walking Rover is also great for the community. Studies have revealed that people who walk their dogs are seen by other people as friendly and approachable. It's also been found that pet owners, and in particular dog owners, were more likely to greet other people in the street, help out their neighbours, and meet and make friends with other people in their community.

Having a dog is good for kids too. As well the physical benefits, pets can teach kids about responsibility and help them develop caring skills. Kids with pets often have higher self-esteem and better social skills. Also, kids growing up in a home with dogs or cats have been shown to have lower rates of allergies.

But always remember – a dog is not a toy. Owning a dog is a serious commitment. You need to care for it and love it for as long as it lives, which can be for up to 20 years.

Good Boy!

Man's best friend could help reduce violence in our communities.

The link between dog and human is a complex blend of companionship, mythology and interdependence. Understanding the role the dog plays in community life is the first step towards enhancing

the lives of the dogs and inevitably, improving the lives of the people around them.

And now, a special conference has revealed that the traditional bonds Indigenous people share with their dogs could offer a key to providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a safer future.

Dog People, held in Darwin from July 16 to 21, brought together academics, veterinarians, community

health workers and Indigenous representatives from across the globe to explore world's best practice for animal management in Indigenous communities. The conference was organised by Animal Management in Rural and Remote Communities (AMRRIC).

Indigenous delegates attending the conference shared their concerns about family violence and child and animal abuse with speaker Professor Frank Ascione from the USA, a leading authority in the field of the links between animal abuse and community violence.

"Professor Ascione's research indicates that animal abuse and cruelty is often an indicator of serious crimes against people and alternatively, empathy and kindness to animals has a positive effect on the lives of people," says AMRRIC Executive Officer Philip Donohoe.

"In fact Professor Ascione has been quoted as saying that in social environments in which child maltreatment, domestic violence and other crimes are common, animal abuse is also likely to occur at a higher rate than normal."

Another speaker, US veterinary pathologist Dr Henry Baker, worked with delegates to help remote communities manage animal populations and develop strategies to improve the health of communities through the health of their animals.

"Human health, animal management and animal welfare is interrelated, yet services can be difficult to access, Phillip says. "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people love their dogs, which are part of a rich fabric in their lives.

"To exclude household and community animals from any health and wellbeing intervention strategy is to deny a rich cultural heritage which in many instances is still operating powerfully today."





ACTIVITY 1: SKIMMING FOR MAIN IDEAS

Look at the heading on page 8 (Power of the Pooch), the photograph under the heading and the sub-heading under the photograph (Your family mutt can do a lot more for you than just bark at the postman).

Read the first paragraph.

1. What are some of the health benefits of having a pet?

2. What does "pooch" mean?

ACTIVITY 2: SCANNING FOR SPECIFIC INFORMATION

1. Why is it that dog owners can be more healthy than non-dog owners?

2. List three reasons why exercising with a pet can make us healthier.

3. What did a recent study reveal about the health benefits of Australian dog owners walking their dogs?

4. List two non-exercise benefits of owning a pet.

5. What are some of the social benefits of being out and about walking your dog?



ACTIVITY 3: UNDERSTANDING WORDS IN CONTEXT

Write your own meaning for the words from the article in the boxes below. (Read the words from the article as well as the sentences around them).

Words from the article	My words that mean the same thing
Your family mutt can do a lot more for you than just bark at the postman.	
The non-judgmental companionship and unconditional love that your pet can give you is known to have considerable mental health benefits.	
The social interaction that dog owners enjoy when they're out walking Rover is also great for the community.	
But always remember - a dog is not a toy.	

ACTIVITY 4: WRITING A DISCUSSION

There are many things to think about before deciding to get a dog as a pet. We've read about some of the benefits and responsibilities of having a dog in the *Healthy Vibe* report. In the grid below, list three points for and against getting a dog.

Use these points to write a discussion about getting a dog.

FOR	AGAINST

In your writing, you should include:

- a beginning paragraph that introduces the topic
- paragraphs that give arguments for and against having a dog as a pet
- a conclusion that makes a final decision about getting a dog.

You should write in full sentences.

You should pay attention to spelling and punctuation.

Give yourself time and space to plan your writing.



Further reading:

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is an organisation that aims to prevent cruelty to animals by actively promoting their care and protection.

For games and information about RSPCA, head to:

www.rspca.org.au

www.rspca.org.au/kidsworld