

# Five Reasons to Love a Cat

## They Bring Health and Happiness Home

by Sandra Murphy

**A**s beloved and compatible pets, indoor cats provide emotional, mental and physical benefits.

### Companionship

Loneliness is never a problem with a cat around. “Cats need to be fed, have litter changed and be brushed,” says Lisa Bahar, a therapist and clinical counselor at Lisa Bahar Marriage and Family Therapy, in Newport Beach, California. “Being comforted by a cat helps with depression and isolation.”

While at Indiana University Bloomington Media School, Jessica Gall Myrick, Ph.D., now associate professor at Donald P. Bellisario College of Communications at Pennsylvania State University, in University Park, discovered watching cat videos isn't



just fun, but a way to feel more energetic and positive. With some 94 million YouTube tales of cat adventures online, there's no lack of available mood boosters.

### Exercise

Some cats enjoy leashed walks, presenting opportunities to mindfully enjoy

nature and make friends. At home, a cat's hunting skill and human creativity can be tapped using do-it-yourself treat dispensers and toys or inventive games.

### Improved Health

Talking to kitty can make a bad day better. A lap cat prompts enforced timeouts and

excuses to nap. Petting reduces tension and stress. Aimee Gilbreath, executive director of the Michelson Found Animals Foundation, in Los Angeles, points to a study from Life Sciences Research Institute, in Pretoria, South Africa, showing, “Simply petting a cat can reduce stress-related cortisol, while increasing serotonin and oxytocin.”

The Second National Health and Nutrition Examination Study Mortality Follow-up concluded that having a cat lowers risk of myocardial infarction (heart attack) and cardiovascular disease including strokes, making cats a novel path to a healthier heart.

When researchers reporting in the *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* measured the purring sound of domestic cat purrs, they discovered these resonate at 25 and 50 Hertz (Hz), the two low frequencies that best promote bone growth and fracture healing. Purrs also have a strong harmonic near 100 Hz, a level some orthopedic doctors and physical therapists use for ultrasound therapy.

A child under a year old living with a cat is only half as likely to develop allergies to pets, ragweed, grass and dust mites, much as inoculations guard against disease and boost immune systems. The study, published in *Clinical & Experimental Allergy*, followed children from infancy to age 18.

French researchers discovered autistic children age 5 and older that had a cat were more willing to share, offer comfort to others and show empathy. Sharing cat responsibilities tightened family bonds.

Cats like routine, especially for meals, making them good pets for Alzheimer’s patients that may lose track of time.

Many people like the added warmth of a nearby sleeping cat at night. Fifteen minutes of exercise, followed by a snack, will put kitty on the owner’s sleep schedule.

## Cats are Low-Maintenance

Overall, cats are self-sufficient animals, requiring only love, food and a spotless litter box. Self-cleaning, most cats don’t require regular trips to the groomer for haircuts and a bath. Scratching posts keep nails short. A snack, playtime or

welcoming puddle of sunshine persuades kitty that it’s naptime.

“In rescue, we say dogs are toddlers and cats are teenagers. Cats live without constant oversight,” says jme Thomas, co-founder of Motley Zoo Animal Rescue, in Redmond, Washington. “They’re good pets for busy people. Adopt two at the same time so they bond and aren’t lonely.”

## Cats are Eco-Friendly

A New Zealand study reports that cats have a lower carbon footprint than dogs,

comparing dogs to a Hummer and cats to a Volkswagen Golf. Dogs eat more beef, incurring red meat’s huge footprint. “Because cats eat less than most dogs overall, it saves money, too,” says Gilbreath.

Everyone needs someone to care for and love. With about 77 million cats living in U.S. households and more in shelters or rescues, there’s plenty of people- and planet-friendly love to be found.

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