



Pets Provide Pathway to Better Health

Playing with a dog can do more than just make you feel like a kid again.

The National Institutes of Health, the American Stroke Association and several leading medical research universities all have come to the same conclusion many times over: Pets can improve your well-being.

Their extensive studies have found that having a pet can reduce blood pressure, lower cholesterol and triglyceride levels and relieve depression. They have also revealed that heart attack patients with pet companions survive longer than individuals who do not have one.

In fact, a study presented during a conference conducted by the American Heart Association determined that a single 12-minute visit with a dog improved the heart and lung function of people with heart failure.

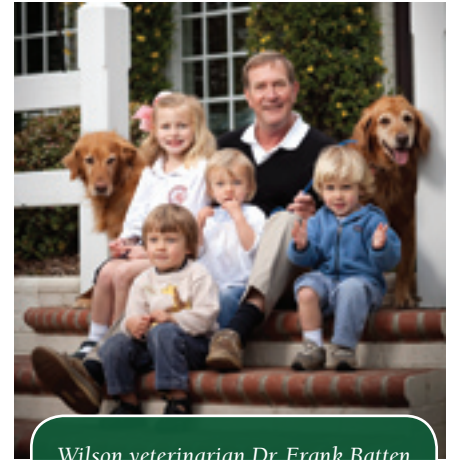
Chrissie Bloomer is a fitness specialist at WakeMed's Healthworks and got her dog, Chloe, more than a year ago. Bloomer pointed out that she walks Chloe at least a mile every day, receiving the same fitness benefits as the dog.

"A pet can help you get on an exercise program," Bloomer said. "They say 21 days makes a habit. If you get on a walking program with a dog at the beginning, you're more likely to keep it after those three weeks. You're more likely to get off the couch because you know the dog needs it as well."

Some individuals might think that caring for a pet is too much of a burden. Dr. Frank Batten, a veterinarian in Wilson for more than 35 years, dispelled that thought. Dr. Batten understands the connections between caring for pets and caring for people. He currently is the chair of the Board of Directors at Wilson Medical Center.

"Animals sometimes have the same diseases and troubles we have. Basically, you're doing the same things you would do for yourself," Dr. Batten explained.

Dr. Batten reiterated many study findings that have noted the benefits of exercise for both the human and animal. Dogs, especially, need regular exercise to maintain a healthy standing. Exercise has been proven as a significant factor to lower people's chances of diseases such as cardiovascular disease.



Wilson veterinarian Dr. Frank Batten enjoys time with his grandchildren and his pets, who keep him active.

Besides annual checkups, Dr. Batten offered another suggestion for new pet owners. He shared the story of a woman who was suffering from heart disease and then obtained a mixed-breed dog from a local animal shelter. The woman immediately sought the services of an obedience trainer, and the dog soon became a loyal companion to the woman for many years.

"It ended up being one of the best relationships I've ever seen," Dr. Batten said. "She was so proud of how nicely mannered the dog was. They kept each other going for many years."

There is a great opportunity for seniors in Raleigh and Wake County to begin a similar relationship. The SPCA of Wake County is promoting its Seniors for Seniors Program. Individuals age 60 or older can receive a \$50 discount if they adopt a pet that's at least five years old. Furthermore, individuals age 65 or older can receive \$10 off the adoption fee for any pet they choose from the SPCA of Wake County.

Also, the SPCA of Wake County is partnering with Resources for Seniors, a Wake County non-profit agency for the program, AniMeals. Clients of the agency who are facing financial strain or physical limitations can receive assistance with obtaining food and supplies for their pets.

"We know the important role pets play in the lives of everyone including senior citizens," said Darci VanderSlik, the community outreach coordinator with the SPCA of Wake County. "We do all we can to keep pets in their homes." For information, visit www.spcawake.org. ❤️