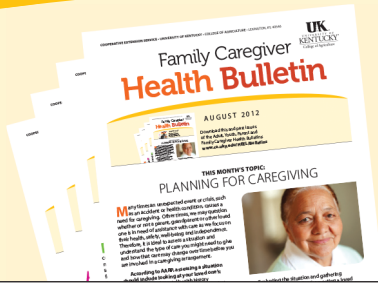


# Family Caregiver Health Bulletin



AUGUST 2014

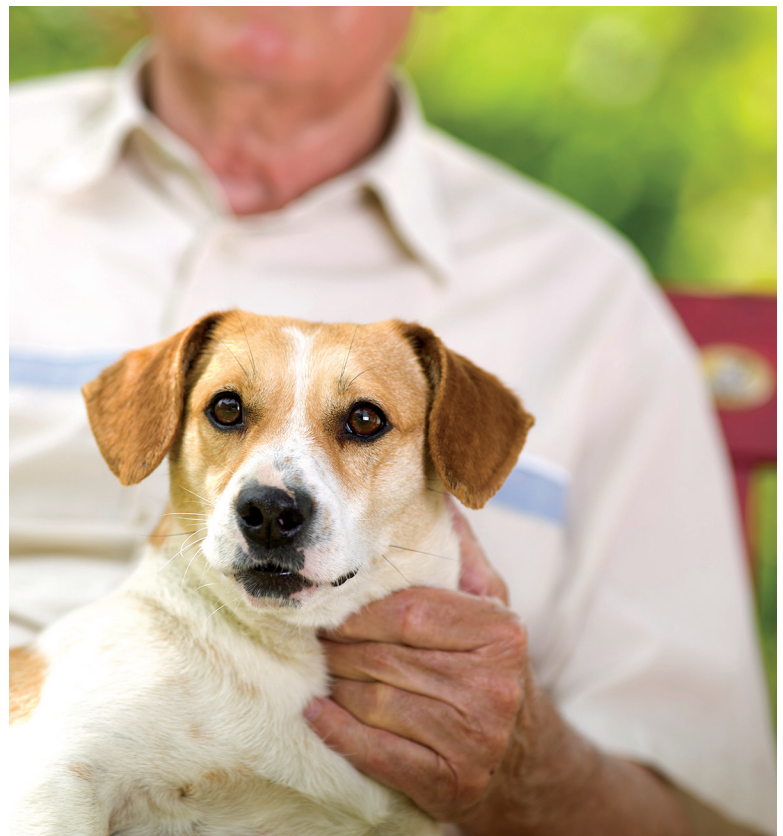
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## THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

# THE HEALING POWER OF PETS

**W**hen you adopt or rescue a pet, it may really be the pet who rescues you. The healing power of pets has been receiving increasing attention. Pets add joy and purpose to a person's daily routine. Pets provide touch, laughter and unconditional love which contribute physical, psychological and social benefits to people of all ages and abilities.

Two years ago, Dr. Edward Creagan of the Mayo Clinic, admitted a patient to the hospital with advanced lung cancer, heart disease and pneumonia. The man was not expected to live through the night. But due to teamwork and medicine, the man's condition improved and he was able to share that "Max" was his incentive to get home. Expecting Max to be this man's child or a friend, Dr. Creagan was surprised to learn that Max was a 95 pound German Shepherd and the reason this patient wanted to live. This story made Dr. Creagan and others



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# *Pets provide touch, laughter and unconditional love which contribute physical, psychological and social benefits.*

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appreciate the tremendous healing power of pets. As a result, Dr. Creagan began writing the names of patients' pets in their medical history records because it helped hospital personnel when talking to patients. Doctors and staff report that it is difficult for patients and families to talk about Spot, Rudy, Buddy or Bella without smiling. Even more powerful is the way in which a patient's attitude can change making the atmosphere become one of healing, peace and serenity. Research demonstrates that when you look into the eyes of an animal, or stroke or hold a pet, a surge of hormones in the brain are released that provoke calm and harmonious feelings. These hormones also decrease blood pressure, decrease pulse, lessen depression and reduce stress and anxiety. Studies demonstrate that if you have a heart attack, you have a greater chance of living one year after the attack if you have a dog.

Pets are powerful across the life course. They can cheer up stressed and tired parents, serve as companions to children or older adults and work as service dogs for those with disabilities. Animals provide a level of social support for those who are mentally ill, living in institutional care or aging in place. Like with Dr. Creagan's patient, pets also provide people with a sense of purpose as animals need to be fed, walked, groomed and loved. If a pet is not feasible due to cost (pets are expensive), allergies or safety concerns, plants or fish can also produce positive therapeutic effects.

Dogs, cats and rabbits are most commonly used for therapeutic purposes with older adults. But dolphins and horses have also been used positively

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with children with mental health issues, epilepsy, physical disabilities and autism. In addition to improving communication skills, some pet therapies also help children and adults build core strength, body awareness and muscle memory.

Pets are also beneficial to caregivers. Caregiving can be a lonely job, but having a companion who loves you unconditionally and greets you at the door with a wagging tail can be just what the doctor ordered. Due to the prolonged stress that caregiving can cause, caregivers are twice as likely as the general public to develop chronic illness. Therefore, interaction with an animal can help you smile more, increase your exercise, lower your blood pressure and contribute to your overall well-being.

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Family Caregiver  
**Health Bulletin**

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