

Purina-Sponsored Research Shows Benefits of Pets for Parents and their Children with Autism

A University of Missouri study, funded by Purina, shows pet ownership helps reduce stress for parents and their children with autism via strong human-animal bond interactions. The results of the study suggest that pets not only help provide comfort and support to children with autism but also to their parents. Companionship and increased social interactions were cited as the most important benefits outweighing burdens of pet ownership.



PURINA-SUPPORTED RESEARCH SUMMARY
Pet ownership helps reduce stress for parents and their children with autism via strong human-animal bond interactions

Given the high stress experienced by families of children with autism, scientists at the University of Missouri Research Center for Human-Animal Interaction wanted to learn if having a pet helps to decrease anxiety and increase social interactions. This research was sponsored by Purina.

764 Parents of Children with Autism Were Surveyed



626 Current Pet Owners (Dog and/or Cat)



70 Non-Pet Owners



68 Unknown Pet Ownership



The participants answered an online survey that included validated scales to delineate the benefits and burdens of pet ownership for parents and their children with autism as well as their bond with the family pet.

Parents of children with autism cited multiple benefits of pet ownership to their children and themselves:

Benefit	Impact on Child with Autism	Impact on Parents
STRONG PET BONDS 	71% of children with autism are attached to their pets	9 of 10 parents are attached to their pets
LOWER STRESS LEVELS 	59% say a pet increases their child's relaxation	62% say a pet increases their relaxation
COMPANIONSHIP 	56% say a pet increases their companionship & affection for their child	2/3 (68%) say a pet adds companionship & affection to their lives
MORE SOCIAL INTERACTION 	48% say owning a pet helps increase social interactions for their child with autism	42% say owning a pet helps increase their social interactions

MORE EXERCISE



1/3 (33%) say the pet helps increase exercise for their child

41% say the pet helps increase their exercise

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What's the Best Way a Family with a Child with Autism Should Add a Pet?

Include children in the decision-making. Some children with autism have sensitivities, so it's important to choose the right pet on an individual basis. A good match considers the pet's energy, size & vocalization. For example, a large, highly active, barking dog may not work as well as a quiet, laidback cat, for some children.



University of Missouri

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[Click here](#) to read an abstract of the study published in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*.



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