Discover the benefits of what a new addition means to you and your family.

First Sun

NEWSLETTER

An informational newsletter for employees.

July 2016 Issue

The Benefits of Pet Ownership

"Until one has loved an animal, a part of one’s soul remains..."
Pet ownership in the United States is increasing. The American Pet Products Association conducts a yearly pet ownership survey, and their 2015-2016 study showed 65 percent of U.S. households have at least one pet, which equals 79.7 million households. In 1988, only 56 percent of U.S. households owned pets. The most commonly owned animals are dogs, cats, fish and birds. A 2015 Harris Poll found that the youngest generations — Gen X and Gen Y — have the highest rates of pet ownership.

There is no doubt that pet ownership is increasing. Pet owners are passionate about their furry family members. Pet ownership also has important, positive effects.

**Benefits of Pet Ownership**

There have been many studies in recent years on the positive impact of pets. Most of the research has focused on dog ownership, but future research will include all types of animals. Benefits appear in all areas of life including physical, emotional and social.

**Physical**

There have been several studies investigating the impact of pet ownership on physical health. The American Heart Association concluded that pets positively impact heart health. These studies show that owning a pet reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have also conducted studies that show pet ownership can decrease blood pressure, cholesterol levels and triglyceride levels. In addition, studies show that people with heart-related illnesses are more likely to survive heart attacks if they own a pet.

Research conducted by the National Institute of Health revealed that owning and walking dogs contributed to owners being less obese and in better physical shape. Pets also get their owners outside; fresh air and sunshine can elevate moods and provide exposure to Vitamin D.

Medical research has also investigated the impact of pets on allergies. Studies reported by the Journal of the American Medical Association have found that children who grow up with pets are less likely to develop common allergies and asthma. Children who grow up in homes with two or more pets by the age of one are much less likely to have allergies by elementary school.

**Emotional and Social**

According to Dr. Al Townshend, a veterinarian and researcher in Maryland, pets know when their owners need them most. Pets can sense emotional distress, including sadness, anxiety or fear ... and they know how to provide comfort. This comfort increases a sense of belonging and self-worth.

Dr. Townshend also reports that one of the most significant impacts of owning dogs and cats is the fulfillment of the basic need for touch. Not only does touch increase our sense of belonging and comfort, it impacts our brains. Stroking, hugging and touching a loving pet elevates several neurotransmitters including dopamine, serotonin and oxytocin. The increase of these chemicals provides an immediate calming effect as well as a sense of joy and happiness.
Pet ownership provides companionship and can decrease loneliness. Research published in the *Applied Developmental Science* journal reported that young adults with strong attachments to their pets feel more connected to other people and to their communities. Research also suggests that pet owners feel more fulfilled and live longer, happier lives.

**Pets and Children**

Pets can also be important companions for children and adolescents. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry has found that children raised with pets show many benefits. Positive relationships with pets can help boost a child’s self-esteem and self-confidence, can aid in the development of trusting relationships and can contribute to the development of non-verbal communication and empathy.

Other benefits include:

- Learning a connection to nature
- Teaching respect for living beings
- Providing lessons about life, birth, illness and death
- Helping develop responsible behavior
- Building immunity to allergies/asthma

**Owning, Buying or Adopting Pets**

While there are incredible benefits to pet ownership, caring for a pet is a big commitment. Choosing the type of pet is important. Your decision should be based on several factors, including schedule, allergies, temperament and personality, and budget. Pets take time, energy and money to care for sufficiently. There are many ways to adopt or purchase a pet. Some families even foster pets, taking care of them temporarily while a permanent home is found.

**Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Can Help**

First Sun EAP offers services that can help you if you have pets or if you are looking to own a pet. First Sun provides comprehensive pet care referral services to assist with needs such as veterinary selection, emergency care, grooming, obedience classes, boarding and pet sitting. Our pet care consultants can also provide information about pet ownership such as learning more about types of pets and breeds, shelters or adoption agencies.

**Pet Ownership 1-2-3**

1. If you have pets, love them! And, remember all of the physical, emotional and social benefits they offer you.
2. If you do not own a pet but are considering it, take time to study the pros and cons for you and your family.
3. Call First Sun EAP at 800-968-8143 for any pet needs or questions you have.

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