

For many people who have cats or dogs, they are like our children. We may share kisses, silverware and our beds. Many pet owners don't think twice about it. For those who have cats, they are almost forced into keeping their place tidy because cats can get into anything absolutely anywhere. Cat owners know that they don't own the cats, the cats own them.

Household pets or companion animals can boost a person's physical and emotional health and there is research to prove it. Having pets has been shown to lower your blood pressure, (Kingwell BA, *et al.* Presence of a pet dog and human cardiovascular responses to mild mental stress. *Clin Auton Res.* 2001 Oct;11(5):313-7) and help to keep weight down due to the daily exercise of walking the dog. It has also been proven that owning a pet can decrease mental stress (Allen K, *et al.* Pet ownership, but not ace inhibitor therapy, blunts home blood pressure responses to mental stress. *Hypertension*

. 2001 Oct;38(4):815-20) and overall promote a strong pet-human relationship (Friedmann E and Son H. The human-companion animal bond: how humans benefit. *Vet Clin North Am Small Anim Pract*

. 2009 Mar;39(2):293-326. doi: 10.1016/j.cvsm.2008.10.015.).

Science aside, on a good day, the simple benefits of walking a dog takes you from social isolation and provides opportunities to meet and greet other dog owners—pet ownership enables you to have a pseudo social life. Unlike your counterparts who are home in bed alone, you are never alone. You have to get up to feed the animals—they help to add a routine to your day. No sick days for you even if that means you use your energy to feed the animals—caring for another living creature can make you feel needed and a little less focused on the illness.

However, there are some choices which should be considered. Since we don't know the exact cause of CFS/CFIDS/ME and there is the possibility of a viral implication, be a bit more careful when you are in a relapse. It has been shown in many studies (too many to list) that CFS/CFIDS/ME affects the immune system. In a study that looked at immunocompromised patients and whether having pets posed a potential threat to their health, it was shown that with simple guidelines, the benefits outweighed the risks (Steele RW. Should immunocompromised patients have pets? *Ochsner J.* 2008 Fall;8(3):134-9).

It has not been proven that whatever we have can jump species, but it also hasn't been disproven. We are dealing with an unknown, so be cautious. When disposing of animal waste, wear gloves, wash hands frequently, and watch for infections in your animals. Ticks in dogs and

cats should be removed in a specific way and if in doubt, take the animal to a veterinarian. Ticks can cause Lyme Disease and in humans, if this is not treated properly, then it has the potential of becoming a persistent illness that could affect multiple organs.

Do not share silverware. Do not kiss your pet on the face and mouth, and if possible, don't share the bed. When you are really ill, your pet knows it. They have an uncanny ability to tune into you perhaps more than you tune into them. So, if they are banned from the bed, they may not be happy but tell them you are protecting them from getting ill. One thing that always holds true about all dogs, no matter the breed, age or size, is that they love us unconditionally, even on our bad days.