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College students find comfort in their pets during hard times

A new study suggests that college students may handle stressful situations better if they have a pet. Research has already shown that pets can improve the quality of life for people who are aging or those who are chronically ill. But researchers here recently found that many college students may also benefit from owning a cat or a dog. A survey of students at a large university and other adults in the area found that nearly a quarter of college students surveyed believed their pets helped them get through difficult times in their lives. Students who chose to live with at least one dog, one cat or a combination of the two were less likely to report feeling lonely and depressed — something they directly attributed to their beloved pet.

These findings highlight how even younger, healthier young adults can benefit from living with our four-legged friends, said Sara Stastny, lead author of the study and professor emerita of psychology at OSU Newark. “We might not think of college students as being lonely, but a lot of freshmen and sophomores are in an early transition from living at home to living in dorms or off-campus. College is a very stressful environment for them and sometimes they can feel isolated or overwhelmed with the change,” she said.

“We found that a lot of young adults are choosing to have an animal companion for important reasons. Many feel their pets will help get them through these difficult and stressful situations, and many more say that without their pet, they would feel lonely,”

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