

[IMAGE]

Your Brain Needs a Pet

By Editorial Staff

Love your pet? Of course you do. But your heart isn't the only organ in your body that benefits from pet ownership. Your brain loves pets, too; so much so that your risk of cognitive decline is lower if you own one. Let's see what new research suggests about why your brain needs a pet, particularly as you get older.

If you're getting older and live alone, your pet may offset the association between living alone and declining cognitive function – particularly when it comes to verbal memory and verbal fluency. That's the finding from a study published in *JAMA Network Open* that evaluated living status, pet ownership and cognitive decline in nearly 7,500 adults ages 50 and older.

seniors with pet - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Specifically, the study found that living alone accelerated cognitive decline – but pet ownership appeared to mitigate the increased risk. That's probably because people who live alone, but who have a pet, aren't really living alone! Sure, they don't have human companionship; but many pet owners might say that their pet is just as good (if not better). When it comes to brain health, it appears to make perfect sense.

Keep in mind that other research makes it clear that as we age, social interaction (with humans) is an important variable that helps us stay healthy and happy, too, so pet ownership isn't the be-all, end-all. Age well by staying fit, eating right, minimizing stress – and as these results show, keeping companions – human and pet – front and center in your life.

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