

The American Institute of Stress

CONTENTMENT

Your source for science-based stress management information

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June 2014

The Healing Power of Pets:

A photograph of a woman with blonde hair lying on her back on a white surface, smiling broadly with her eyes closed. A light-colored, long-haired dog is lying on top of her, resting its head on her face. The woman is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus yellow.

**Harnessing the Amazing Ability
of Pets to Make and Keep
People Happy and Healthy**



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AIS provides a diverse and inclusive environment that fosters intellectual discovery, creates and transmits innovative knowledge, improves human health, and provides leadership to the world on stress related topics.

CONTENTMENT

We value opinions of our readers.

Please feel free to contact us with any comments, suggestions or inquiries.

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Contentment is a quarterly newsletter with news and advertising designed with the general public in mind. It appeals to all those interested in the myriad and complex interrelationships between stress and health because technical jargon is avoided and it is easy to understand. Contentment is archived online at stress.org. Information in this publication is carefully compiled to ensure accuracy.

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What is it that makes us love our pets so much? Is it that they don't expect much from us, don't require college tuition, or simply can't talk back?

When it all comes down to it, pets provide for us the type of unconditional love that can seem nearly impossible for us to find in other humans. In today's busy lifestyle, pets can offer consistent, grounding support while also reminding us not to take life so seriously. Through their love and affection, pets help to initiate the release of positive endorphins in the brain like oxytocin, which can make us feel more connected to the world around us and more willing to lend a helping hand to others. With their playful nature, pets also teach us simple ways to play more in our life, triggering the healthy relaxation response in the brain and body that can help build our resistance to stress.

In this month's edition of Contentment we offer up some expert opinions as to how having a pet in your life can help reduce the impact of negative stress. We also approach the topic of helping your pet through stressful times, such as our upcoming Fourth of July celebration. And we wrap up with a playful look at how one of our AIS Fellows has learned to manage stress from one of the experts in his life: his cat.

In our next edition we'll be looking at the benefits of healthy humor for stress management, so as a sneak peak tying in this edition's topic, here are some funny pet videos to help you get your giggle on.

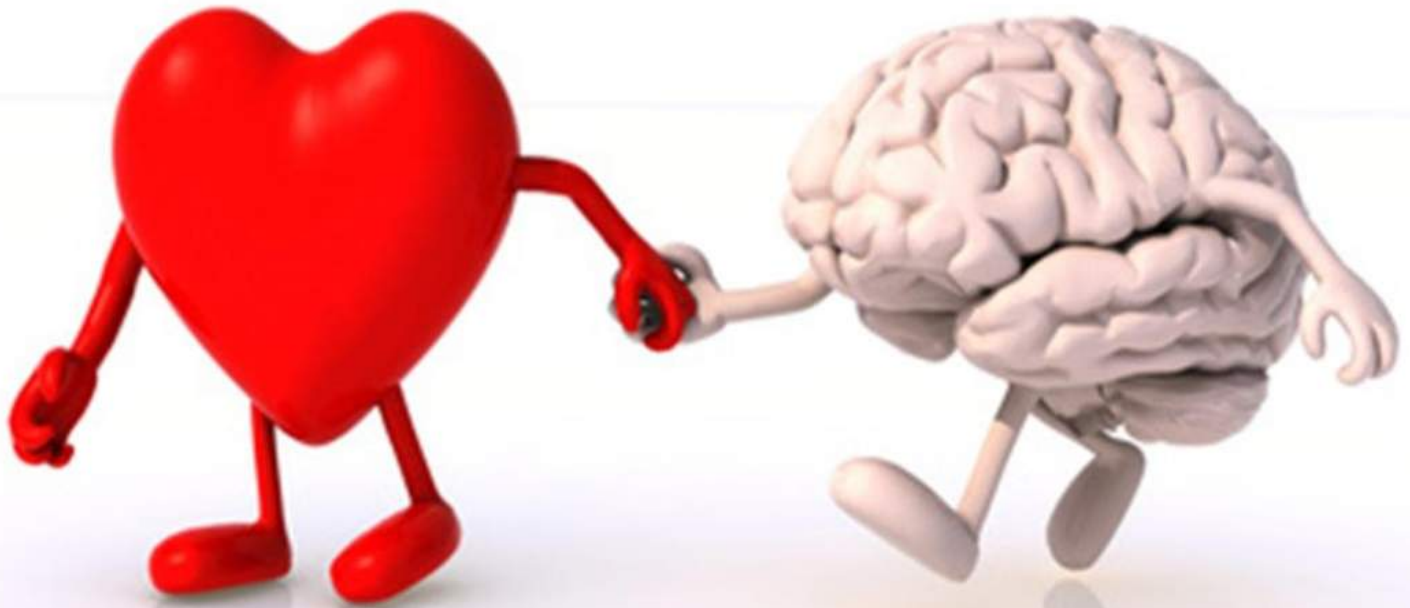
Guy interviews his Guinea pig:



Kittens Dancing:



First we got your brain...



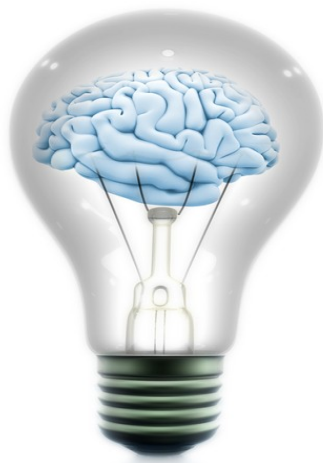
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TID



BITS

Tools, Tips and Techniques to help you live better!

The pet-health link has been well established for relationships with dogs, cats, birds, mammals, reptiles, aquarium fish and horses. A prominent researcher in this field also suggests that similar benefits may extend to individuals who care for their gardens, farmers actively tending their crops, 4-H children with pet animals, as well as bird watchers and wild bird feeders. As society has become more industrialized and urbanized and agriculture increasingly mechanized, the potential for such activities appears to be declining. It is postulated that such contact with the natural world plays an essential but unappreciated role in human development. Infants who are deprived of touch fail to thrive or develop normally and the healing benefit of touch therapy in adult patients is well recognized. Nurturing and caring seem to induce or be associated with significant psychologic and physiologic responses that have beneficial health repercussions. Conversely, social isolation, bereavement an inability to care for others and lack of zest for work and daily activities are associated with increased susceptibility to illness, depression, and loneliness. Caring for and looking after other living things, regardless of whether they are people, pets or plants seems to provide a powerful buffer against such problems by somehow promoting the healing ways of nature (vis medica-trix naturae).

<http://youtu.be/1ythp1PmYF8>

[http://youtu.be/
GKMpUyddFyo](http://youtu.be/GKMpUyddFyo)

GET INSIDE OUR HEAD

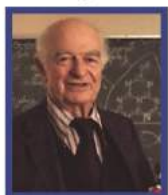
It's Not Our Credentials
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Linus Pauling



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Charles Spielberg

Join our prominent psychologists, physicians, other health care practitioners and health conscious individuals who are interested in exploring the multitudinous and varied effects of stress on our health and quality of life.

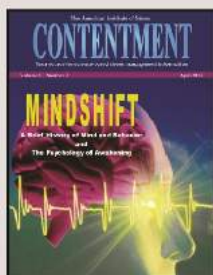
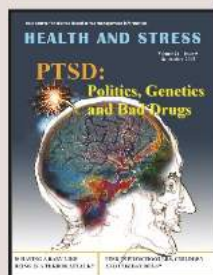
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Owning a Dog or Cat Can Reduce Stress

The Health Benefits of Pet Ownership

By Elizabeth Scott, MS, DAIS
Author of 8 Keys to Stress Management

When thinking of ways to reduce stress in life, usually techniques like meditation, yoga and journaling come to mind. These are great techniques, to be sure. But getting a new best friend can also have many stress relieving and health benefits. While human friends provide great social support and come with some fabulous benefits, this article focuses on the benefits of furry friends: cats and dogs! Research shows that, unless you're someone who really dislikes animals or is absolutely too busy to care for one properly, pets can provide excellent social support, stress relief and other health benefits—perhaps more than people! The following are more health benefits of pets.

Pets Can Improve Your Mood:

For those who love animals, it's virtually impossible to stay in a bad mood when a pair of loving puppy eyes meets yours, or when a super-soft cat rubs up against your hand. Research supports the mood-enhancing benefits of pets. A recent study found that men with AIDS were less likely to suffer from depression if they owned a pet. (According to one study, men with AIDS who did not own a pet were about three times more likely to report symptoms of depression than men who did not have AIDS. But men with AIDS who had pets were only about 50 percent more likely to report symptoms of depression, as compared to men in the study who did not have AIDS.)

Pets Control Blood Pressure Better Than Drugs:

Yes, it's true. While ACE inhibiting drugs can generally reduce blood pressure, they

aren't as effective on controlling spikes in blood pressure due to stress and tension. However, in a study on pets and blood pressure, groups of hypertensive New York stockbrokers who got dogs or cats were found to have lower blood pressure and heart rates than those who didn't get pets. When they heard of the results, most of those in the non-pet group went out and got pets!

Pets Encourage You To Get Out And Exercise:

Whether we walk our dogs because they need it, or are more likely to enjoy a walk when we have companionship, dog owners do spend more time walking than non-pet owners, at least if we live in an urban setting. Because exercise is good for stress management and overall health, owning a dog can be credited with increasing these benefits.

Pets Can Help With Social Support:

When we're out walking, having a dog with us can make us more approachable and give people a reason to stop and talk, thereby increasing the number of people we meet, giving us an opportunity to increase our network of friends and acquaintances, which also has great stress management benefits.

Pets Stave Off Loneliness and Provide Unconditional Love:

Pets can be there for you in ways that people can't. They can offer love and companionship, and can also enjoy comfortable silences, keep secrets and are excellent snugglers. And they could be the best antidote to loneliness. In fact, one study found that nursing home residents reported less loneliness when visited by dogs than when they spent time with other people! All these benefits can reduce the amount of stress people experience in response to feelings of social isolation and lack of social support from people.

Pets Can Reduce Stress— Sometimes More Than People:

While we all know the power of talking about your problems with a good friend who's also a good listener, research shows that spending time with a pet may be even better! One study showed that, when conducting a task that's stressful, people actually experienced less stress when their pets were with them than when a supportive friend or even their spouse was present! (This may be partially due to the fact that pets don't judge us; they just love us.)

It's important to realize that owning a pet isn't for everyone. Pets do come with additional work and responsibility, which can bring its own stress. However, for most people, the benefits of having a pet outweigh the drawbacks. Having a furry best friend can reduce stress in your life and bring you support when times get tough.

Sources:

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Siegel JM, Angulo FJ, Detels R, Wesch J, Mullen A. AIDS diagnosis and depression in the Multicenter AIDS Cohort Study: the ameliorating impact of pet ownership. AIDS Care. April 1999.



Enhancing Life

The Human-Animal Connection: REFLECTIONS FROM A VETERINARIAN

By: Ava Frick, DVM, CAC, FAIS



What is it about animals that make us feel good when we are in their space?

How do they bring out the best in us?

How do they improve our health and overall well-being?

There are all kinds of research studies proving the rewards of human animal connections. But even those who do not read know this to be true. It is a feeling they emanate of wanting us, kindred spirits, sharing souls, the look from those eyes, that pulls us in and warms our hearts. It is what and how we feel when we are with them.

At the age of three I already knew my purpose in life was to be an animal doctor. Growing up on a farm in Missouri I spent many hours in the barn with the cats and kittens. Watching their behavior, mostly for the goal of being better able to catch them! Then there were the cows and calves, sows and piglets, horses, chickens, and later a funny goat. (Oh yeah that's right, all goats are funny.) We generally had a dog or two, some indoors, some not. That's the farm life I suppose.

With each encounter and time spent with the animals I learned by observing, yet grew by feeling. Those feelings, or emotions, were related to some kind of communication, received and perceived. That communication was sometimes translated into; "She likes me" or "I need you too" or "thank you for that" and the occasional "I've had enough now." This becomes more accurate as we learn the communicating signals a specific spe-

cies uses. Animals are much more in tune to all facets of body language because, different than humans, they do not exist by our extensive use of verbal communication. Animal signals can be the eye; changes in shape and size of the pupil, position of ears, nose, lips, swishing of the tail, erection of feathers or fur, body contour to exhibit definition of size or intent, an odor, showing of teeth, or dancing for joy.

Joey, was a Spitz /Pekingese mix who showed up in my garage one day when he was about 6 months old. Joey stayed by my side for 17 years and then disappeared one day just as quickly as he appeared. He was never a problem, never did anything wrong, went to work with me where he was employed as the greeter, knew which dogs were friendly, and when to ignore a challenged advance. He did this by just turning his head to one side - enough said, end of conflict.

During the days of my traditional practice work (1987-2001) I was on call 24/7. When an emergency call would happen in the middle of the night Joey would be standing by the phone as I talked through the situation with the client. Somehow either by my closing words, expression or body language he knew, before the phone hit the cradle, that I would either be getting dressed and going to town, or getting back in bed. If he was headed for a truck ride (meaning I was going in to the clinic) he would begin dancing up on his hind legs and hopping around the house with glee. I said nothing directly to him, but he knew consistently, without a doubt, what was about to happen.

This past month new brain research from the University of Minnesota was released showing rats can have regrets and remorse about food choices. David Redish, professor of neuroscience at the university and lead author of the study, has over the past 14 years looked at why people make choices they are likely to regret. Regret is the recognition that a mistake has been made. It is a cognitive behavior previously thought to be unique only to humans.

In an attempt to study decision making in common lab rats, Redish and Adam Steiner, a neuroscience graduate student, strapped sensors on rats to track how they responded to different choices of food rewards. After observing their behavior Redish and Steiner created an experiment, called Restaurant Row, designed to induce regret.

Rats in the lab had to choose whether to wait for a food they liked, or move onto another food station, which may or may not have a favorite food. The rats that did move on and found the next option less appealing showed regretful behavior — stopping and looking back as if feeling

some kind of remorse. The more we sincerely look at animals, the more we find they do share emotions and feelings like ours.

And while we work to better understand them, this is not to say that animals are not also struggling to understand us. Koko the gorilla is a wonderful example. Koko was born July 4, 1971 and according to Penny Patterson, her long-term trainer, is able to understand more than



Koko, her kitten and her trainer Penny Patterson.

To learn more about Koko www.koko.org

1,000 signs based on American Sign Language, and approximately 2,000 words of spoken English. She has documented Koko inventing new signs to communicate novel thoughts. One of these is the word for a "ring." In an effort to communicate this item Koko combined the words "finger" and "bracelet" using then "finger-

bracelet" as her interpretation of a ring.

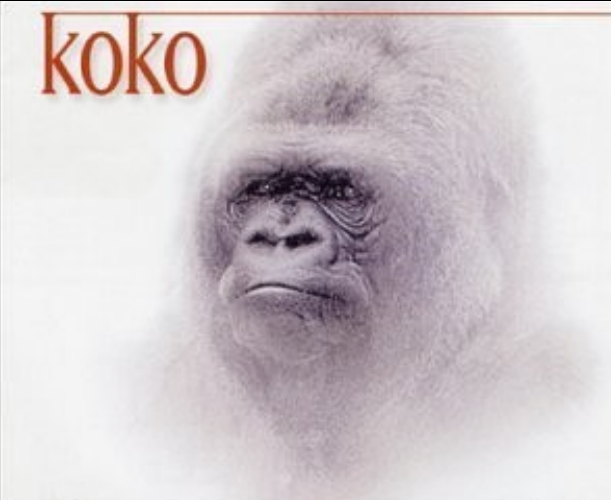
Although not unique, Koko is one of the few non-humans known to keep pets. Researchers at the Gorilla Foundation tell about Koko asking for a cat for Christmas in 1983. Ron Cohn, a biologist with the foundation, told the story that she was less than satisfied when given a life-like

stuffed animal. She did not play with it and continued to sign "sad". So on her birthday in July 1984, she was able to choose a kitten from a litter that she named All Ball. Koko cared for the kitten as if it were a baby gorilla.

In December of that same year, All Ball escaped from Koko's cage and was hit and killed by a car. Later, Patterson said that when she signed to Koko that All Ball had gone, Koko signed "Bad, sad, bad" and "Frown, cry, frown, sad". Patterson also reported later hearing Koko making a sound similar to human weeping. In 1985, Koko was allowed to pick out two new kittens from a litter to be her companions.

Gorillas are much like us both emotionally and cognitively. It is the closeness, time invested, and years of research by a caring team, that has allowed Koko to develop her communication skills in a human-like way. She has a music CD: "Fine Animal Gorilla" that is a collection of music about Koko with her own words as some of the lyrics, an opportunity to share her feelings and grow through her compassion and life. It is produced and released by the Laurel Canyon Animal Company. July 4th of this year Koko will have her 43rd birthday.

Birds are also great communicators. Especially parrots who mimic and utilize our phrases in appropriate times. Pedro was a parrot who, before his rescue, had been caged for over 11 years. He was now given freedoms to experience life and his new environment and his interactions with his new owner began to blossom. On one occasion the owner was gone and her parents were taking care of

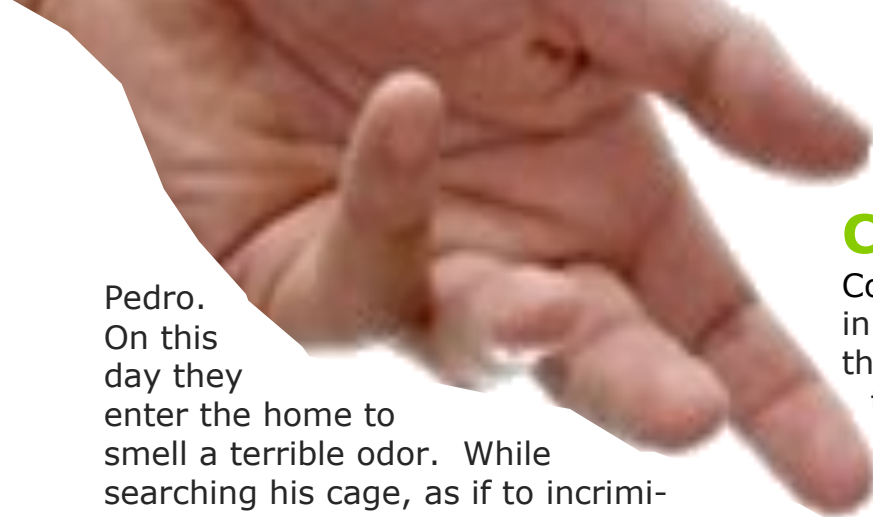


LAUREL CANYON 5 ANIMAL COMPANY

The Laurel Canyon Animal Company created Fine Animal Gorilla (Koko's name for herself) to benefit the Gorilla Foundation. Many of the lyrics are taken from conversations with Koko. She approved all the lyrics on the CD.

Here is a sample of some of Koko's music:

- [Scary Alligator](#)
- [Even Gorillas Get The Blues](#)
- [Ordinary Girl](#)
- [Fine Animal Gorilla](#)
- [Goin' To Maui](#)
- [Gorilla Lullaby](#)
- [Koko Love](#)
- [Nimitz kids](#)



Pedro. On this day they enter the home to smell a terrible odor. While searching his cage, as if to incriminate Pedro, he was shouting in his best bird voice, "The toilet, the toilet!" Inspecting the house they found the toilet to be fine but the freezer had quit working and it was full of spoiled meat wreaking the foul odor. To Pedro, the worst thing he had ever smelled and could associate with human concern was the toilet.

Often the relationship we share with house dogs can be impacted not only by our behavior but how we perceive our relationship. A client recently shared with me the story of his Cocker Spaniel, Yogi. Something happened that elicited the then college student to hit Yogi as in a reprimand for what he had done. For 4 days Yogi did not go to bed with his master but chose to stay under a kitchen counter. With remorse about what was happening Mr. Alvarez finally decided an apology was in order. He verbally said, "I apologize for what I did to you. I had no right to do that." That night Yogi returned to sleep in the bed of his master. Did he really understand the apology? Most likely not. But he did read the change in how Mr. Alvarez perceived their relationship and how his attitude and body language toward him changed. Like the rats, the remorse was evident. Once the apology was made and a conscience cleared, communication was reopened.

Compassion

Compassion is the emotion that we feel in response to the suffering of others that motivates a desire to help. It is the taking care of another's needs where we see their lives are in jeopardy or struggling. We can watch animals helping each other, whether or not they sense the suffering and empathy, we translate it as such and can learn from them.

Everywhere we look around the world there is some degree of suffering happening to animals, generally at the hands of humans. Be it from direct contact or indirectly, as in damaging or altering their environment, we have thereby rendered them less able to survive. Other humans empathetically then come forward with a declaration or conviction to help.

Over the years in veterinary practice I have seen another aspect of this. An owner with a pet who has been injured and suffering pain will often times, because of a fear for the present suffering, believe that the best decision is euthanasia. (This is certainly not a consideration that human medical doctors face.) Whether this fear is related to something from their own past or present condition, the owners cannot bear to see their beloved animal be in pain. This is in large part what caused me to change my practice focus toward integrative medicine. In the 1990's very little medication existed to ease pain in animals. Looking to the human professions I found much I could do to help through rehabilitation, chiropractic osteopathy, physical therapy modalities,

herbs, and nutrition. We have much to offer now and the owner or caretaker can be relieved of their mental anguish of not being able to help, because we can.

Validation

Having an animal can validate one's existence or allow us to feel needed. Unlike a child who needs us for a while, then grows into the teenage years, becomes more independent, tells the parent that he or she hates them, is indifferent or spiteful, and creates disdain in the home, a pet does not. Pets need us throughout their entire life. The pet does not change their affection (unless in pain or old and feeble).

Animals are non-judgmental. Many a cowboy friend has commented that returning home to the dog or goat or horse after a late night was much better than the person to which they were attached. The animal did not chastise them for how long they had been gone, who they were with, or how they smelled. Animals do not invalidate but are continually encouraging our existence and greeting us with

the same enthusiasm whether we were gone four hours or two weeks. They make us feel good regardless of our social status, race, abilities, age, poor jokes, or that bad hair day. An admirable trait that can transform into changed attitudes for people who chose to look at this characteristic. We can learn to have admiration for others without considerations, simply because they exist.

Animals can make us feel good by permitting us to have contact with a warm body, openly accepting hugs or kisses, again and again. They can be the impetus that brings a child out of seclusion and allows him or her to experience body contact in a safe way on their own terms. They can be the link that keeps an elderly person connected to life.

Value

Value toward another life can be instilled through animals. I was out of veterinary college less than a year when a family with two daughters, one 5 years old and the other 7, appeared at my clinic. They presented their hamsters each in its' roll





-polly ball. Unfortunately the hamster belonging to the youngest girl had a very large tumor growing from its side. The parents were well aware of the monetary investment needed to save this hamster. They knew that from that aspect alone medical intervention did not make logical sense. (Hamster's lives are short and purchase price cheap.) But the value of life that their daughter would learn by her parents helping her hamster to live longer and be normal was invaluable. The surgery went well and the hamster happily returned home to play, for a while longer, in her rolly-polly ball.

Purpose

Animals can give us purpose and renewed health. Cookie was a middle-aged overweight daschund.

Mr. Pehle, her owner, was an elderly gentleman with diabetes, some heart concerns, and also a bit overweight. He loved Cookie and would do anything for her, even things he would not do for himself. Cookie needed exercise. We set up a program that included daily walks. Mr. Pehle religiously, rain or shine, walked with Cookie. At first they were very short but with time you could see the two of them out on a stroll all over our small town. Her health improved, as did his. Years later at his funeral his family shared their thankfulness to me because of how his life was improved and extended due to Cookie's exercise program. It was his devotion, love, and her giving him purpose that helped both of them share a longer healthier life.

Hope

Animals can offer us hope. In the years following the depression, 1936 to 1940, a horse surfaced to give America a diversion from all the bad that had plagued the world. The power and beauty of a horse along with the excitement of a race, with a few dollars on a sure bet or maybe on a long shot that could change a person's poverty for a period of time, drove citizens to the race track. It was Seabiscuit. Like many human Americans at the time, he did not have an easy start and was not the embodiment of a beautifully designed (race horse) body. But he had heart and tenacity and gave hope to people who could identify with his rough beginning, and a belief that for them too there could be a finish line with their victory in sight.

Just recently, a similar event again stirred the hearts of horse racing fans. California Chrome rose from a plain but prospective mare and an inexpensive stud fee to over-

come the odds of simple beginnings. He raced and won the 2014 Kentucky Derby and Preakness and for a brief time renewed in Americans a different interest in life and briefly distracted us from war and hatred, giving some hope in winning and a fairy tale ending.

At another time of war, a different species of animal affected our lives. Elsa, “the lioness that changed the world”, inspired the 1966 movie, *Born Free*. Elsa was a Kenya lioness born in 1956 and raised, along with her orphaned sisters, by game warden George Adamson and his wife Joy Adamson. Though her two sisters eventually went to the Netherlands’ Rotterdam Zoo, Elsa was trained by the Adamsons to survive on her own, and was eventually released into the wild.

While Elsa lived in many ways like a domesticated pet when she was small, Joy was fiercely determined to give Elsa the education she needed to hunt and live in the wild. When Elsa was three years old, she brought three cubs of her own to show to the Adamsons. Her connection to those who raised her and then set her free had not gone unnoticed. Elsa earned worldwide fame when her early life's story was published in the book *Born Free*.

Laughter

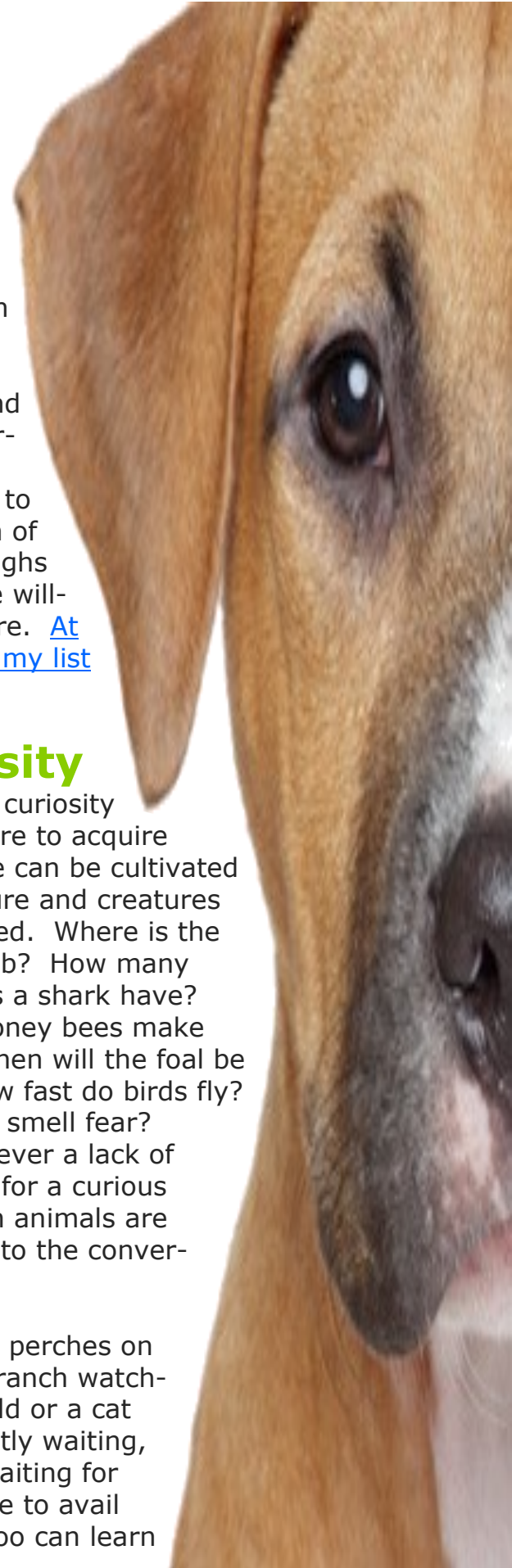
Laughter comes into our lives from experiences with animals, often when you least expect it. I’m not sure that they have the conviction to try to make us laugh, but they certainly can sense the different facial expressions, body language, and responses that come about from humor and laughter. Cats of course, are being cats and whatever you get from

that is your pleasure, albeit accidental on their part. “Funniest Videos” and other internet posts can attest to the wealth of animal laughs people are willing to share. [At the top of my list are goats.](#)

Curiosity

Childhood curiosity and a desire to acquire knowledge can be cultivated when nature and creatures are included. Where is the hermit crab? How many teeth does a shark have? How do honey bees make honey? When will the foal be born? How fast do birds fly? Can a dog smell fear? There is never a lack of education for a curious child when animals are brought into the conversation.

As a hawk perches on the tree branch watching the field or a cat sits patiently waiting, waiting, waiting for that mouse to avail itself we too can learn



patience from animals. Everything is not instantaneous. This lesson may become more important nowadays with the speed that things happen since technology has advanced. Phones are click and send and drive-up service is commonplace. There is a skill in sitting quietly and patiently waiting for the right moment, removing external interference, and focusing on an opportunity to which you have projected into the near future. And then receiving the reward for having the tenacity to persevere.

In the late 1980's and early 90's I raised and showed English Lop rabbits. One of my favorite diffusers and quiet moments was after I had fed all the bunnies. They were in contentment, all munching their pellets and hay, pleased with the fresh choices, nourishing their bodies. Everything was still except for the symphony of "munch,

munch, munch." Horses (also an herbivore) in a stable are much similar. It is a calming sensation.


Thankfulness

Thankfulness for the life. There is a short story about a young boy whose parents were trying to ease the pain of the impending euthanasia of their old beloved dog at their veterinarian. The doctor was visiting with him, explaining about life and death and what was about to happen. At one point the young boy spoke up saying, "It's ok, I know why we live longer than dogs. It's because it doesn't take them as long to learn the lessons God asked of them."

As much as we can be thankful for the life, it is extremely difficult to look death



in the face and then go there for them. Oftentimes I know that what I am doing for the animals at my Pet Rehab & Pain Clinic is not just helping them feel better, but also giving their loving family the time they need to say good-bye. They are not being greedy or keeping the pet alive for themselves, but they want to make certain before the final breath is taken, both by the pet now and them down the road, that they did everything possible to help. Help their dear friend live comfortably, pain free, happily, stress-free, and hopefully knowing they are loved.



People will spend a lot of money to secure this phenomenon. It may originate from some circumstance in their past where they feel like they failed to do everything possible and regret now haunts them. It may be because they want that care for themselves. It may be that this life has meant so much to them that their conscience is struggling at the present time and they need to have no doubts. Whatever the reason, I have relived this scenario many times in my career. I remember a farmer, in my earlier doctor days, apologizing to me for being sentimental over his old dog and shedding a tear. I assured him that there was no need to apologize for caring about a good friend, no matter if she was 2-legged or 4-legged. Love and loss does not have set boundaries to our emotions.

Unconditional Love

And the greatest of these is love. Unconditional love is the number one answer I get from people that I ask, "What do you most appreciate about your relationship with your dog?" Unconditional love is the cement that binds this marriage of human and dogs. For dogs it is a love without rules or documents or licenses, given freely by a creature that expects nothing in return.

When life is good there is a harmony of all facets. The rhythm of the hearts, the wave lengths of dreams shared, songs sung, colors worn (like the vibrancy of color of some fish and birds), and emotions expressed, all move in harmonic resonance. The patterns of their foot prints, the wake left in the ocean as they pass, and the wind stirred in their wings, all left behind as a reminder of their existence at one moment in time.

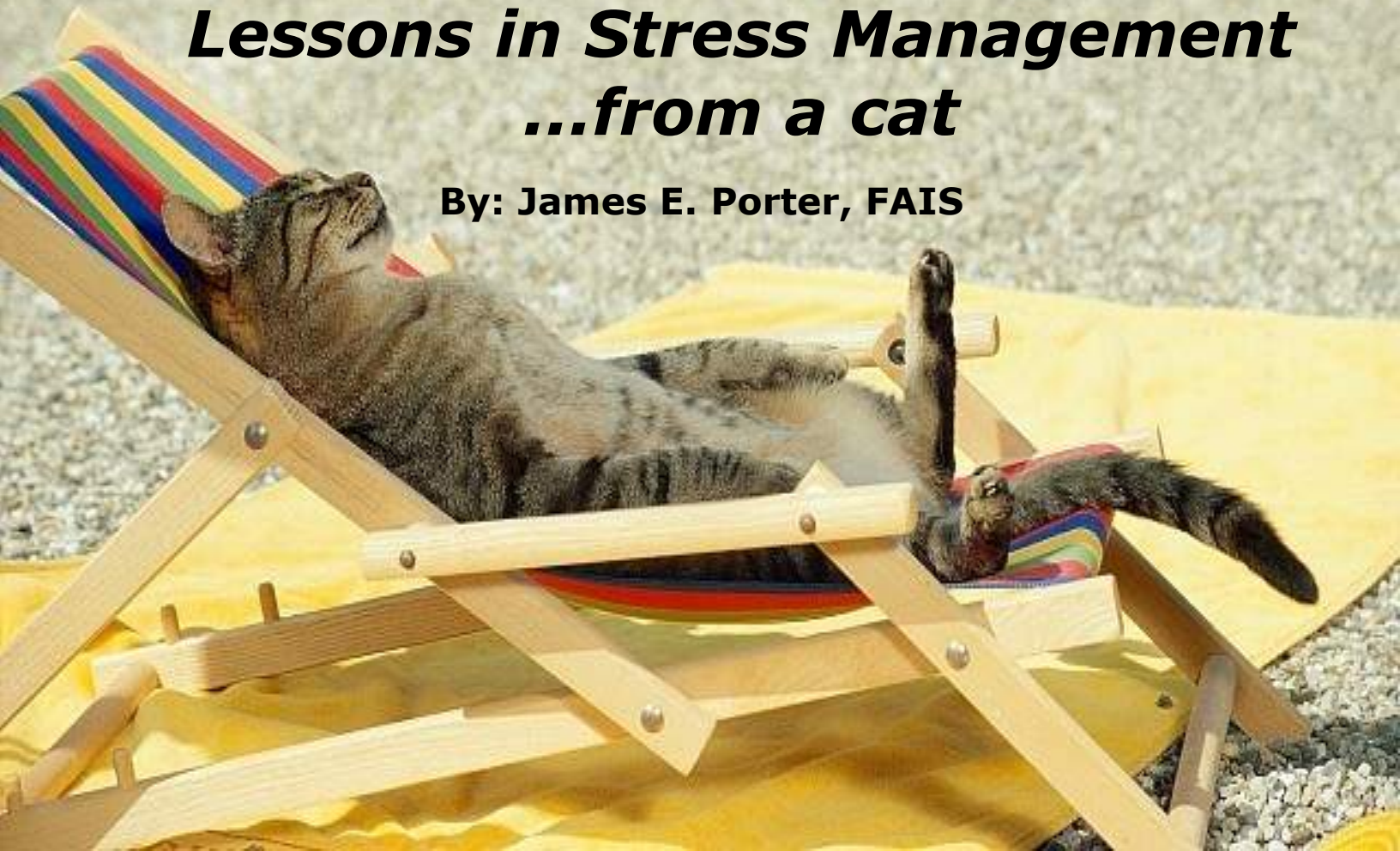
Animals do improve our lives. Take a look at nature. Out there is an animal waiting to fill the void. Our lives are enriched because they exist. The more we communicate or interact with them, admire, appreciate, and take responsibility for them, the wealthier (emotionally) each of us becomes and the greater is our survival potential.

Maybe our best communication is not with words, as they may not speak our language, but from the eye – the window to the soul, a language with which each is familiar. Look with kindness, compassion, with intent to do no harm intertwined by a desire to be friends, expressed through eyes from the depths of a loving heart. When we do that, our well-being can be revived.

Rest, Relax, Repeat

Lessons in Stress Management ...from a cat

By: James E. Porter, FAIS



I've learned a lot about stress management by observing my cat. He really takes life as it comes and truly enjoys relaxing as much as he possibly can. Cats typically sleep up to 18 hours a day and my cat never misses a wink. If he's sleeping in the living room on the sofa, he may look up when I walk in or he may not.

If he is awake and he sees me coming he ALWAYS greets me with a stretch. It's a very formal greeting that apparently a lot of cats do with their owners. It looks to me like a yoga stretch (if I

had to name it, I'd call it downward facing cat) and he appears to really be in the moment when he is doing it. When I bend down to pet him he always purrs appreciatively, and seems totally LOST in a moment of pure bliss. When I get to the kitchen I check his food bowl. If it's empty, I put out food for him. But he only comes and eats on HIS schedule, not mine. He's a cool customer in every respect.

But his life isn't completely devoid of stress, either. We live in the woods and we regularly see all sorts of wildlife in

our backyard including a fox that comes through regularly and a coyote that comes through occasionally.

Now we human beings talk about how "*it's a jungle out there*" but for my cat it really is. Whenever he walks out our front door, his life is in danger. And he handles this REAL danger with more serenity and aplomb than I could ever hope to maintain in my much safer world where the biggest threats I have to worry about are lost keys, traffic jams and the occasional rude remark from someone I might know. But just think about how stressful it would be if every time you walked out your front door you had to possibly contend with something that could eat you for lunch!

In his book, *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers*, author and Stanford Professor Robert Sapolsky, tells us that the reason zebras don't get ulcers is that they don't think about the lion when it's not there. So I guess it's safe to say, that my cat isn't thinking about the fox or the coyote when they are not there. We humans on the other hand, are famous for thinking about our stress at all hours of the day or night. In fact, I'm probably more stressed out about the fox than my cat is.

But it's not like my cat isn't cautious, either. In fact, he's very careful. When I bring him out to our screened-in porch

he sniffs at the door before he commits to going out. Sometimes he just changes his mind and won't go out at all. When he sleeps outdoors he usually finds tight places where only he can fit or high places where he can keep an eye on things, like on the roof of our car.

Several times our cat has come back from the surrounding woods with nicks and cuts and other scrapes. And one time it was so bad we had to take him to the vet. But his antidote to major stressful events like these is simply to

take whatever time he needs to recover (after we took him to the vet he slept on the sofa for two days straight). And then, when he's ready, he goes back outside, with the same serenity, and the same equanimity he has maintained almost every hour of every day of his entire life. He's always cautious, but never anxious. Unless something is directly threatening him, he's always relaxed and totally in the moment.



The fox. He appears to have something in his mouth.

So what have I learned about stress management from my cat? Live in the moment. Don't worry about stress unless it's staring you in the face. Give yourself some recovery time, after any stressful event. Get plenty of sleep. Don't eat unless you're hungry. Stretch regularly and most importantly, whenever you're feeling really good, *purr*.

on the **FLIP** **SIDE** ETIB

How Can Humans Help Their Pets With Stress?

THUNDERSTORMS AND FIREWORKS THE SEASON OF ANXIETY AND STRESS FOR YOUR PET

By: Ava Frick, DVM, CAC, FAIS

What caused your dog to become afraid of thunderstorms and fireworks? You want your dog to want you but why does he have separation anxiety? Is your stress making your pet (or horse for that matter) nervous or did they just get that way? Animals have survived through centuries by observing everything around them. They are constantly taking in sights, sounds, smells, touch perceptions, vibrations, anything they perceive as vital to survival. This information is then categorized, some being programmed to keep and other is filed away as unnecessary or unimportant data. The decision to keep or toss can be different for each species, breed, sex, age, and global habitat. Whether an animal is a predator (the hunter) or a prey (the hunted) makes a difference in how they respond and react to situations. When a body goes outside of the endocrine systems "comfort zone" we start to see altered behavior to environmental situations. The endocrine system comprises the hypothalamus, thalamus, pituitary, pineal gland, thyroid, parathyroid, adrenal glands and pancreas. These glands are in constant communication to balance messages that signal the body to work.

Stress can push a body to the limit and beyond. Stress for an animal can be an inconsistent life schedule, too many animals in the home, too much confinement, not enough exercise, lack of vital nutrients, a grain-laden diet, separation or loss of a friend (animal or human), pain, disease, thunderstorms, fireworks, arthritis, allergies, or even an owner who is nervous and upset, and there are more. The combination can be as varied as the number of stressed animals out there because no two beings are identical. How you react and respond can make a difference in the overall outcome.

Eliminating the symptoms first involves identifying the etiology. Finding the cause and changing that part of the animal's lifestyle or health status may resolve the stress reactions. I like to first address mineral patterns. The body needs calcium and magnesium in order for the nervous system to be calm and relaxed. Lacking these vital nutrients an individual cannot be calm. He will ramp up in a stressed situation escalating without the ability to stop until exhaustion hits. Zinc is also a very important mineral and works with calcium for body functions across many levels.

This assessment can be made with a simple fur test. A small sample is clipped from the belly, submitted to a laboratory, and the results of tissue mineral and toxic metal levels will be received in 3 to 4 weeks. A customized nutritional balancing program targeting specific minerals and vitamins for your pet can then be designed.

Herbs are also helpful in transitioning from the nervous state while waiting for nutrients to achieve their cellular positions.

Oral calming herbs include St. John's Wort, Valerian, Passion Flower, Kava, Eleuthero, and Skull Cap. Topical or aromatic herbs such as lavender can also be beneficial in some situations.

Pheromone collars like NurtueCALM 24/7 will help some cats and dogs. This therapy mimics the pheromone that the mother dog or cat produces to calm and reassure her pups or kittens. Animals recognize these pheromones throughout life. When the collar is in place, the perception of the pheromone by the cat or dog is immediate. However, as in every behavior program, the visible improvement in specific behaviors requires some time, depending on a variety of factors: the cat or dog, the nature, duration and severity of the problem, and behavior modification (animal and owner). Usually, an improvement in specific behavior signs is seen during the first two weeks after wearing the collar, but some animals require a month to exhibit visible improvement. The active ingredient in the NurtureCALM collar is androstenone, which is an interomone.

Therapeutic options can also include thunder shirts, behavior modification, drugs,

and a prescription medical device called Alpha-Stim®. Comforting the body with a caressing concept, as in the thunder shirts, works well for some dogs. Cats are generally not fond of such a "contraption" (Their words, not mine!). Having a dark, secluded, quite space in which to hide is also helpful. Behavior modification is important no matter which approach you decide to take toward changing your pets focus on the situation and life choices.

Drugs used to treat anxiety, stress and depression do not come without a caveat of toxic effects and many are prescribed off-label in animals. Toxic signs may include depression, agitation, ataxia, tremors, dry eyes, rapid heart rate, vocalization, and seizure activity.



Alpha-Stim® has no systemic side effects and the treatments are cumulative and long lasting. A very low level microamperage wave is delivered to the body via little ear clips

(like an iPod). This helps to normalize the body by inducing a balance in signals or frequencies between the endocrine organs. Physiologically it also increases blood and cerebral spinal fluid levels of beta endorphin and serotonin. This device has been on the human market for over 38 years and is FDA regulated for anxiety, pain, insomnia, and depression. Alpha-Stim® can successfully treat a variety of human and animal stress conditions.

You can't stop thunderstorms and if you can't move to a state where fireworks are prohibited then dealing with it becomes a priority. Try some of these suggestions to help get your pet through the rough seasons. They have worked for others.

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