

THE RESULTS ARE IN:

# Happiness Really Is a Warm Puppy!

If you think your dog makes your life better...you're right! A psychologist analyzes the joys—and long-term benefits—of dog ownership.

BY SUZANN PILEGGI

Numerous recent studies have found that having a secure bond with your pet can leave you feeling more secure in all of life's areas. To learn more, we interviewed Dr. Barbara Fredrickson, a psychology professor at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, whose book, *Positivity*, identifies the 10 emotions (joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love) we need to feel to increase our happiness. She has

even come up with a formula: When positive emotions outnumber negative emotions three-to-one, people reach a happy tipping point, becoming more resilient in life and in love. Owning a dog, says Fredrickson, can certainly tip the scales in your favor.

**Cesar's Way:** Based on the research you've done, how does having a dog add joy to one's life?

**Dr. Fredrickson:** Think of the wide range of experiences you share with your dog. Playing, nature walks, expressing affection: They all might

add joy. And each of these emotions, however short-lived, can contribute to a healthier, more flourishing life by broadening our minds and building our coping resources.

**CW:** What are the psychological benefits to owning a dog, or even just being around one?

**Dr. F:** I think of pet ownership as a cross-species friendship. In this light, the benefits of owning a dog are similar to those of having a close friend. Dogs can be a rich and boundless source of health-promoting positive emotions.



**CW:** Can our dog actually make us happier overall, or does he provide just momentary pleasure?

**Dr. F:** It's both. Those momentary pleasures accumulate and compound over time to make you happier, and better functioning overall.

**CW:** Can a dog also help people recover from depression?

**Dr. F:** Positive emotions are the key to bouncing back from life's challenges, so, yes, the good times you share with your dog overcome feelings of stagnancy or a depressed mood.

## TEST YOUR PERSONAL POSITIVITY...

with Dr. Fredrickson's self test! Using the 0-4 scale below, indicate the degree to which you've experienced positive (black type) and negative (red) feelings on the previous day. Add up the scores. If positive emotions outrank negative ones by at least 3-to-1, you're on the right track. Need improvement? Spend quality time daily with Fido, and keep retesting!

0 = not at all; 1 = a little bit; 2 = moderately; 3 = quite a bit; 4 = extremely

- What is the most amused, fun-loving, or silly you felt? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the most inspired, uplifted, or elevated you felt? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the most angry, irritated, or annoyed you felt? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the most guilty, repentant, or blameworthy you felt? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the most awe, wonder, or amazement you felt? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the most interested, alert, or curious you felt? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the most ashamed, humiliated, or disgraced you felt? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the most hate, distrust, or suspicion you felt? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the most grateful, appreciative, or thankful you felt? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the most love, closeness, or trust you felt? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the most contemptuous, scornful, or disdainful you felt? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the most sad, downhearted, or unhappy you felt? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the most proud, confident, or self-assured you felt? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the most serene, content, or peaceful you felt? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the most disgust, distaste, or revulsion you felt? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the most scared, fearful, or afraid you felt? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the most hopeful, optimistic, or encouraged you felt? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the most joyful, glad, or happy you felt? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the most embarrassed, self-conscious, or red-faced you felt? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the most stressed, nervous, or overwhelmed you felt? \_\_\_\_\_

YOUR TOTAL BLACK SCORE \_\_\_\_\_ YOUR TOTAL RED SCORE \_\_\_\_\_

www.positivityratio.com

## The Doggie Rx

In addition to boosting your mood, owning a pet yields a host of surprising health benefits. At right, eight more reasons to lay on the puppy love.



### 1. EARLY PROBLEM DETECTION

Strong evidence supports the theory that, due to their hypersharp olfactory senses, dogs can detect ailments like prostate cancer, diabetes, and hypoglycemia before an owner knows he's in peril. Ongoing studies to determine how dogs can be trained for specific dis-

ease detection are in progress.

### 2. PSYCHIC SEIZURE POWERS

People who are subject to seizures have reported that their dogs can sense one coming on before they do. As a result of this finding, "seizure alert" dogs are now being specially trained to warn their owners that

a seizure is on the way, giving them time to call for help and position themselves in a safe spot—away from a stairwell or a hot stove, for instance.

### 3. FEWER FALLS

People with Parkinson's disease sometimes experience what's known as "freezing"—the feet "freeze" in place while the rest of the body keeps

moving—and the result is often a nasty fall. For reasons that baffle scientists, a dog's touch can actually unfreeze an offending appendage, and some canines are now being trained to master that touch.

### 4. INCREASED HEART HEALTH

People with pets (OK, not just dogs!) have lower

cholesterol and triglyceride levels.

### 5. FEWER MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS

A study by the National Institutes of Health showed that pet owners "make fewer doctor visits, especially for non-serious medical conditions." That means pet ownership can actually lower healthcare costs!

### 6. INCREASED SURVIVAL ODDS

The NIH study also found that people with pets are more likely to be alive a year after being treated for a coronary condition than their pet-averse counterparts.

### 7. LOWER BLOOD PRESSURE

A study by the State University of New York at Buffalo found that,

in stressful situations, a person with hypertension and a pet has better blood pressure numbers than a pet-free person with hypertension. Other studies have confirmed this.

### 8. A FITTER YOU

This one is almost too obvious: When you walk your dog, you also walk yourself. No one can argue the health benefits of that!