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Cats are good for your health, say owners young and old

Cats Protection Week: 8 – 15 September 2001



Recent research conducted by Cats Protection has proved what cat-lovers have suspected for ages: that cats really do have a powerful part to play in our health, happiness and relationship stakes. Two separate surveys of Cats Protection members aged 13 and under, and 55 and over, have shown that our relationships with our cats can be amongst our most significant and rewarding, regardless of our age or gender.

Chief Executive of Cats Protection, Derek Conway TD MP, hopes the findings will encourage more people to consider rehoming a cat during Cats Protection Week (8 – 15 September). “A cat can be our closest confidante supporting us greatly through life’s ups and downs,” he said. “Cats can really add to the quality of our lives. We hope that more people will discover their joys during Cats Protection Week.”

‘Survivor’ contestant, Mick Easton, who enjoyed occasionally putting the cat amongst the pigeons whilst on the island, has gained a lot of happiness from his Cats Protection rescue cat, Whisper. “My house wouldn’t be a home without Whisper. He has really helped me to relax during a hectic time,” explained Mick. “It was great to have his company again when I returned from filming. He seems to have enjoyed hearing about all the goings-on during the making of ‘Survivor!’”

Extensive research amongst the 55 and over age group has revealed:

➤ That **79%** of respondents sometimes prefer to **share their feelings with their cat rather than a human**. Whilst this might be highly understandable for those living alone, the survey found that **73% of those living with a partner prefer to share their feelings with their cat rather than a human**.

➤ **34% of women** and 20% of men who expressed an opinion on whether their cat was a better companion than their significant other, **said that they felt their cat was a better companion**. The most common reasons cited for this preference include the **constant companionship** offered by a cat (81%) and a **lack of conflict** with their feline friend (62%). People in the north of England are most likely to feel this way whereas people living in south-west England are least likely to.

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➤ The effectiveness of cats as stress reducers is also highlighted by the research findings. **82%** of respondents perceived that their cat has helped them to **reduce their stress levels and relax more**. Other important 'health and happiness benefits' derived from being a cat owner include **a reduction in feelings of loneliness** (62%), greater feelings of peace, joy and/or happiness (58%) and **having a purpose in life** (36% overall and twice as important for women as for men).

➤ Overall, **50%** of respondents said **their cat had helped them in times of crisis** (52% women and 37% men). Of those who said their cat had helped them in a crisis, 46% of respondents felt their cat had helped them cope with bereavement whilst 13% felt their cats had helped them cope better with a period of illness including depression and other mental health problems. A further 13% found their cat 'just being there' was therapeutic in times of crisis.

➤ **13% of those surveyed have experienced tensions** with others as a result of someone close to them not getting on with their cat/s. Women and people with four cats or more are more likely to have experienced conflict, with 33% of those who have experienced conflict over their cat reporting that the situation was resolved by the other person improving their attitude towards the cat/s.

➤ Two-thirds of respondents spend an hour or more of quality time with their cats each day, with **27% of women** and 12% of men **spending over three hours with their cat** each day. That's a lot of time spent relaxing and talking to our cats!

➤ 55% of those surveyed **thought their cat had helped to improve their relationship with others** (61% men and 39% women). 54% of people whose cats had helped them improve their relationships with others, said they felt more sociable.

And for children aged 13 and under, research showed some equally interesting findings:

➤ **81% of children sometimes share their feelings with their cat** rather than a family member or friend when they are upset. 65% of respondents reported that sharing their feelings with their cat cheers them up and helps them to feel happier whilst 47% of respondents felt that their cat helped to ease their feelings of loneliness.

➤ **"Feeling like I always have a close friend with me"** was the most popular 'health and happiness' cat ownership benefit for this age group, with **87%** (92% girls and 78% of boys) reporting that they felt this way about their cat.

➤ Having a cat helped **35% of children feel better about themselves** (39% of girls and 28% of boys) whilst 49% felt more relaxed and happier about life as a result of having a cat.

➤ Children admire cats because their felines do funny things that make them laugh (80% of respondents). They also enjoy their cat welcoming them when they get home (70% of respondents) and think their cat looks nice (80% of respondents).

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➤ **80% of children thought that their cat had helped them get on better with family** and friends. Whilst cat owners don't meet others through walking their pet, owning a cat can still provide important social benefits with 65% of children liking to chat to others about their cats.

"Whilst the emotional support and mental stimulation that cats can provide children and adults with is extremely important, our research showed us that felines can also help to protect us in times of danger," said Derek Conway. "A number of adult respondents reported that their cat had alerted them to intruders, a fire starting or a neighbour in need of help. It all goes to prove that our loyal cats really do add life."

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For further information relating to the findings of the 'Cats add life' surveys, **please call Emma Osborne**, Cats Protection Press Officer. **Tel: 01403 221 934**

Notes to editors:

Interviews are available with:

Dr June McNicholas - top UK companion animal studies researcher and Senior Research Fellow at the University of Warwick.

Derek Conway - Chief Executive of Cats Protection.

Availability:

Dr June McNicholas: available Thursday 6 September (am) for ISDN studio link interviews. Also available Saturday 8 September (am) via landline telephone.

Derek Conway: available Thursday, 6 September (am) and Friday, 7 September (am) for ISDN studio link interviews. Also available via landline phone on Monday, 10 September.