

View this article online at: [patient.info/news-and-features/how-can-walking-your-dog-help-your-mental-health](https://patient.info/news-and-features/how-can-walking-your-dog-help-your-mental-health)

## Why walking your dog can boost your mental health

Dogs love daily walks because they get to sniff, exercise and spend quality time with their owners – and if they're lucky, chase a tennis ball too. The good news is that owners also receive the benefits of these walks, as spending time in nature, exercising and getting fresh air can work wonders for our mental health.

### Why is walking your dog good for your mental health?

Studies suggest spending time with a pet is good for you for a variety of reasons, from encouraging regular [exercise](#) to providing [companionship](#).

Research by the University of Warwick found that playing and petting with a dog helped to reduce anxiety<sup>1</sup>. University students were assigned to either watch videos of a dog or play with a dog before rating their [mood](#) in a survey. Although all the students felt less anxious afterwards, those who directly interacted with a dog experienced a greater drop in [anxiety](#).

[Counselling Directory member Jennifer Warwick](#), a member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, says dogs are a great reason to get out and about.

"The joy dogs show at the prospect of a walk and knowing they are happy helps you feel happier too," she says. "Being with your [pet](#) has a real, positive impact on your [mental health](#), so going for a walk with them has got to be a win-win."

## Dog owners get more exercise

Dog owners also tend to get more exercise<sup>2</sup>, which is known to boost our mental health. Whether it's a quick stomp around the local park or a longer walk in the countryside, regular walks, and [physical activity](#) triggers the release of chemicals such as dopamine and serotonin, which boost mood and reduce [stress](#)<sup>3</sup>.

Also, sharing a walk with a dog – rather than walking on your own – may be even more beneficial. A study found that heading outside with your doggy companion helps to boost the brain chemical GABA (Gamma-aminobutyric acid), which helps calm us down<sup>4</sup>.

## Being outside is good for you

If you've ever felt better after going for a walk, you'll probably understand why spending time [outside](#) is one of the easier ways to boost your health and [happiness](#). As being amongst trees and hearing the birds sing is beneficial to our psychological health<sup>5</sup>.

And it doesn't take long to reap the benefits of the great outdoors either. Researchers at Cornell University found that as little as ten minutes in a natural setting can help us feel happier and lessen the effects of both physical and mental [stress](#).

Also, feeling the sun – and wind or rain – on your face can help you feel more grounded if you're feeling worried or stressed, Warwick adds. Walking your dog can be a form of [mindfulness](#), a relaxation technique which involves paying attention to what is going on inside and around you, moment by moment.

"It helps you get out of your head and be more present," she explains. "Being present means not worrying about what's happened in the past, or thinking about what may happen in the future. Instead, your focus is on the present, which is great at helping you manage [stressful](#) situations and difficult emotions. So get your walking boots on and grab your dog's lead."

## Further reading

1. Thelwell: [Paws for thought: A controlled study investigating the benefits of interacting with a house-trained dog on university students mood and anxiety.](#)
2. Westgarth: [Dog owners are more likely to meet physical activity guidelines than people without a dog: An investigation of the association between dog ownership and physical activity levels in a UK community.](#)
3. Salmon: [Effects of physical exercise on anxiety, depression, and sensitivity to stress: a unifying theory.](#)
4. Akiyama et al: [Hormonal and neurological aspects of dog walking for dog owners and pet dogs.](#)
5. Bakolis et al: [Urban mind: Using smartphone technologies to investigate the impact of nature on mental wellbeing in real time.](#)
6. Meredith et al: [Minimum time dose in nature to positively impact the mental health of college-aged students, and how to measure it: A scoping review](#)

**Disclaimer:** This article is for information only and should not be used for the diagnosis or treatment of medical conditions. Egton Medical Information Systems Limited has used all reasonable care in compiling the information but makes no warranty as to its accuracy. Consult a doctor or other healthcare professional for diagnosis and treatment of medical conditions. For details see our [conditions](#).

<b>Last updated by:</b> Lydia Smith 15/12/2023	<b>Originally authored by:</b> Lydia Smith 06/01/2023
<b>Peer reviewed by:</b> Dr Krishna Vakharia, MRCP 15/12/2023	

---

View this article online at: [patient.info/news-and-features/how-can-walking-your-dog-help-your-mental-health](https://patient.info/news-and-features/how-can-walking-your-dog-help-your-mental-health)

Discuss Why walking your dog can boost your mental health and find more trusted resources at [Patient](https://patient.info).

---



To find out more visit [www.patientaccess.com](https://www.patientaccess.com)  
or download the app



Follow us

