



## Headed to the pub? Spare a thought for the dog!

Dogs have loved it, cats have hated it, goldfish may not have even noticed; but many humans have come to rely on their pets to get them through the Covid-19 pandemic period. Despite the lows of the past year, for many lock-down has been the perfect opportunity to welcome a dog or new pet into their lives and recent studies found that 86% of respondents felt they had bonded more with their pets since being in lockdown.

Pets have played a crucial part in helping us to adjust to a new normal: 60% pet owners believe their pet had helped them maintain a regular routine and 43% said that their animal had reduced their anxiety. For those working from home, 58% said that their companion animal had boosted their productivity and motivation, whilst 12% revealed they spoke to their pet about their workload or colleagues.

Pet ownership is a wonderful thing, but it is also a huge responsibility and a costly commitment that goes way beyond lockdown. As the saying goes, 'A dog is for life', and as restrictions ease and people's social lives begin to kick up a gear, it's important to take a moment to consider the implications for our furry companions and to give them a hand to help them adjust, just as we ourselves are having to adjust.

Whilst the majority of pets have benefitted from more company, longer walks and playtime, it's important to remember that life has been far from normal for them too. Take dogs for example, few will have met other dogs and if they have seen them, it's possibly been from a distance or on a lead unable to interact or play. There will have been fewer visitors coming into the home to interact with and many new pets may not yet have experienced being properly left home alone.

Try building in minimal periods apart, initially briefly separated from you by a door or gate. If they remain calm, build up the time apart so they start to adjust to not being with you all the time. If they get anxious when separated, start barking or whining or scratching at the door, you may need to go back to a shorter period to help them adjust. By gradually increasing your time apart, you can ensure they will settle on their own when the time comes.

Our pets will also need help when it comes to seeing friends and family again too, both out and indoors. Teaching them how to greet new people calmly, how to settle when guests visit or when you're in a pub garden or cafe are key skills they may not yet have mastered, but skills that will set you both up for success and a happy and fulfilled partnership.

## LOCKDOWN LIFTERS BY ELAINE

As we are now slowly facing a more normal approach to day-to-day life, some people may be more apprehensive than others to start socialising again, especially elderly people or those who live alone or who have worked from home over the last year with little or no contact with the outside world. Please be patient with family members, friends and work colleagues and let them ease into life at their own pace whilst lockdown is slowly lifting.

A book I bought a few months ago, *The Food Mood Connection*, by Uma Naidoo, features the connection between good mood and food and what foods can cause depression, anxiety and help with trauma. A friend of mine who has had hardly any contact in the last three months is now extremely anxious about the normal things;

shopping, visiting friends and family etc. Her diet is not the best and she has a very sweet tooth which is proven to increase levels of anxiety. I have set up a meal plan for her which will increase her intake of vitamins, nutrients and include foods to hopefully help her. From experience, I have recently reduced the amounts of foods high in sunflower or vegetable oils; these increase levels of inflammation throughout the body and brain and can cause joint pain, anxiety and depression. I always stick to either olive, coconut or avocado oil when cooking.

**Omega 3** – try oily fish and look out for tins of sardines or mackerel in spring water or olive oil – avoid varieties that are in brine or sunflower oil.

**Fibre rich foods** – brown rice, bran, beans, broccoli, bananas, almonds, walnuts, apples

and carrots to name a few.

**Vitamin D rich foods** – egg yolk, salmon, mushrooms.

**Magnesium** – brilliant for anxiety and there are many good quality supplements available. Try spinach, cashews, peanut butter (low-sugar brands), avocados and edamame beans which are all high in magnesium.

**B vitamins** – B6 is great for balancing hormones, B12 is good for brain fog and helps with concentration.

**Cultured foods** – look out for fermented or aged foods such as sauerkraut, miso and live plain yogurt. Cultured foods are shown to help alleviate anxiety due to its job of killing bad bacteria in our gut and helps improve our nervous system.



## Wellbeing Weekly Session

Friendly reminder – the Wellbeing Wednesday ‘Weekly Session’ is now here every week at 10am. Anyone can join just follow the details below...

### What to expect:

1. Opening the session with a moment for mindfulness
2. A short video for inspiration
3. A moment to share what has gone well and what you are looking forward too in the week ahead
4. A short quiz to stimulate fun, thinking, and laughter.
5. Finishing off with ‘time to stretch’ – using examples of Megs Chair Yoga to relax, engage those endorphins and feel positive in our minds before finishing the session.

[Click here for the Zoom link.](#)

## GOOD MOOD SMOOTHIE

- 120 ml of almond milk or filtered semi-skimmed milk
  - 1 pitted date
  - Half a banana
  - Quarter tspn of ground cinnamon or ground nutmeg
  - 1 tbsp of peanut butter
  - Half a cup of ice cubes
- Whizz up all of the above for a nutritious drink!

## COCKTAIL IDEA – ZINGY GRAPEFRUIT SPRITZ

This serves 4 people. Pour all ingredients in a jug and place ice in individual glasses with the garnish.

- 500ml grapefruit juice
- 500ml of prosecco or champagne
- 500ml Soda water
- Add a slice of fresh grapefruit and fresh mint to garnish

## Pets and our wellbeing

by Andy Holter

Nine in 10 pet owners say their animals have a positive effect on their wellbeing with an overwhelming 94 per cent confirming their four-legged friends have a positive impact on their health. It's great to see the many ways our beloved pets positively improve our overall wellbeing and bring us happiness – this goes to show just how important they are to millions of people across the UK.

Pets can also have a positive impact on our mental health: the National Institute of Health discovered that owning a pet can severely lower your stress levels and can aid recovery from stressful situations quicker than a partner or family member can. Companionship it seems is a key part to owning a pet and helps to prevent loneliness, particularly in the older generation. Being a sole companion, they can provide a sense of purpose and routine and a reason to wake up every morning.

**Did you know?** Studies around pets and mental health show that petting and playing with animals reduces stress-related hormones. These benefits can occur after just five minutes of interacting with a pet. Therefore, pets are very helpful for anxiety sufferers. Playing with a dog or cat raises our levels of serotonin and dopamine.

## Top 10 ways owners say their pet improves their wellbeing:

1. They make me feel happier
2. Offer me companionship
3. Make me laugh
4. They make me feel calmer
5. Help take my mind off things
6. Know they love me unconditionally
7. Bring positivity to my life
8. Help me get outside every day
9. Help me appreciate the small things in life
10. Help me stick to a daily routine

So why not take some time to spend with your beloved pet this weekend, or if you don't have your own pet, ask a friend or neighbour; offer to take their dog for a walk and share in the benefits of this very special relationship and boost your own wellbeing!

“The world would be a nicer place if everyone had the ability to love as unconditionally as a dog.” M K Clinton

