

The benefits of having a pet for people living with dementia

Caring for pets is an important part of life for many people. Half of all adults in the UK have a pet, or companion animal. Having a pet can contribute to well-being, and people who have dogs tend to walk more, which is good for their health. We wanted to find out whether having, and caring for, a pet is linked to better well-being and health for people with dementia.

We used information provided by 1542 people with mild-to-moderate dementia taking part in the IDEAL study. We asked whether they had a pet, and if so what kind of animal it was and whether they were actively involved in caring for it (for example, feeding or grooming it).

Nearly one-third had at least one pet. Just over half of these had a dog (58%) and just under half had a cat (42%). Smaller numbers of people also had birds, fish or other, mostly indoor, animals.

Nearly three-quarters of those who had a pet were actively involved in caring for it. In just under half of cases this pet was a dog.

People with dementia who had a dog or other pet were more physically active, especially if they were directly involved in caring for it, than those without a pet. Those with pets also felt more positive about themselves and their lives, and less lonely, than those without a pet.

Our findings suggest that for some people with dementia, having and caring for a pet may help to support well-being and health.

This is a summary of a [research article](#) which appeared in the **Journal of Applied Gerontology** in October 2020.