Hilarious videos of animals are trending all over the Internet at the moment. But when our pets aren’t busy getting us ‘views’ on YouTube, they’re providing us with all sorts of other benefits as well. As it turns out, pets can actually have a really positive impact on our mental health. Read on and get the facts, including when having a pet isn’t the best idea.

The plus side of pets
A cat chasing it’s own tail will always be funny. Dogs running into things will never get old. However, if we look a bit closer at the benefits that pets have on our lives, it actually goes much deeper. Having a pet can have a whole lot of positive effects on our mental health. Owning a pet can help to relieve symptoms of anxiety and depression, as well as acting as a source of comfort more generally for the owners.

If you're not able to have your own pet but you would still like to interact with one, you could always offer to walk your neighbour's or friend's dog, or even consider volunteering at your local animal shelter.

That's barking mad
Check out some of the most common ways that owning a pet can improve your mental health.

Furry friend
Pets are great companions. If you’re feeling lonely or down, it’s really nice to have a pet around for the company. If you’re feeling particularly crap, it can be really tempting to pull away from your friends and family and isolate yourself. Having a pet around all the time can help to combat this feeling of isolation.

You are your pet’s favourite person
Caring for a pet is a great way to give you a sense of purpose and something positive to focus on. Being responsible for feeding, bathing, walking and grooming an animal is a great way to remind yourself that you’re capable of achieving things, big or small. Looking after another living being is no walk in the park; although it should probably include a walk in the park every now and then.

Get sweaty
Getting out and about is a really positive way to look after your mental health. Whether it’s a leisurely stroll or an intense game of AFL – it’s all great for the mood. Having a pet, especially a dog, is a great opportunity to engage in additional activities and exercise, like going for a walk around the block or hanging out in the park together.

Stay social
Human beings are social creatures. Staying socially connected is a great way to keep mentally fit. Having a pet is a handy way to expand your social networks, whether it’s walking your dog at the park and talking to fellow dog owners, taking your furry friend to Puppy school or using their hilarious YouTube videos to break the ice at a party.

Routine
Having a structured routine is an important part of looking after our mental health, and is also helpful when it comes to managing symptoms of depression and anxiety. A routine includes things like waking up and going to sleep at a similar time every day, exercising regularly and having three meals every day. Having a pet is another great way to add structure to your day by the need to feed them at similar times every day and taking them for daily walks.

Keeping it simple
Whilst it’s super important to stay connected to your social networks, we all know that relationships can sometimes be complicated and end up bringing us distress every now and then. Well, the great thing about pets is that they don’t talk back, they don’t disagree and they certainly don’t argue. They love you unconditionally—so long as you feed them regularly.

When to get a pet
So, there are a lot of great reasons to get a pet. Keep in mind, however, that owning a pet isn’t for everyone. They’re a pretty big responsibility and they’re also expensive to look after; if someone is suffering from severe depression or anxiety, having a pet could end up putting on more pressure instead of making things easier. So, consider your circumstances carefully before you make a decision and remember that a pet isn’t a temporary purchase – they stick around for a long time. If you want, talk it through with someone that you trust to get their perspective on the situation.

Extract from Reach Out: http://au.reachout.com/pets-and-mental-health

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