

# How Living With Another Pet Affects a Dog's Health

With humans, strong social ties are associated with an increase in well-being and longevity. How about dogs? What effect does an in-home canine or feline companion have on your dog's health and resistance to disease? Here's what data from the 21,410-dog Dog Aging Project reveals.

**Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker**

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dogs may benefit from living with other canine, or even feline, companions
- Data from 21,410 dogs found living with other dogs was associated with better health and fewer diseases compared to dogs without furry friends in the household
- Dogs living in homes with wealthier owners had better health, along with more diagnosed diseases, possibly due to increased veterinary care
- The benefits of social ties outweighed the effects of finances five-fold
- Be sure to consider practical matters, like space and finances, as well as your dog's personality and age when choosing whether or not to add another pup to your home

In humans, strong social ties are linked with increased well-being and longevity. Dogs, too, may benefit from going through life with a canine companion, according to researchers with the Dog Aging Research Consortium.

Using data from 21,410 dogs from the Dog Aging Project, living with other dogs was associated with better health and fewer diseases compared to dogs without furry friends in the household.<sup>1</sup> So if you're looking for a simple way to give your only pet the best, and longest, life possible, a trip to the animal shelter may be in order.

## Social Ties Impact Dogs' Health More Than Economic Factors — by Five-Fold

Using the largest observational dataset of pet dogs' environment and health, the team found age was the strongest predictor of health issues, but even then, age-related changes varied among dogs, likely due to environment.<sup>2</sup>

Dogs living in homes with wealthier owners had better health, along with more diagnosed diseases. The latter doesn't mean the dogs were sicker but rather that they may have received more veterinary care or increased testing to facilitate the diagnoses.

However, dogs living in households with other pets also had higher health scores and fewer disease diagnoses. This social component had a much larger effect on health than finances. The researchers noted "social enrichment confers health benefits, which outweighed the effects of finances five-fold."<sup>3</sup>

Often, the other companions in the household were dogs. In the study, 70% of homes with more than one animal had another dog. However, cats were also sometimes present. According to the study:<sup>4</sup>

*"This suggests that similar to humans, increased social enrichment in companion dogs is associated with health benefits, and also provides an example of an easily modifiable environmental intervention to improve dog welfare."*

## Social Environment Influences Dogs' Health

Other factors in dogs' social environments also influenced their health. For instance:<sup>5</sup>

- **Children influence dogs' health** — Dogs living in households with more children had fewer diagnosed diseases and, typically, poorer health. This could be because resources such as time and money are typically stretched more in such households. "We think that this is because the more time that owners have to dedicate to human children, the less time they have for their furry children," study author Layla Brassington from Arizona State University noted.<sup>6</sup>
- **Owner age matters** — Younger dogs with older owners were healthier than older dogs with older owners. But dogs living in households with older owners tended to have higher mobility, perhaps a reflection of the owners time to spend on daily activity.
- **Household stability affects health** — Younger dogs in less stable households were less healthy than older dogs in stable homes. "Similar to humans, environmental adversity plays a particularly important role in early life," the team explained.<sup>7</sup>
- **Neighborhood stability is also important** — **Older dogs** in less stable neighborhoods were less mobile than older dogs living in stable neighborhoods. "Similar to older people in lower SES [socioeconomic status] neighborhoods, dogs experience a reduction in activity that could ultimately be linked with poorer health outcomes," the study found.<sup>8</sup>

However, social connectedness came out on top, showing that dogs benefit significantly from having animal companions. According to Brianah McCoy from Arizona State University:<sup>9</sup>

*"This does show that, even for our companion dogs, having those strong social connections and social companions is important. Overall, it's good for your dog to have social support around, in the form of other people and other dogs. Dogs are social animals, just like us, so they benefit from being around others."*

## How to Choose the Best Friend for Your Pup

If your dog is the only pet in your home and is not reactive to other animals, adopting him a pal might be good for everyone involved. Not only are you saving a life of an animal in need, but your pet gains a playmate and companion. But the plan will backfire if the two dogs don't get along — or you're not prepared to care for two animals in your home.

There are practical things to consider, like whether you have the space, time and finances to care for another pet, but it's critical to also keep your current dog's personality, sex and age in mind.

When dogs are young, having another dog around can help with emotional development, and a well-behaved older dog can help a younger dog catch on to the rules of your household. A calm dog can also provide an excellent role model for an anxious pup.

Some dogs do better with opposite sex companions. In one study, household aggression between dogs most often involved same-sex pairs and, among them, 68% of the cases involved two females.<sup>10</sup> The good news is many shelters allow you to "try before you buy," bringing your potential new pup home for a night or two, to make sure they're a good match for your household.

Before you let the two pups meet, learn the proper procedure for **successful new dog introductions** first. You only get once chance to make a first impression, and you want to ensure your pups get off on the right paw.

Further, even after you've become an established multiple dog household, take some time each week to play with your pups individually — and always give them access to separate areas of your home so they can choose to be together or alone.

## Sources and References

<sup>1</sup> [People June 20, 2023](#)

<sup>2,3,4,7,8</sup> [Evolution, Medicine & Public Health May 13, 2023](#)

<sup>5</sup> [The Canine Chronicle, Social Dogs Are Healthier Dogs](#)

<sup>6,9</sup> [UW Medicine, Newsroom May 24, 2023](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association March 15, 2011, Vol. 238, No. 6, Pages 731-740](#)

---