

The Benefits of Having a Pet for Suicide Prevention

Pets give you a reason to stay

- A pet depends on you for food, water, walks, and companionship — a daily reason to get up and keep going.
- That responsibility can feel heavy, but it can also anchor you to life on days when nothing else does.
- Many people report that the thought of leaving their pet stopped them from acting on suicidal thoughts.

Pets reduce loneliness without requiring conversation

- Loneliness is one of the strongest risk factors for suicidal thinking.
- A pet offers silent, steady companionship — presence without pressure to perform or explain yourself.
- The simple act of being near another living being can lower the intensity of isolation.

Pets help regulate your nervous system

- Petting an animal can lower cortisol, slow heart rate, and reduce blood pressure.
- Caring for a pet adds rhythm to the day: feeding times, walks, grooming, play.
- That structure can interrupt the spiral of rumination that often comes with depression.

Pets get you moving and outside

- Dogs need walks; even a short daily walk increases sunlight, movement, and social contact.
- Fish, birds, cats, and small animals also create small physical routines that keep you engaged.
- Movement and daylight are evidence-based supports for mood.

What the research suggests

- Studies link pet ownership to lower levels of depression, anxiety, and loneliness in some populations.
- Veterans with PTSD, people in recovery, and older adults often report that pets improve emotional stability.
- Pets are not a substitute for therapy or medication, but they can be a meaningful part of a support plan.

If you cannot have a pet right now

- Volunteer at a shelter, offer to walk a neighbor's dog, or visit a friend with a pet.
- Foster an animal temporarily if ownership feels like too much.

- Even houseplants or caring for a garden can provide a smaller version of the same connection.

A pet is not a treatment — but it can be part of one

- If you are struggling with suicidal thoughts, a pet alone is not enough.
- Combine the companionship of a pet with professional support, connection with people, and a safety plan.
- If thoughts turn toward hurting yourself, call or text 988 immediately.

**If you are in
danger right
now**

Call or text **988** for the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. If there is immediate danger, call **911** or go to the nearest emergency room.

This guide is educational information only. It is not medical, psychiatric, or crisis advice. If you are thinking about hurting yourself, contact 988 or 911 now.

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