

Cats' Purring Found to Benefit Human Health

There is nothing quite like the sound of a contented cat purring. Their unique and beautiful sound has always seemed soothing to me, dating back to when I was a little girl and I would put my ear against our tolerant cat's side to enjoy the sound up close.

Most cats purr when they are happy, when they are relaxing or while they are being stroked by their special person – some purr while they are enjoying a meal. Veterinarians will tell you that cats may also purr when they are distressed, perhaps as a way to soothe themselves. Mother cats often purr while nursing their kittens, which must be a calming sound for the babies.

People who love cats often feel that their companionship has a soothing effect, and it turns out that the vibrations of a cat's purr have a therapeutic effect on nearby humans as well as other cats.

Cats purr in the range of 20-140 hertz (the measurement we use for sound wave frequencies) which reduces stress responses in humans. Stress is harmful to our immune system and makes us more susceptible to a variety of health problems. The vibration of a cat's purr has other specific health benefits too, including decreasing symptoms of dyspnea (shortness of breath), reducing swelling and promoting healing in soft tissue and bones. Frequencies of 25 to 50 hertz are optimal for strengthening bones and 100 to 200 hertz is the second most beneficial range.

A study at the University of Minnesota Stroke Research Center followed 4,435 people for a decade to look at the medical benefits of cats. The study showed that people without cats and those who never had cats were at a 40 percent greater risk of dying from a heart attack and at a 30 percent greater risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

Sleep is essential for good health, and studies in the UK have shown that people report sleeping better with a feline companion than with their human partners. A study conducted by the Mayo Clinic Center for Sleep Medicine found that 41 percent of the people in their study reported that they slept better because of their pet, while only 20 percent said sleeping with their cat reduced their quality of sleep.

In addition to the proven health benefits, the companionship of a cat is just plain enjoyable – from their delightful, amusing play to their calm blood-pressure-lowering presence as they nap nearby.

This time of year, there are many cats awaiting adoption at local animal shelters. You could adopt your own little purring companion to enhance your health and happiness by visiting your local shelter.

Bonney Brown is Co-Founder and President of Humane Network. She created and sustained a 94% communitywide save rate as Executive Director for Nevada Humane Society, which had more than 10,000 annual animal admissions. And she was National No More Homeless Pets Director, COO and Communications Director for Best Friends Animal Society.



By Bonney Brown

