

pets

Pets. They are on my mind, because as I write this, our little Yorkshire terrier, Kramer, is lying on top of my desk, sleeping so soundly that I am wondering if he might be unconscious.

Animals are interesting creatures—so much so, that we often choose to live with them, despite the fact they can bite us, scratch us, disrupt our sleep, and ruin our carpeting.

Why do we put up with the cost and inconvenience of a pet? Is it worth the hassle? Interestingly enough, for many people, owning a pet may be a lifesaver. Now, you're probably picturing the Lassie look-alike who nudges his owner awake, thereby saving the entire family from a gas leak. That's not quite what I mean.

Research on the effects of owning a pet indicates that pets can reduce our stress by distracting us from our own problems. It's hard to sit and feel sorry for yourself when the dog has to go out NOW. And the unconditional love we get from a pet is heart-warming. Fluffy doesn't care about your midriff bulge or wrinkles. Spanky doesn't think you're a nerd. Perhaps one of the most surprising findings was that pet owners who suffered a heart attack had one-fifth the death rate of people who didn't own pets.

On the surface, you might guess it's because pet owners have to get out and walk more. But birds, cats, fish, and hamsters don't require us



to exercise them. So what is it? Maybe it's talking our problems over with Tweetie, or the relaxation we feel watching fish swim in their tank. Both can lower blood pressure. There is some evidence to indicate that the sense of total responsibility for some living thing other than oneself may provide the incentive to stay alive.

The reasons aren't all clear, but the statistics can't be denied. Taking care of your pet may not be as one sided as you think. It may be the other way around. Looks like Rover really might be "man's best friend" after all.

