Top Ten Things To Know
Pet Ownership and Cardiovascular Risk

1. This AHA Scientific Statement critically assesses studies regarding the influence of pet ownership on the presence and reduction of CVD risk factors as a novel strategy in reducing the risk of CVD.

2. Pet ownership, particularly of dogs, is probably associated with decreased CVD risk (LOE B), and may have a causal role in reducing CVD risk (LOE B). Further investigation is needed to establish a causal relationship.

3. While pet ownership may be reasonable for the reduction in CVD risk (Class IIb, LOE B), pet adoption, rescue, or purchase should not be done for the primary purpose of reducing CVD risk (Class III, LOE C).

4. An association between pet ownership and lower blood pressure has been found in some, but not all, studies.

5. Of all pets, dogs seem most likely to positively influence physical activity, especially with owners who regularly walk their dogs.

6. Pets also play an important role in providing social support, which is one of the most significant predictors of adherence to behavior change over time.

7. Companion animals may strengthen engagement in a weight loss program.

8. A positive relationship between pet ownership and autonomic function or cardiovascular reactivity to stress has been reported in most published studies. People with pets tend to have lower baseline heart rates, lower blood pressures, and significantly reduced increases in heart rate and blood pressure in response to stress. Recovery time from a stressful event is also markedly improved.

9. Further investigation is warranted regarding the influence of pet ownership on reducing CVD risk, including those on risk factor modification, primary prevention, and use of pet acquisition as a part of a strategy for secondary prevention of cardiovascular disease.

10. Minimal data are available to make an association between hyperlipidemia and pet ownership, as well as survival in people without established cardiovascular disease and pet ownership.

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