

Stressed. Lonely. Overweight. Aggressive. Misunderstood.



The wellbeing needs of cats are largely misunderstood by many owners. The PDSA Animal Wellbeing Repo

The health and welfare needs of over ten million cats, dogs and rabbits across the UK are not being properly met. This is the finding of a landmark report from leading veterinary charity, PDSA, which for the first time measures the wellbeing of our most popular household pets.

The PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report produced in conjunction with YouGov, is the largest report of its kind. Over 11,000 owners were 'scored' (out of a possible 100) on how well they are looking after their pets according to the five welfare needs, that is environment, diet, behaviour, companionship and health, as defined by the Animal Welfare Act*. As a nation, owners scored an average of 63 out of a possible 100, with 48% of participants falling under the average which highlights a significant need for improvement in certain areas of animal health and welfare.

When looking at each of the three species individually, around five million cats, four million dogs, and over 700,000 rabbits could be suffering, mentally and physically because they are not receiving all the essential health and welfare requirements necessary for their happiness and wellbeing.

By lifting the lid on the health and welfare standards of pets in the UK today, as well as gathering the opinions and knowledge of pet owners, PDSA has been able to deliver the most comprehensive evidence-based measure of pet wellbeing.

In terms of which species is currently looked after the best, dogs may no longer be man's best friend; cats currently top the list, closely followed by dogs and hopping into third place are rabbits, whose wellbeing needs are the least understood of all the companion animals surveyed.

But it's not all bad news. What is evident from the report is that the UK is a nation of animal lovers; but, unfortunately, the affection owners have for their companion animals can be misguided and sometimes detrimental to their pet's welfare.

The PDSA Report has been structured around the Animal Welfare Act* which not only identifies the fundamental health and welfare requirements pets need for long-term physical and psychological health, it puts the onus on owners to fulfil those requirements.

PDSA believes that its groundbreaking report will help owners to be more aware of what really makes their pet healthy and happy. PDSA Director of Veterinary Services, Richard Hooker, says: "Nationally, the overall awareness of the existence of the Animal Welfare Act is just 45%. The Act outlines the five basic and guiding principles designed to safeguard the wellbeing of pets and the fact that so many owners are not familiar with it is extremely worrying.

"Our report reveals that there is much work to do to raise awareness of what pets need to live health and happy lives. Only by doing this, can there be a positive impact on the standard of wellbeing for animals in the UK. This is not a finger wagging exercise, it's about finding out how pets are living today, identifying areas of concern, and supporting owners who want to do the best for their pets."

PDSA's Animal Wellbeing Report has highlighted some significant issues facing the nation's pets.

Rabbits

- 750,000 rabbits are not getting the recommended daily amount of hay or grass
- Over 150,000 rabbits live in hutches that are too small
- Over 1.1 million rabbits live alone and crave a suitable companion

Cats

- Over 3.3 million cats are unvaccinated and susceptible to potentially fatal diseases
- Around 1.3 million cats show aggression to other pets on a weekly basis
- A worrying proportion of owners provide their cats with too few resources (litter trays, bowls and beds) which can lead to high levels of stress

Dogs

- 1.9 million dogs are left alone for longer than recommended every day

- Over 165,000 dogs show aggression towards people on a weekly basis
- Obesity epidemic set to worsen as 2.4 million dogs are fed on scraps or leftovers as one of their main types of food

Animal wellbeing across the regions:

Northern Ireland and London have the lowest familiarity with the Animal Welfare Act with just 38% and 42% respectively having heard of it or received any advice on it. PDSA's Animal Wellbeing Report shows the highest level of awareness peaks at just 51% in Yorkshire and Humberside.

Richard Hooker adds: "Pets can't speak and tell us if they are unhappy, but with the right information and guidance owners can make positive changes to their pets' lives. As a leader in promoting pet health and wellbeing, PDSA wants this Report to raise awareness and prompt positive behaviour change. We want to work with the pet owning public to help them enjoy pet ownership through a deeper understanding of their pets' needs."

To download a copy of the report visit www.pdsa.org.uk/pawreport

Speaking in support of the PDSA PAW Report, the President of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), Peter Jinman, OBE, says: "The PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report is an excellent initiative. The findings of the research will help focus owners on areas where they could improve the care and welfare of their pets."

"The Animal Welfare Act was a landmark piece of legislation but evaluating its impact on the way people care for their animals is critical to an understanding of its success. I would urge others to assist PDSA in refining its PAW Report so that resources can be focused on achieving continued improvement in companion animal health and welfare."

British Veterinary Association President, Harvey Locke, also welcomes this report, saying: "PDSA's report provides a new and innovative way of attempting to benchmark responsible pet ownership as well as creating a good template for on-going data gathering."

"It is all too easy to take on a pet without accepting responsibilities for the care and welfare of that animal. This report not only identifies areas where the wellbeing of companion animals can be improved but offers simple, sound advice to address key health and welfare issues."

Survey of 11,124 dog, cat and rabbit owners was conducted online between 21st September – 16th November 2010 through the YouGov panel. Data is weighted to be representative of dog, cat and rabbit owners in the UK.

****When referring to the Animal Welfare Act this includes both the Animal Welfare Act 2006 covering England and Wales, and the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 which applies to the whole of Scotland. The five animal welfare needs:**

- Environment – The need for a suitable environment (place to live);
- Diet – The need for a suitable diet;
- Behaviour – The need to express normal behaviour;
- Companionship – The need to live with, or apart, from other animals;
- Health – The need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

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