

Pet ownership and risk factors for cardiovascular disease

Warwick P Anderson, PhD, Principal Research Fellow,

Christopher M Reid, Msc, Manager of Clinical Trials and Services,

Garry L. Jennings, MD, Director of Alfred-Baker Medical Unit

Objective: To compare risk factors for cardiovascular disease in pet owners and non-owners.

Design and patients: Accepted risk factors for cardiovascular disease were measured in 5741 participants attending a free, screening clinic at the Baker Medical Research Institute in Melbourne. Blood pressure, plasma cholesterol and triglyceride values were compared in pet owners (n = 784) and non-owners (n = 4957).

Results: Pet owners had significantly lower systolic blood pressure and plasma triglycerides than non-owners. In men, pet owners had significantly lower systolic but not diastolic blood pressure than non-owners, and significantly lower plasma triglyceride levels and plasma cholesterol levels. In women over 40 years old, systolic but not diastolic pressure was significantly lower in pet owners and plasma triglycerides also tended to be lower. There were no differences in body mass index and self reported smoking habits were similar, but pet owners reported that they took significantly more exercise than non-owners, and ate more meat and "takeaway" foods. The socioeconomic profile of pet owners and non-owners appeared to be comparable.

Conclusions: Pet owners in our clinic population had lower levels of accepted risk factors for cardiovascular disease, and this was not explicable on the basis of cigarette smoking, diet, body mass index or socioeconomic profile. The possibility that pet ownership reduces cardiovascular risk factors should therefore be investigated.

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