

# Creature comforts

## Pets bring a special joy to life

As many pet owners know, a furry dog or fluffy cat can be much more than just another mouth to feed. Pets return the favor by providing companionship, entertainment and unconditional love.

But did you know that a loving pet can literally save someone's life? More researchers are discovering that the most serious disease for seniors is not cancer or heart disease—it's loneliness.

Dogs and cats help overcome the pain of loneliness by providing companionship and affection. For people who are typically alone for long periods, pets also can provide a sense of security and protection.

But they are also good for your health in many other ways. Pets can make you laugh and divert your mind away from troubles. They also broaden your circle

of friends and encourage good health through exercise. Studies show that pets can aid relaxation, lower blood pressure, promote health and prolong life.

According to a study in the *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, many older Americans think having a pet is more important than moving to a convenient place to live where pets aren't allowed. But did you know that if you live in a federally subsidized housing community, it's against the law to discriminate against pet owners? The good news is that tolerance for pets in senior facilities is increasing, and all states now allow pets in nursing homes.



### Adopt a pet

There are several pet adoption agencies from which to choose. The Animal Protective League in Cleveland has many animals waiting for a good home. Call 216/771-4616 or visit their Web site at [www.theapl.org](http://www.theapl.org).



## Living with diabetes

### What seniors need to know

Medical advances have made diabetes easier than ever to live with, but it's still important for those diagnosed with the disease to become educated and take control of their monitoring and treatment, according to the American Diabetes Association. The association highly recommends self-monitoring for blood sugar levels in all diabetes patients, especially if you are:

- Taking insulin or diabetes pills
- On intensive insulin therapy
- Having a hard time controlling your blood sugar levels
- Experiencing severely low blood sugar levels or ketones from high blood sugar levels
- Recording low blood sugar levels without the usual warning signs

Home monitoring involves pricking your finger with a needle, called a lancet, to get a drop of blood. Some monitoring devices also allow you to use your forearm, thigh or fleshy part of your hand.

Before using the lancing device, wash your hands and the site for the pinprick with soap and water. If you

choose to prick your fingertip, use the side of your fingertip by your fingernail to avoid having sore spots on the frequently used part of your finger.

Under ideal circumstances, people with diabetes should have the disease under control through home monitoring and have access to quality diabetes care, including frequent monitoring by a knowledgeable health care team.

**For more information, call your local Cleveland Clinic Health System hospital or the Diabetes Association of Greater Cleveland at 216/591-0800 or visit [www.dagc.org](http://www.dagc.org).**

# Have a healthy heart

**S**omething as simple as eating breakfast every day actually can help your heart stay stronger and healthier, according to the National Institutes of Health. The outlook for longevity is improving every year thanks to medical science, but following the basics of good diet and exercise still can make a big difference. Here are a few heart-healthy tips to help you take a licking and keep on ticking:

- Eat breakfast every day.
- Select high-fiber foods such as whole grain breads and cereals, beans, vegetables and fruits.
- Have three servings of low-fat milk, yogurt or cheese a day. Dairy products are high in calcium and vitamin D and help keep your bones strong as you age. Or take a calcium and vitamin D supplement.

- Drink plenty of water. You may notice that you feel less thirsty as you get older, but your body still needs the same amount of water.

- Ask your health care provider for ways to safely increase your current amount of physical activity.

- Make physical activity a part of your everyday life. For example, take short walks throughout your day. You do not have to have a formal physical activity program to improve your health and stay active.

- Get enough sleep.
- Stay connected with family, friends and community.

## Help your heart

For more information on a healthy-heart diet plan, call your physician or local Cleveland Clinic Health System hospital.



## Big winner

Congratulations to Walter Moore. He was the winner of the \$100 Target gift certificate offered in our last issue. Thank you all for your terrific responses—we enjoyed hearing from you. Look for more chances to win big in our next issue.

## Butter or margarine?

Despite the problems with some kinds of margarine, we still recommend it over butter and here's why: Butter contains two cholesterol-raising ingredients: dietary cholesterol and saturated fat. Dietary cholesterol is found only in animal products. Saturated fats are solid at room temperature and also are found largely in red meat, as well as high-fat dairy products and coconut and palm oils.

By comparison, the controversy over margarine lies with its level of "trans fat," a largely man-made fat. Trans fats are formed when hydrogen is added to vegetable oils, making the oil more solid and less likely to spoil. However, trans fats have been shown to increase the "bad" LDL cholesterol, lower the "healthy" HDL cholesterol and make blood platelets stickier.

Still, a little margarine know-how will help you reduce the amount of trans fat you eat. The more solid a margarine stays at room temperature, the more trans fat it contains. So choose tub or liquid margarine, and look for products touted as "trans fat-free" or "zero trans fat." By switching the first ingredient from partially hydrogenated vegetable oil to water or liquid vegetable oil, some manufacturers have reduced the trans fat content to a much healthier level.

## Join the circle

Do you have friends interested in joining Senior Circle Plus? If so, please send them to our Web site, [www.seniorcircleplus.com](http://www.seniorcircleplus.com), to register online or have them call **866/937-2247** to receive an application in the mail.