What Pets Can Teach Us About Living Well

Humans may sit at the top of the evolutionary food chain, but that doesn't guarantee that we always make the best decisions in life. Sometimes, we can benefit by sitting back and observing how our pets approach daily living.

Pets don’t multitask. We like to think that we are quite adept at doing many tasks at once. However, the reality is that when our attention is divided, we can’t give any task the time that it might need for a job well-done. Our memory suffers (think about that as you’re “studying,” texting, and surfing the web) and we may take longer to get things done.

Americans are among the most productive individuals on the planet. Living in a 24/7 culture, we go, go, go nonstop. Even when we’re on vacation, we take work with us. It’s no wonder we’re tired all the time. We don’t see our pets doing this. Between short periods of intense activity, they nap. In the sun, in the shade, wherever there’s a cozy spot. We would be much healthier if we relaxed a little and took a quick snooze now and then.

We all know that walking is good for us. Why then, do we drive around the parking lot at the gym or mall for 30 minutes trying to get a spot by the door? Walking is the cheapest and easiest thing we can do for ourselves.

Another bad consequence of our busy lives is that we don’t always make time for relationships. Few animals thrive in a solitary lifestyle. To be our best, we also need to cultivate and nurture friend and family relationships.

When was the last time your dog worried about his 401K or your cat lamented causing you to fall 5 years ago? Never? That’s because our pets live in the moment and enjoy the here and now. While there are times when it’s appropriate for us to think about the future or past, we can’t forget about the present. The past is over, and we cannot change it. The future isn’t guaranteed to us.

Animals forgive (they probably also forget). Too many people hold onto grudges because they believe they are punishing the offender by doing so. In reality, you’re confining yourself to a self-made prison where the other person always has the upper hand. Forgiveness doesn’t mean that the other person is right. It means that you plan to live your life and to be happy in it.

Be curious. If we could remember to look at the world through the eyes of a young child, ordinary things would suddenly become extraordinary. We get so caught up in “important” stuff, that the really important stuff escapes our attention.

Get your silly on! Our pets aren’t worried about what other people think of them. We should be less so. Every now and then, we just need to do goofy stuff just because it’s good for us.

Drink more water when you’re thirsty. Animals don’t worry about frou-frou coffees or status drinks. When their bodies say they’re thirsty, they drink what their bodies need—water.

Show some love! Our pets love us unconditionally. They won’t abandon us if we’ve had a bad day or messed up at school or work. Life is short, so love people while you can.
A Step-by-Step Guide to Prenatal Development

Whether you have just learned that you’re pregnant, or you’re planning to become pregnant, it’s important to remember that a lot is (or will be) happening to you and your baby during this time. Taking care of your personal health and making good lifestyle choices will benefit both of you. The journey from conception to birth takes about 40 weeks. During this time, eating well, getting enough rest and exercise, and meeting with your family doctor or OB-GYN can help ensure that your pregnancy and delivery are as healthy as possible.

Your body is designed to provide a lot of protection for the baby during pregnancy, but there are environmental things called teratogens that can be very harmful if the baby is exposed to them. Things such as radiation exposure, chemicals, and toxins in the air and water are obvious risks to the baby. However, even more common things such as over-the-counter medicines, prescription medicines, and alcohol, nicotine and caffeine can have a seriously negative effect on fetal development. Ask your doctor before you become pregnant or as soon as you find out that you are about any medications that you take routinely.

Month 1: In the first month of pregnancy, your baby is a mass of rapidly dividing cells that must make its way down the fallopian tube so that it can safely implant in the endometrial lining of the uterus. This is a long, hard process for the zygote, and many simply cannot make the trip. Those that do are barely visible since they are smaller than a grain of rice.

Month 2: By the end of eight weeks, all those cells that were dividing rapidly in the first month have settled into place and are a tiny version of what they are destined to be (bones, lungs, fingers, etc.). You probably don’t have a baby bump yet, but you are probably feeling very tired. You may also feel morning sickness (which doesn’t only occur in the morning or necessarily let up during the pregnancy!). You should schedule your first prenatal appointment and discuss any chemicals or food additives to avoid.

Month 3: Week 12 marks the end of the first trimester, and the risk of miscarriage drops. You have probably gained between 2 and 5 pounds and are sporting a little bump now. Your baby is starting to look more like a person and more organs are getting ready to activate.

Month 4: Your baby is about 5 inches long now and weighs in at about 4 ounces. To accommodate the baby’s increased needs, your blood volume has increased. This results in the “pregnancy glow” that others may comment on, but may also result in varicose veins and a greater bleeding risk.

Month 5: At 20 weeks, you’re halfway through your pregnancy. Your baby is just as aware of you as you are of him or her. In fact, the baby’s hearing is developed, so talk and sing and read stories to your growing tummy. Those can later comfort your baby after birth. Expect to gain about 1/2 pound a week for the rest of your pregnancy.

Month 6: By 24 weeks, your baby weighs about a pound and is about a foot long (think about a hefty hotdog). This marks the beginning of viability which means that the baby most likely would survive if it had to be born early. Talk to your doctor if your breasts begin to leak or become sensitive. Your doctor will also probably recommend a glucose screening within a couple of weeks to test for gestational diabetes.

Month 7: At a whopping 2 pounds, your baby can now do a lot of things—blink, cough, suck a thumb or finger, and possibly dream! There is less room to move around, but the baby should start getting ready for birth by moving into a head-first position. Pay attention to periods of rest and activity. These patterns will be similar once the baby arrives. Now is the time to take a childbirth class if you haven’t already. Your visits to the doctor should also take place about every two weeks now.

Understanding what happens during pregnancy can help you make better choices for your and your baby’s well-being.

Take time to pamper yourself during your pregnancy.
Month 8: Your baby is no longer a little “bun in the oven.” At almost 4 pounds, your baby is making some of the final changes in its appearance before it makes its grand entrance. The baby’s movements may not seem as dramatic because there isn’t much room left. If you haven’t already discussed delivery options with your physician, do so now. If you elect to have a medicated delivery, you will have to have that scheduled prior to going to the hospital.

Month 9: You’re almost there. “Full-term” babies are born sometime between the 38th and 40th week. By now, you both are ready for this journey to end. You should see your doctor once a week now. The hormones that will signal that it’s time for birth make your ligaments loose and achy. Warm (not hot) baths can help with soreness.

Back pain is one of the most commonly cited reasons that Americans give for missing work. About 80% of us will report having back pain at some point in time, and back pain is one of the most common reasons why employees miss work. In fact, back pain ranks second as a reason for visiting the doctor only to upper respiratory infections.

One important strategy for relieving back pain is getting a good night’s sleep. For many, however, back pain interferes with their ability to sleep. Experts recommend finding a mattress that appropriately supports and cushions our body. They also suggest changing sleep positions so that our spines are better aligned and supported. Sleeping on one side with a pillow between the knees helps keep the spine in a neutral position and relieves back strain. If you must sleep on your back, place a pillow under your knees so that they are slightly flexed. This will also help relieve the strain on the back. It is also important to sleep on a comfortably firm mattress.

Posture is also key in preventing and relieving back pain. You should sit upright with your shoulders relaxed and your feet flat on the floor. If you sit for extended periods of time at work, you might ask your supervisor to have your work space evaluated to insure that the space fits you ergonomically. Sometimes, simple adjustments in how your body fits your space can make a difference in how your back feels. If you suffer chronic pain, it may also be worthwhile for you to have your living space evaluated.

Physical therapy can be a helpful tool for back pain sufferers, especially if the pain resulted from an injury. Therapists can evaluate the nature of the injury or restrictions caused by the pain and teach stretching and exercises, as well as other techniques to help relieve the pain and heal the injury.

Hands-on therapies can also be helpful. These include massage, which some studies have shown to improve pain and functioning if performed once a week for about 10 to 12 weeks. The other approach is spinal manipulation, a technique in which the spine is gently manipulated and realigned to help improve function and mobility.

It is no longer recommended that people stay in bed in response to back pain. It is important for you to get up and move around as much as you can tolerate to hasten the recovery process. Using an over-the-counter or prescription pain reliever in conjunction with heat and/or ice therapy can help you relax so that you can move more easily. Being as active as you can tolerate will help maintain your flexibility and comfort level.

After months of waiting, the last few weeks and days can seem to take forever. The reward at the end of your wait is more than worth it.
Spinach Frittata

1 teaspoon olive oil
1 garlic clove, minced
3 cups baby spinach leaves
3 whole eggs, plus 4 egg whites
3/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/2 yellow onion, chopped
1/4 cup minced red bell pepper
2 waxy red or white potatoes, about 3/4 pound, peeled and shredded
2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil
1/4 cup shredded part-skim mozzarella or provolone cheese

Preheat the broiler. Position the rack 4 inches from the heat source.

In a large, nonstick frying pan with a flameproof handle, heat 1/2 teaspoon of the olive oil over medium heat. Add the garlic and sauté until softened, about a minute. Stir in the spinach and cook until it wilts, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer to a bowl. Set the frying pan aside.

In a bowl, whisk together the whole eggs and egg whites. Stir in 1/4 teaspoon of the salt and pepper. Set aside.

Return the frying pan to medium heat and heat the remaining 1/2 teaspoon of olive oil. Add the onion and sauté until soft and translucent, about 4 minutes. Stir in the remaining 1/2 teaspoon of salt, the bell pepper, and the potatoes, and cook until the potatoes begin to brown but are still tender-crisp, 4 to 5 minutes.

Spread the potatoes in an even layer in the pan. Spread the spinach evenly over the potatoes. Sprinkle with the basil. Pour in the beaten eggs and sprinkle evenly with the cheese. Cook until slightly set, about 2 to 3 minutes.

Carefully place the pan under the broiler and broil until the frittata is brown and puffy and completely set, about 3 minutes. Gently slide onto a warmed serving platter and cut into wedges. Serve immediately.

176 calories
6 grams total fat
163 milligrams cholesterol
611 milligrams sodium
16 grams total carbohydrates
2 grams dietary fiber
12 grams protein