

## **Pets and Your Heart**



**Dr. Alexis Hill's passion for horses has enabled her to experience some of the health benefits of animals firsthand.**

Pets not only provide loyal companionship, but may also support a healthy heart.

"Studies have shown that interacting with animals can encourage physical activity, decrease blood pressure and reduce stress," said Alexis Hill, D.O., internal medicine physician affiliated with Salem Regional Medical Center (SRMC) and SRMC Primary Care-Lisbon. "All of these things may help lower a person's risk of developing chronic illnesses, such as heart disease."

Outside of practicing medicine, Dr. Hill's passion for horses has enabled her to experience some of the health benefits of animals firsthand.

"Horses have always been a big part of my life," she explained. "I grew up showing horses and competing in events, and today enjoy riding my quarter horse, Macy, on a regular basis. Caring for horses has helped keep me active and bring a sense of balance and calmness."

### **Pets can help improve heart health by:**

#### **Increasing Movement**

Activities like playing with a pet or walking a dog add more movement into the day, which can help with maintaining a healthy weight and improve overall health.

#### **Lowering Blood Pressure**

Animals are known to have a calming effect, and research shows that owning a pet can help lower heart rates and blood pressure levels.

#### **Reducing Stress**

Pets provide companionship and support, which can decrease stress. Seeing, touching, hearing or talking to an animal also helps the body release hormones associated with relaxation, while lowering levels of stress hormones.

#### **Helping Heart Patients Recover**

Evidence suggests that some heart attack survivors with pets may recover faster and live longer than non-pet owners with the same heart problems.

“While not everyone is able to or wants to have a pet, simply observing an animal, such as through bird watching, can provide relaxation and help reduce feelings of anxiety and depression,” Dr. Hill added.

*Alexis Hill, D.O., Internal Medicine, sees patients ages 18 and older at SRMC Primary Care – Lisbon, located at 38506 Saltwell Road in Lisbon. Appointments with Dr. Hill can be scheduled by calling 330- 424-1404. She is affiliated with Salem Regional Medical Center’s medical staff.*