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# CANINE HEALING GUIDANCE

By Marybeth Haines

## How your dog can help you relieve stress and find clarity

**A**s humans living in a fast-paced society, we are inundated with deadlines, societal pressures, financial stresses and much, much more. We tend to overthink things because we are so unfocused on what we truly desire. Stress easily overtakes us and we become overwhelmed. Does this ring a bell for you?

Each day, before I start my work, I take a few minutes to strategise and prioritise what I need to do that day. By doing this, my work is done more efficiently and with less stress. Essentially, I create a roadmap that I follow for that day. Without my roadmap, I tend to become lost easily, especially when under stress. I'm grateful to be living a busy lifestyle with a business that is booming; however, I need to be on my toes all the time. I am unable to be there for those I serve if I cannot be present with myself. On one particular day, I had my roadmap of what I needed to have done for that day but because of the magnitude of tasks, I found myself frozen. My feelings overwhelmed me and

I knew I needed to make a choice. I could choose to stay paralysed or choose to take action. I chose to take action.

### TAKING ACTION

We sometimes spend so much time thinking about where we are stuck that we miss out on taking any kind of action. Not only that, when we begin to overthink, we tend to worry about other's expectations of us. It is when we can release ourselves from that moment of worry, leave our minds and drop into our bodies that we can find clarity.

On this particularly stressful day, I decided to close my eyes and take a few deep meditative breaths. To my surprise, when I opened my eyes, I saw my dog Nemo staring at me. I immediately smiled and started petting him and felt relief. My breathing slowed down and I felt... better! I got down on the floor and connected with Nemo, who at the time seemed to know just what I needed. I told him that I was going to be okay and that I was just a little scattered, and

he listened! He didn't interrupt me or give me advice and was 100 per cent present in the moment. Do you know what he did? He gifted to me exactly what I needed!

Immediately I knew what my next article of writing was going to be. I wanted to talk about how dogs give us such incredible emotional support, and share with others my story of how that dark day turned sunny after I opened my eyes to see him staring at me with his head tilted, as if to figure me out. I wanted to share a deeper meaning of how dogs can calm us, help us heal and find balance and clarity in times of stress. Dogs give us emotional support that sometimes we are not even aware of!

### THROUGH THE EYES OF A DOG

Seeing the world through the eyes of a dog and living vicariously through your dog even for a moment can help you find balance in stressful times. Now of course you know that your dog doesn't understand your deadlines for work or politics. They can't comprehend a lot of things that





**Dogs give us unconditional love and that is a gift!**



complicate the lives of humans, and just knowing that is reassuring.

#### **4 WAYS YOUR DOG CAN HELP REDUCE STRESS**

**1. Touching/petting your dog** – Studies show that when a baby is born, if they are not touched or given love, they can't survive. Have you ever wondered why children who are autistic gravitate to dogs? Dogs are therapeutic and often people who don't demonstrate a lot of affection towards other people will enjoy petting our canine friends. Social interaction with dogs is calming and they love the attention. It's like it came in their "job description" of helping us humans! No wonder daycares, hospitals and homes for the elderly bring service and therapy dogs into their facilities to help folks heal and relax.

The next time you need a break from feelings of anxiety or stress, go to your dog and really focus on his or her reaction when you pet them in their favourite places, whether it be under their chin or behind their ears. When your dog's tail is wagging, there is a mutual understanding and connection that you feel grateful for.

Your breathing slows down and you relax. The next time you are stressed, see how your dog reacts to you when you greet them. Just by being with your dog in close proximity is healthy. Feel the comfort of your dog. Energy between you and your dog is exchanged and can result in an overall feeling of well-being.

**2. Play** – We play as kids and need to remind ourselves to play as adults too! With a dog as your companion, you are constantly watching play occur with the other dogs around your own dog or with the people with whom you visit. Take a favourite toy and watch what your dog does! Have you ever been pres-

ent to fully witness this? How amazing! Playing with your dog can raise serotonin and dopamine in human beings.

When we were young, my brother used to take the long pool strainer outside and lunge our dog, Piper. Yes, he would turn in a circle and Piper would try to catch the strainer as my brother rotated around and around. We called this the pool strainer game.

Then there was our friend's dog who could differentiate between the blue toy and the red ball. When we'd come over for a visit, the ball and toy would be brought out by Lucky the Jack Russell. On command, Lucky would bring either toy as a game and this could go on for hours if we had the time! He LOVED playing this game with us.

Dogs have their own individual personalities and I've learned that dogs can show a range of emotions too. Have you seen a dog who looks like he/she is laughing? I believe that joy is a real emotion that dogs can feel when playing with you and that is contagious!

**3. The simple act of taking your dog for a walk** – Taking your dog for a walk is an obligatory part of pet ownership, and as anyone who owns a dog knows, it can often feel exactly like that: an obligation. However, it is much better to look at the walks you take with your dog as an opportunity for mutual benefits, and the exercise you get is beneficial for both physical and mental health. Study after study has shown the many benefits of light to moderate exercise for brain function, and walking, especially at a brisk pace, can reduce stress. By the time you get home from your walk, you feel better. Dog walks are therapeutic.

Look at life from a dog's perspec-

tive and you may see how your breathing slows down and how you are engaged. Dog walking is a great tool for destressing. Next time you walk your dog, quietly observe their mannerisms and how they interact with their surroundings.

**4. Caregiving** – Dogs have a high degree of social intelligence and they can pick up on emotions of their caregivers. More than any other animal, dogs have evolved to become acutely attuned to human beings. They are able to understand many of our words; however, they're even better at understanding our tone of voice and language of our body. They can gauge your mood too!

Have you time and time again been helped by your dog, who seems to give you just what you need in times of stress? Does your dog come up to you when you are sad and interact with you as if to say in their own way that they are there for you?

#### **UNCONDITIONAL LOVE**

Our dogs do so much for us. When we care for them, we feel needed – and we are! Dogs give us unconditional love and that is a gift. You may feel like it's time to brush your dog or give them a massage on their legs that have run so hard that day. Watch as they close their eyes and feel your love and care. Touch and movement are important to humans in reducing stress and being healthy.

Children can learn empathy through caregiving for a pet. By giving your dog care and love you are helping yourself to be calm and be soothed, which leads you away from the fight or flight feelings of stress and anxiety.



**AN EXERCISE TO HELP FIND CLARITY WHEN STRESSED**

Our dogs live moment by moment. Here are four easy steps to bring you back into the moment.

**Breathe** – Now is the time to just notice your breathing. How do you do this, you ask? Let’s take it step by step –

1. Take a few seconds, close your eyes and notice your breath. Pay attention to notice how it feels as the air moves in and out of your lungs. Does your chest expand as your lungs fill with air, or do you notice that your stomach moves in and out with each breath? Remember: there is no right or wrong way here – the intention is to just be a witness to your breathing.
2. **Allow** – On your next breath and as you exhale, open your eyes. Relax your eyes while allowing your gaze to view and just look ahead of you. You may find that


- your vision becomes unfocused and things may appear blurred. This is okay.
3. **Refocus** – Begin to refocus your eyes and allow your gaze to come back into focus and look around again at your same surroundings. Do you notice anything different? Perhaps you see more clarity to your vision of what you would normally see? Do things look the same, or do they appear just a bit different?
4. **Realign** – Close your eyes again and go back to noticing your breath. As a witness, sense how you are breathing now. What do you notice? Is your breathing more calm and relaxed? Bring your awareness to your breathing and continue to breathe slowly in and out.

This exercise is to help you take the attention away from your stressful thoughts and bring you into the moment. Dogs live in the moment

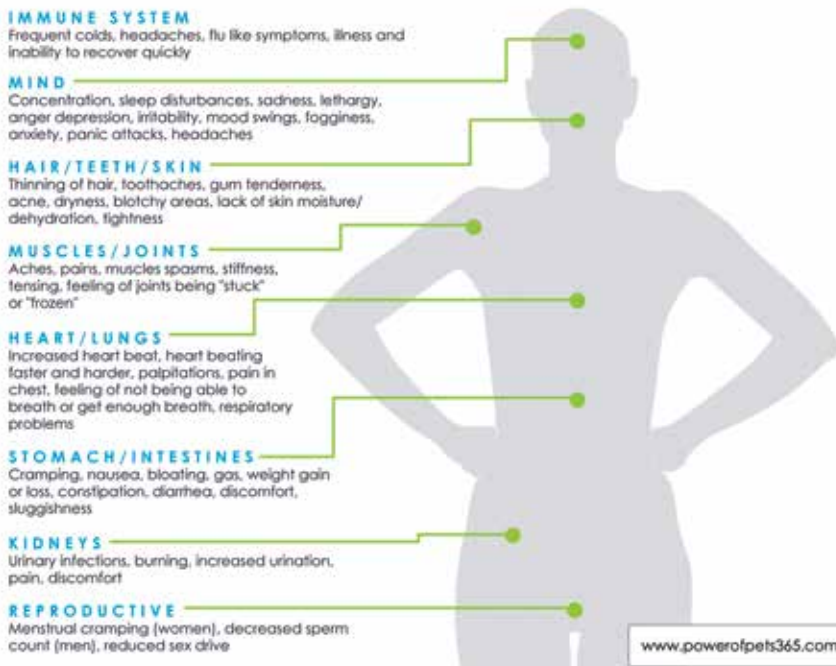
and we can learn from them in our own human way. When you bring your attention to your breathing, you are no longer inside your thoughts; you are free of them... even if for a few seconds. You can then become present and in the moment and from this point you have full access to your own needs, your own truth and your true desires.

**LIVE, LOVE, BARK**

Next time you find yourself needing clarity, focus and support from stress, give this exercise a go! We can learn a lot from dogs about being in the moment! Pet your dog and scratch them under their chin; play, go outside for strolls, let them run or sniff and imagine looking through their eyes and from their perspective.

Don’t be surprised if you lose track of what you were stressed about all along. The work can wait. It’s time for you and your canine friend to see what is behind that next tree! 

**HOW STRESS FROM GRIEVING CAN AFFECT THE BODY**



*About the writer: Marybeth Haines empowers people to make choices that promote action, personal growth and healing. She is an author, speaker, consultant and grief specialist from Ontario, Canada. She is a wife, sister, daughter and a mother to her furry children with tails and whiskers.*

*Marybeth is the author of "The Power of Pets – 7 Effective Tools To Heal From Pet Loss" and "From Empty To Empowered – A Journey To Healing From Unexpected Pet Loss". In 2012, she founded the "I Believe In The Power of Pets" movement. Her focus is teaching proven step-by-step strategies in reinforcing the bond and connection between pets and people.*

*Her books are available on Amazon.com or via her website. For a limited time, Marybeth is giving away FREE copies of her book at: [www.authormarybethhaines.com](http://www.authormarybethhaines.com). There is no obligation or anything to buy when receiving this book. All that is required is a request and your book will be electronically delivered to you right away.*