

7 Reasons to Sleep with Your Dog Tonight

If your dog already shares your bed, it may not come as a surprise to learn that dogs can improve sleep quality and benefit health in many ways. But you may not expect the stunning results of a survey of 962 women who compared sleeping with a dog to sleeping with a human bed partner.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Being close to your dog increases production of the hormone oxytocin, the “love hormone,” which is linked to bonding and feelings of affection and happiness
- Women who slept with a dog in their bed had stronger feelings of comfort and security than those who slept with a human bed partner
- Dogs, and particularly service dogs, have been found to diminish the effects of nightmares in PTSD patients
- If you’re looking for a way to strengthen the bond between you and your dog, snuggling up together at bedtime may help
- Co-sleeping with a dog may help with relaxation and anxiety among people with chronic pain

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If your dog shares a permanent place in your bed, you probably don’t need to read about the benefits to be convinced that it’s a good idea. But the fact is, some studies have hinted at the idea that sleeping with your dog could interfere with your sleep if he shares the bed, as opposed to simply sleeping in your bedroom on a bed of his own.¹

There’s no denying that dogs can snore, hog the covers, wake you up by **barking** or seriously invade the space on your side of the bed. But that’s not looking at the whole picture, because sleeping with your dog, if she’s a good sleeping buddy, can impart benefits as well.

Reasons Why Sleeping with Your Dog Is Good for You

- **It promotes the release of oxytocin** — Being close to your dog increases production of the hormone oxytocin, the “love hormone,” which is linked to bonding and feelings of affection and happiness,² while lowering your heart rate.³ Oxytocin may also help promote sleep, leading to a better night’s rest.⁴
- **It increases feelings of comfort and security** — In a study published in Mayo Clinic Proceedings,⁵ many of those surveyed said they felt secure, content and relaxed when their pet slept nearby. A survey of 962 adult women also revealed that women who slept with a dog in their bed had stronger feelings of comfort and security than those who slept with a human bed partner.⁶

Further, 41% of pet owners perceived their pets as unobtrusive or even **beneficial to sleep**.⁷ Study author Dr.

Lois Krahn, a sleep medicine specialist at the Center for Sleep Medicine at the Mayo Clinic, said, "To have a purring cat or a well-behaved dog nearby may be very relaxing and conducive to sleep. Provided everyone sleeps well, it can be a benefit."⁸

- **It's good for sleep efficiency** — In a study using fitness trackers to accurately gauge sleeping time for dogs and humans sharing a bedroom,⁹ sleep efficiency, which is a measure of how much time is actually spent sleeping while in bed, was high — 81% for owners and 85% for dogs. A sleep efficiency score of 80% or higher is considered to be indicative of a good night's rest.
- **It reduces nightmares in PTSD** — Up to 70% of people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) suffer from nightmares. Dogs, and particularly service dogs, have been found to diminish the effects of nightmares in PTSD patients, as they immediately awaken the person and also provide comfort. According to the journal *Sleep Review*:¹⁰

"Dogs are also used to mitigate anxiety, which is often associated with insomnia, and to modify hyperarousal and hypervigilance, which in turn creates a more amenable mood state for sleep initiation, as well as a greater sense of safety in those who are uneasy in the dark and/or night and who tend to phase-reverse to dodge nighttime sleep."

While a service animal may be necessary to combat nightmares in PTSD, even a family dog may provide comfort to a child who has trouble sleeping due to nightmares.

"[D]uring an awakening, both the child and the pet remain together in the room and the pet can continue providing a sense of safety and protection against any lingering wake/sleep transitional monsters/threats that might have been perceived to come back into the waking world with them," *Sleep Review* reported.¹¹

- **It may help with chronic pain** — Among people with chronic pain who often have trouble staying asleep, dogs helped with relaxation and anxiety, ultimately enhancing patients' sleep in one study.¹²
- **It's good for your heart** — In 2013, the American Heart Association released a scientific statement relaying that pet ownership, and dog ownership in particular, is "probably associated with decreased CVD [cardiovascular disease] risk" and "may have some causal role in reducing CVD risk."¹³

Interacting with your dog is also associated with a 3.34-mmHg decrease in systolic blood pressure, which in turn lowers your heart disease risk.¹⁴

- **It increases bonding** — If you're looking for a way to strengthen the bond between you and your dog, snuggling up together at bedtime may be just what the doctor ordered. Dr. Ken Tudor shared his experience when sharing his bed with "a herd of cats and dogs every night":¹⁵

"The results were extraordinary. The bonding with our pets was so formative that they were easily trained without any expertise on our part. Potty training was never an issue because they let us know immediately that it was time to go outside. They simply responded positively to every command with little reward."

Is Co-Sleeping with Your Dog Right for You?

While most pet owners can safely and enjoyably share their beds with their dogs, there are a few instances where it may be better to sleep separately. If you have **allergies** to your pet, it's likely better to avoid having his dander infiltrate your bedsheets. Very young infants should also avoid sleeping with pets, who could accidentally suffocate a

baby.

People with a compromised immune system may also want to sleep sans pets, as there's some risk of disease transmission. If you're healthy, however, and you enjoy cuddling up with your canine at nighttime, it's perfectly safe to do so — and know you're far from alone. Surveys suggest that 56% of dog owners sleep with their dog next to them, with about 50% of the dogs sleeping in their owner's bed.¹⁶

Sources and References

^{1, 9} [Mayo Clinic Proceedings September 2017, Volume 92, Issue 9, Pages 1368-1372](#)

² [Psychology Today September 14, 2017](#)

³ [Anthrozoos April 28, 2015](#)

⁴ [Regulatory Peptides 2003 DOI:10.1016/s0167-0115\(03\)00118-6](#)

^{5, 7} [Mayo Clinic Proceedings December 2015](#)

⁶ [Anthrozoos 2018, Volume 31, Issue 6](#)

⁸ [Time September 11, 2017](#)

^{10, 11} [Sleep Review June 22, 2015](#)

¹² [Soc. Sci. 2018, 7\(9\), 157 \(Archived\)](#)

¹³ [Circulation June 10, 2013](#)

¹⁴ [The Columbus Dispatch February 28, 2016 \(Archived\)](#)

¹⁵ [PetMD December 22, 2015](#)

¹⁶ [CDC, Zoonoses in the Bedroom January 26, 2011](#)
