

Shelter dogs that rest more during the day may show signs of improved welfare

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From left to right Emma, Milly and Ellie. Credit: Sara Kassabian

Shelter dogs that rest more during the day may show signs of improved

welfare, according to a study published October 12, 2016 in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* by Sara Owczarczak-Garstecka and Oliver Burman of the University of Lincoln and the University of Liverpool, UK.

More than 130,000 dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*) enter UK animal shelters every year. Understanding indicators of their welfare status, including [sleep patterns](#), could help shelters identify dogs with compromised welfare. One hypothesis suggests less well-adjusted shelter dogs sleep poorly and rest less during the day. The authors of the present study tested this hypothesis by monitoring 15 shelter dogs over 5 non-consecutive days to record sleep patterns and activity levels as well as any behaviors, including repetitive pacing and panting, that may indicate compromised welfare. The researchers also tested how positively the dogs responded in a food reward test.

The authors found that dogs that spent more time resting during the day displayed more behavioral signs of well-being, and performed better on the positivity test. However, the researchers suggest there may be a ceiling effect on how long dogs are able to sleep during the day.

Whilst the study used a very small sample of dogs, the scientists posit that dogs that can sleep more during the day may be better adjusted to their environment. Additional research could further assess the utility of sleep as a measure of shelter dog welfare, but the authors recommend that setting aside quiet time during daytime hours for dogs to rest may be beneficial.

"The data suggest that greater resting behavior during the daytime is a clearer indicator of good welfare in [shelter dogs](#) than a greater proportion of sleep during the night," says Owczarczak-Garstecka.

More information: Owczarczak-Garstecka SC, Burman OHP (2016)

Can Sleep and Resting Behaviours Be Used as Indicators of Welfare in Shelter Dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*)? *PLoS ONE* 11(10): e0163620.
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