**Will You Be My Furry Valentine?**

Happy Valentine’s Day! This is your friend Shelby with Antrim Veterinary Hospital. We all love our pets and we hope our pets love us but do we know how to let them know we love them?

Do you make eye contact with your dog? A study found that a dog whose owner spends 30 minutes with their dog including eye contact has a 300% increase in their oxytocin levels. Oxytocin is known as the “love hormone.” Even without eye contact just spending 10 minutes with your dog the oxytocin levels increase by 57% and after 30 minutes by 130%. Therefore, you don’t need to be staring lovingly into your dog’s eyes to show them how you feel, you just need to spend time with them. Try cuddling on the couch or even reading to them. Buy them a new toy and have a play date or buy a new collar and take them for a walk. Remember when making eye contact to make it soft, not intimidating.

It’s no secret that a lot of our feline friends don’t like to snuggle as much as their canine counterparts do. However, after 10 minutes of play your cat’s oxytocin levels increase by 12%. One study even suggests that cats prefer interactions with their humans over eating! When your cat touches their forehead against you (head bunting) their body is releasing endorphins which make them feel happy. When they look at you show them you love them back by making eye contact with a soft, slow, blink.

The very best Valentine’s Day gifts we can give our pets are our time and affection. Give them regular exercise, feed them a good quality diet on a schedule, brush them regularly, and take them for regular veterinary visits to ensure they are in good health. Also, make sure your pet’s identification tags are up to date or have them microchipped so they can be brought back to their loving home if they become too adventurous.