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Does salivary cortisol relate to expected and perceived effects of contact with dogs in healthy participants?

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Background: Human-animal interaction seems promising as a non-pharmacological adjuvant across different treatment settings. Yet, although some studies have demonstrated positive physiological and psychological effects of such interaction, e.g. interacting with a dog, little is known about the underlying mechanisms and the potential contribution of contextual, non-specific factors. **Methods**: Using a randomized within-subjects design, fifty healthy participants were exposed to different levels of contact with a dog: 1) visual, 2) visual and tactile, 3) visual, tactile, and interaction, and 4) a no-dog control. Saliva samples to detect cortisol levels were collected before and after each test situation along with participant ratings of their expected and perceived physiological and psychological effects on visual analogue scales. **Results:** Results will be presented at the 3rd International Conference of the Society for Interdisciplinary Placebo Studies (SIPS) in Baltimore, May 2021. **Conclusion (preliminary):** The study is expected to elaborate our understanding of whether contact with a dog affects cortisol levels in healthy participants and whether this interacts with their perceived effects as well as core elements in placebo effects such as positive expectations towards the effect.

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