

# Purina Cat Chow Brings the Healing Power of Cats to College Campuses Across the Country

## *"Therapod" Tour to Visit Students in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles as Part of the Cat Chow Cats as Therapy Project*

ST. LOUIS, April 29, 2026 /[PRNewswire](#)/ -- With nearly half of Americans reporting higher stress levels this year than last<sup>1</sup> and 83% of Gen Z describing an unhealthy relationship with their phone,<sup>2</sup> [Purina Cat Chow](#) is bringing back an evidence-based, screen-free solution directly to students who need it most. This May, Cat Chow is launching a three-city college tour of its Therapod: a mobile, phone-free experience offering participants a moment of calm through connection with certified therapy cats from leading animal therapy organization [Pet Partners](#).

Kicking off during finals week in the spring in NYC, the tour continues at the start of a new school year in the fall in Chicago and culminates during midterms week ahead of World Mental Health Day in October in Los Angeles. After debuting in New York in 2025, the Cat Chow Therapod tour in 2026 is timed to support students across the country at some of their most stressful moments.

"Cats can be very sensitive to our emotional states, and their natural social behavior is a great fit for improving our mood," said Dr. Annie Valuska, Purina animal behaviorist. "A cat quietly resting nearby, seeking gentle physical contact or purring can help us slow down and reset. The Therapod brings that special experience directly to students – many of whom are miles from home and the pets they love."

### **The Mental Health Benefits of Cats**

Research shows that just 10 minutes with a cat can measurably reduce cortisol, the hormone associated with stress.<sup>3</sup> For college students navigating finals, new semesters, and life away from home, time with a therapy cat can make a meaningful difference. Pet Partners, whose certified cat therapy teams will be on-site at each stop, sees the initiative as a meaningful response to the mental health challenges students face every day.

"College students today are navigating a complex mix of academic demands, social pressures, and the near-constant stimulation of a digital world," said Taylor Chastain Griffin, PhD, National Director of AAI Advancement at Pet Partners and a trained mental health professional. "We're seeing a clear need for support strategies that are both accessible and grounded in evidence-informed practices. The Cat Chow Therapod offers students a brief but meaningful opportunity to step away, regulate their stress response, and engage in a calming interaction with a therapy cat—an experience that can support emotional well-being in a simple, approachable way."

Students can visit the Cat Chow Therapod at the following locations:

- **New York City, May 6–7.** 10am – 4pm ET by the New York University College of Arts & Science entrance, adjacent to Washington Square Park
- **Chicago, September 16–17.** At DePaul University by The Quad
- **Los Angeles, October 6–7.** At UCLA's Wilson Plaza, adjacent to Bruin Walk and the UCLA Store; then at Westwood Village near the main UCLA Campus

### **Additional Resources for Cat Owners and Animal Therapy Advocates**

The Cat Chow Therapod is the centerpiece of the brand's broader Cats as Therapy (CAT) Project,

launched in 2025 to promote mental well-being through the healing power of cats. Through the CAT Project, Cat Chow hopes to showcase the mental health benefits of cats and, ultimately, help more people experience them.

Those who can't visit the Cat Chow Therapod in person can explore the therapeutic benefits of feline companionship through HAPPi, a free enrichment program from Purina, at [catchow.com/CATproject](https://catchow.com/CATproject). HAPPi offers pet owners daily tips and activities that support the human-animal bond and encourage overall wellness.

For more information on Cat Chow or the Cats as Therapy Project, visit [CatChow.com/CATProject](https://CatChow.com/CATProject).

### **About Nestlé Purina PetCare**

Nestlé Purina PetCare creates richer lives for pets and the people who love them. Founded in 1894, Purina has helped dogs and cats live longer, healthier lives by offering scientifically based nutritional innovations. Purina manufactures some of the world's most trusted and popular pet care products, including Dog Chow, Purina ONE, Pro Plan, Friskies and Tidy Cats.

Our more than 11,000 U.S. associates take pride in our trusted pet food, treat and litter brands that feed 46 million dogs and 68 million cats every year. Nearly 500 Purina scientists, veterinarians, and pet care experts ensure our commitment to unsurpassed quality and nutrition.

Over the past five years, Purina has contributed more than \$150 million towards organizations that bring, and keep, people and pets together, as well as those that help our communities and environment thrive. Purina is part of Nestlé, a global leader in Nutrition, Health and Wellness.

For more information, visit [purina.com](https://purina.com) or subscribe [here](#) to get the latest Purina news.

### **About Pet Partners**

Pet Partners is the national leader in demonstrating and promoting the health and wellness benefits of animal-assisted therapy, activities, and education. Since the organization's inception in 1977, the science proving these benefits has become indisputable. With thousands of registered teams making millions of visits annually, Pet Partners serves as the nation's most diverse and respected nonprofit registering handlers of multiple species as volunteer teams. Pet Partners teams visit with patients in recovery, people with intellectual disabilities, seniors living with Alzheimer's, students, veterans with PTSD, people who have experienced crisis events, and those approaching end of life, with the goal of improving human health and well-being through the human-animal bond. With the release of its Standards of Practice for Animal-Assisted Interventions and international expansion, Pet Partners is globally recognized as the industry gold standard. For more information on Pet Partners, visit [www.petpartners.org](https://www.petpartners.org).

### **Sources**

<sup>1</sup> Allianz Life Insurance Company of North America. (2025, December 16). Nearly half of Americans more stressed heading into 2026, Allianz Life study finds. Allianz Life Newsroom.

<https://www.allianzlife.com/about/newsroom/2025-Press-Releases/Nearly-Half-of-Americans-More-Stressed-Heading-into-2026>

<sup>2</sup> BePresent. (2024, July 12). BePresent 2024 Digital Wellness Report. Fitt Insider.

<https://insider.fitt.co/press-release/bepresent-2024-digital-wellness-report/>

<sup>3</sup> Pendry, P., & Vandagriff, J. L. (2019). Animal visitation program (AVP) reduces cortisol levels of university students: A randomized controlled trial. *AERA Open*, 5(2), 1–12.

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