

The Benefits of Therapy Animals for Seniors

Anyone who has ever stroked a dog's soft ears or felt the gentle rumble of a cat's purr knows the calming feeling an animal can offer. A pet companion presents many health benefits to their owners, like lower cholesterol levels and can even prevent heart attack and stroke. They can also help fight depression.

For these reasons, more and more often animals are being utilized for therapeutic purposes at senior facilities. Therapy animals are used to promote health and healing for seniors of any age range or health condition, whether they are depressed, chronically ill or have ongoing disabilities.

Pet therapy for seniors, also known as Animal Assisted Therapy, is a technique that uses animals to interact with seniors for numerous reasons to help improve their quality of life. Studies show that just fifteen minutes spent bonding with an animal promotes hormonal changes within the brain. Stress levels drop as the brain produces serotonin (the "feel-good" hormone), along with prolactin and oxytocin. This is why therapy animals are good companions for seniors, because they offer so many amazing health benefits.

Pet Therapy for Seniors

Some assisted living facilities are offering pet therapy because of the numerous benefits interaction with animals offer to seniors. American Senior Communities are among such facilities.

Seniors suffer from depression usually as a result of loneliness or isolation, either because friends and family members cannot visit on a regular basis, or they aren't as active as they previously were. Perhaps a loving spouse has passed away. Contact with therapy animals can bring some withdrawn seniors out of their shells, making them happier and more communicative.

Studies show that seniors who are active and always around others, or who own a pet decline in health far less rapidly than isolated or depressed seniors.

Physical, Emotional and Psychological Benefits of Pet Therapy for Seniors

- Seniors with heart conditions who own pets tend to outlive those who don't.
- Walking a dog provides much-needed physical exercise, which leads to improved mobility and a healthier lifestyle overall.
- The ability to have something to pet or touch can result in lower blood pressure, normal heart rate and reduced stress.
- Pets provide emotional stability during stressful situations, helping to reduce anxiety and depression.
- Caring for a pet helps increase a senior's self-confidence and self-esteem, providing them a way to feel useful and responsible for something.
- For dementia patients, animals can be soothing to those who have difficulty using language.
- Feeding and grooming can help increase seniors' physical skills and help them become more active.
- Animals can help improve socialization- they listen without judgment and give unbiased affection, especially when a senior may desire to share the thoughts they may not be comfortable telling family or friends.

Having an animal in a senior's life can help improve their well-being and give new meaning to their life. Due to the numerous health benefits therapy animals provide, many assisted living facilities are starting to include pet therapy in their regular senior care programs. Being around animals makes people feel better, healthier, and happier.

For more information about American Senior Communities, please visit www.ASCSeniorCare.com.