

# Health Benefits of Pet Ownership

“When pet love comes to seniors, everybody’s tail wags.”

If a dog is man’s and woman’s best friend, then that same cute canine is certainly a senior’s very best friend. For as a recent newspaper headline stated, “When pet love comes to seniors, everybody’s tail wags.”

Pet owners know the many joys of pet ownership firsthand. They have a greeter waiting by the door when they get home, a friend to walk with around the neighborhood, and a special someone to snuggle with while watching a movie on the couch. For seniors, this can be particularly beneficial as getting older can be very lonely. Loved ones and friends move or pass away, and it becomes increasingly difficult to leave the house and participate in once-loved activities. But pets provide a source of comfort and companionship and can have an astounding effect on symptoms of depression and feelings of loneliness.

Studies have shown that there are physical health benefits of interacting with animals, too. The bond between people and their pets can increase fitness, lower stress and bring happiness to their owners. Other health benefits of having a pet include decreased blood pressure, decreased cholesterol and triglyceride levels, and increased opportunities for socialization. Plus, feeding, walking, grooming and playing with a pet can provide a sense of purpose and help keep the mind sharp.

While the advantages of pet ownership are undeniable, it is important that older adults select the right pet for themselves as animals come with

responsibilities and obligations. When selecting a pet, consider such factors as:

- What age pet would be best? A puppy or kitten may not be ideal for elderly owners because of the intensive care and training they require.
- What temperament would be a good fit? Different breeds have different characteristics and interact with their owners in different ways.
- Do you have any disabilities or functional limitations that need to be taken into account?
- Are finances an issue? Pets can be a significant financial commitment when you consider food, medical care, toys and grooming.

As for where to adopt a pet, seniors can turn to breeders or shelters (which are usually much less expensive and come with the added benefits of giving an unwanted animal a home). Shelter employees often know each animal’s personality well and can assist in making a good match. Online pet shopping is also possible, thanks to sites like [petfinder.com](https://www.petfinder.com), which allows potential owners to search for their perfect pet in a massive database composed of approximately 250,000 adoptable animals from nearly 11,000 animal and rescue groups nationwide. However, it’s still recommended to meet a potential pet in person to more accurately gauge the fit.

In short, there are many physical and emotional health benefits to investing in a pet. That’s why senior pet ownership continues to be encouraged in many well-respected publications and medical journals. The key is finding the perfect match—just as you would in finding that perfect friend.



