

Seniors With Animals As Pets (S.W.A.P.)

Everyday pets bring love, laughter, and companionship to elderly people all over the world. Doctors, social workers, home care workers and nursing homes recommend companion animals to help the elderly lead happy, healthy lives and give them independence and hope.



Birds, cats, dogs, and other pets help to keep seniors active and give them a chance to nurture and receive love in return for caring for a pet.

Pet ownership for the elderly has both advantages and disadvantages. If you are a senior who would like to have a companion pet, or if you know a senior and are thinking of giving them a companion pet, there's a few things you should consider.

Advantages of Companion Pets

Companionship

Pets are great companions for elderly people who live alone and have little contact with family and friends. Pets give them a different outlook and bring laughter and love into their lives. They make seniors feel needed and keep them active seeing to the pet's daily care.

Acceptance

Pets accept their elder owners as they are. They are devoted, forgiving, and loving. They don't hold grudges, bring up the past or stop interacting with their owners because of a difference of opinion.

Touch

Research has proven that touch is very important to the well being of humans. We all need to be hugged and be able to hug in return. A cat curled up in the lap of a senior or the friendly touch of a dog's nose will help the elderly feel safe and secure and gives them a sense of reassurance and satisfaction. Stoking a beloved pet can lower blood pressure and lift depression.

Keeping Active

There's nothing that can bring laughter into the life of a senior like animal antics. Seniors keep active by feeding, grooming and caring for their pets. Dogs get the elderly out of their living quarters and into the fresh air and sunshine. While out walking, they meet other people who they can converse with. Caring for pets keep seniors active both mentally and physically.



Responsibility

By caring for a pet's needs, such as feeding, grooming, and walking, animals give seniors the incentive to maintain their own hygiene. Pets give the elderly a sense of independence, boosts self esteem and motivates them to perform daily tasks that may otherwise be ignored, such as bathing, eating, and getting out of the house.

Safety and Security

Pets give the elderly a sense of security. Dogs alert them when someone comes to the door. Seniors feel safer answering the door when there is a dog present. Dogs can also alert seniors who are hard of hearing to a ringing telephone or the ringing of a doorbell.

Socialization

Dogs are an especially good choice for seniors who need socialization. They help seniors to meet their dogs get to know the people in the neighborhood. Dogs break the ice and encourage friendly conversation between seniors who might otherwise feel they have nothing in common. Seniors who have a pet are more likely to maintain good mental health and a pet provides them with stories to share with others.



Living for the Moment

Pets live for the moment. They cope with life's ups and downs and then forget about them. Pets help the elderly to keep focused on the present and keep them in touch with the small pleasures of life. Pets take time to stop and smell the roses every day. Seniors who have a companion pet tend to do the same. The innocence and trust of a companion pet help seniors to be less cynical toward life and to overcome feelings of isolation and rejection.

Staying in Touch with Nature



When people lived in rural areas and were still allowed to keep chickens, ducks and other animals in cities and towns, they were constantly in touch with the natural world. Today's society is largely urban and industrialized. Animals other than pets can only be found in petting farms and zoos. People have lost contact with nature which is always balm for the soul. Pets help seniors to stay in contact with nature and they fill voids that can otherwise lead to anxiety and depression.

Disadvantages of Companion Pets

Pet ownership is not for all seniors. Before a senior adopts a pet into their life, it is important to look at every aspect of how the animal will impact their life. Let's look at the disadvantages of pet ownership.

Costs

Many seniors live on a strict budget and have limited income. It will be very hard for them to incorporate food, grooming and veterinary bills into a budget that is already stretched to the limit. If you are a senior who lives on a scanty income, you may have to re-examine your desire to have a pet as a companion.

Limiting Mobility

If you enjoy traveling be sure to consider the fact that a pet needs constant care and attention. Will you be able to take your companion pet along on your trips? Can you afford to board him out or hire a pet sitter to care for him while you're traveling? Will having a companion pet limit your mobility? Ask yourself these questions and answer them honestly. You may have to re-evaluate the idea of bringing a companion pet into your life, depending on where your priorities lie.

Pet and Disease

Pets can carry disease. Though they are not usually transmitted to humans, elderly people who are frail or who have a weak immune system may be susceptible. Seniors who fall into these categories should discuss the possibility of adopting a companion pet with their doctor.

Death of a Companion Pet

Seniors consider companion pets as family members. If the pet dies, the senior can be overcome with grief in the same way they would be if it was a human companion. Seniors who are completely alone can be deeply affected by the loss of a companion pet. Some elderly pet owners decline rapidly after losing their pet. Each senior should assess whether they are willing to take the chance on losing a companion animal.

The Pet's Future

Some seniors prefer not to adopt a companion pet in case they become ill and cannot care for it at some point. It's possible to have an alternative care provider to decide for the pet's care in case of infirmity or death. Seniors should specify who their pet should go to in their Will. This will assure the pet's future is secure.

Be Sure

If you are a senior who is contemplating adopting a companion pet, take into consideration how it will affect your life. Will you be able to properly care for the animal financially and physically? Be honest and evaluate the pros and cons carefully. Never adopt a companion pet because a family member or friend encourages you to do so. You know your capabilities and desires and it's strictly your decision, no one else's. You are the only one who knows if a companion pet will be an asset or a liability. Make your decision, whatever it may be, and stand firm.



Simcoe and District Humane Society Can Help with....

- **Your decision to adopt a pet.**
- **Keeping your pet when you can't keep up.**
- **Your Pet's Future care**

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