

The Wellness Express™



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Depression and Pets

Presented by: Total Health Systems

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Introduction

Depression can affect a person's thoughts, behavior, feelings and sense of well being.¹ The condition can make people feel sad, anxious, empty, hopeless, worried, helpless, worthless, guilty, irritable or even loneliness can bring about depression. A person may lose interest in activities that once were pleasurable, experience loss of appetite or overeating, have problems concentrating, remembering details, or making decisions, and may contemplate, attempt, or commit suicide. Many physical problems may also occur, such as loss of energy, aches, pains, loss of sleep or digestive problems.²

A depressed mood is not always triggered by a psychiatric condition. It may also be a normal reaction to certain life events, a symptom of some medical conditions or a side effect of some drugs. It is also prevalent among the elderly who are sometimes isolated or have no support from family or friends and no one to interact with.



Benefits

Research has found that interacting with a pet can help people with depression, lower blood pressure and reduce stress. People who had become inactive due to depression and who opted to become a dog owner were found to have increased fitness levels and better sleep. "Pets offer unconditional love that can be very helpful to people with depression," says Ian Cook, MD, a psychiatrist and director of the Depression Research and Clinic Program at UCLA.

Many nursing homes throughout North America have pet visitation programs. Specially trained dogs, cats and even rabbits and guinea pigs are brought to nursing homes on a regular schedule for interaction with the residents. In some cases nursing homes have their own pets or aquariums on site so residents that are interested can participate in the care of them.

Is a Pet Right For You?

The responsibility and care of a pet is not for everyone and depends on the level of depression. Taking care of an animal can sometimes add more stress to a severely depressed person. There is also the question of affording a pet. Cost of food, supplies and veterinary needs for a cat or dog can cost as much as \$1,000 to \$1,500 per year on average. Also, some people who never had a pet as a child may not be comfortable



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with one later in life.

While not as affectionate or interactive as cats or dogs, a bird may provide enough “company” to bring a depressed person out of the worst of their condition and birds are usually less expensive to take care of. Some parrots for instance can be extremely affectionate and interactive. Even caring for a goldfish or two can be enough to change a person’s mood.

What If You Are Allergic to Pets?

Studies also show some beneficial results from electronic pets such as Sony’s Aibo and Omron’s NeCoRo; however, the therapeutic value of such artificial pets remains limited by the capabilities of technology. A recent solution to physical limitations of technology comes from GeriJoy in the form of virtual pets for seniors. Seniors

can interact with GeriJoy’s pets by petting them through the multitouch interface of standard consumer-grade tablets, and can even have intelligent conversations with the pets.

If you have a family member, or know of someone, with depression that you feel can be helped by pet ownership do not present them with a kitten or puppy without consulting them, their family or health care practitioner to find out if this is the best solution or the best time for the responsibility of a pet. Rather than bringing a person out of their shell it could possibly add to their problems.

If the prognosis is good then a pet could be just the right solution to help restore both mental and physical wellness to a person suffering from depression. People who have symptoms of depression should also have a chiropractic check-up as another step to their health and well-being.



Quote to Inspire

“Until one has loved an animal a part of one’s soul remains unawakened.”

Anatole France

References and Sources:

1. Salmans, Sandra (1997). *Depression: Questions You Have – Answers You Need*. People’s Medical Society. ISBN 978-1-882606-14-6.
2. "National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH) • Depression". *nimh.nih.gov*. Retrieved 15 October 2012.



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