

# SENIORS & PET THERAPY



## What is Pet Therapy?

***Pet therapy is an interaction between a person and a trained animal, alongside the animal's handler, with the goal of helping that person cope with or recover from a health issue or mental challenge. Pet therapy is a broad term that encompasses Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) and Animal-Assisted Activities (AAA).***

AAT typically entails concrete treatment goals using an animal and its handler, in conjunction with work done by a licensed psychotherapist, social worker, or other mental health care provider. AAA generally involves interactions where the animal and its handler visit with one or more people for comfort or recreation. Both have value and tend to revolve around the same benefits to the patient.

Dogs and cats are most commonly used in pet therapy. However, fish, guinea pigs, horses, and other animals can also be used. The type of animal chosen depends on the therapeutic goals of a person's treatment plan, the location where the therapy will take place, and the type of support needed.

With the early successes, more grant money has been applied in recent years to studying and quantifying the benefits of pet therapy, including being used in situations such as child development, therapy, public health, autism mediation, and disease reduction or prevention.



*"Dogs have a way of finding the people who need them, filling an emptiness we don't even know we have."*

– Thom Jones  
American writer



## Benefits of Pet Therapy

The most well-known benefits of pet therapy are:

- Lowers anxiety and helps people relax
- Provides comfort and reduces loneliness
- Increases mental stimulation
- Lowers blood pressure and improves cardiovascular health
- Diminishes overall physical pain
- Makes exercise and physical therapies more enjoyable
- Enables a greater use of language and social interaction in patients with dementia or autism
- Assists in recall of memories in patients with head injuries or chronic diseases such as Alzheimer's disease

Sources: [Alliance of Therapy Dogs](#), [National Center for Biotechnology Information](#), [NPR](#)

## Requirements for Pet Therapists

Animal-assisted therapy often serves in conjunction with work done by a licensed psychotherapist, social worker, or other mental healthcare provider.

For the most part, not just any animal can be used for pet therapy. The first step in pet therapy is the selection of a suitable animal. Before an animal and its handler can participate in pet therapy, the team usually must fulfill certain requirements. This process typically includes:

- a physical examination of the animal to confirm it's healthy
- an obedience training course
- an instructional course for the trainer
- an evaluation of the animal's temperament and behavior
- a certification from the sponsoring organization

Source: [Healthline](#)



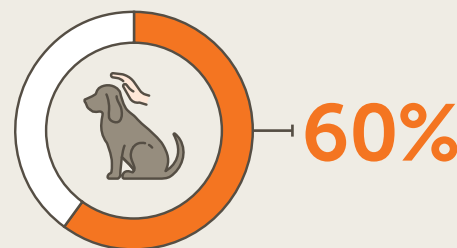
## Who Could Benefit from Pet Therapy?

**Pet therapy can significantly reduce pain, anxiety, depression, and fatigue in people with a range of health problems, including:**

- People with dementia
- People in long-term care facilities
- People receiving cancer or invasive treatments
- People with cardiovascular diseases
- Children or adults having dental procedures
- Veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder

Source: [Mayo Clinic](#)

***And it's not only people with health problems who reap the benefits. Family members, friends and even staff who sit in on animal visits say they feel better, too.***



A recent report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the National Health Center for Health Statistics shows that nearly 60% of hospice care providers that provide alternative therapies offer pet therapy to patients.

Source: [Alliance of Therapy Dogs](#)