

# Tips for Caregivers: Deciding if Pet Therapy is Right for Your Loved One

## Benefits of Pet Therapy -

Pet therapy has been shown to create a sense of well-being in the elderly which improves social interaction, engagement, and even nutritional intake. Human-animal interactions improve depression and loneliness, reduce agitation and the need for medications, and improve vital signs. Research shows that interactions between humans and animals increases production of serotonin, prolactin, and oxytocin, the “good” hormones responsible for improving mood. Further, levels of the stress hormone, cortisol, are decreased.

These tips can help you decide if pet therapy is right for your loved one.

## Make the Decision Together

- Situations vary and people age differently. Full pet ownership may not be suitable for every situation, and the right pet should be paired with the right person.
- Consider fall risks and compromised immune systems.
- A decision to get a pet should not be forced on the elderly person.
- Full ownership of a pet may not be the answer. Requesting the services of a professional therapy pet may be a better choice.

## Are There Disabilities?

- In some cases, dogs may not be a good fit for someone with major physical limitations.
- Indoor pets that need less care, such as cats or birds may be a good choice.
- In the case of significant impairments, your loved one may be a candidate for a trained therapy pet/service animal to aid in functioning.

## The Right Kind of Pet

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## Financial Considerations

- Some pets are more expensive than others to maintain. Consider the costs involved for each kind of pet, not just for initial cost, but also ongoing care and maintenance.
- Adopting a pet from your local shelter may be an affordable choice. Shelter workers often have become very familiar with each animal's personality and can assist in making a good match.
- Some shelters offer discounts to seniors. For instance, The Idaho Humane Society offers a discount to people over the age of 60, through Pets for the Elderly. This discount is \$50 off adoption fees for dogs two years of age or older. Call (208) 342-3508 ext. 2274 for more information.

