

PET THERAPY



Multiple Sclerosis Society
of SA & NT

Many people believe that pets are important to a healthy lifestyle.

Pet therapy is a general term that covers owning a pet, animal assisted therapy and animal assisted activity. Owning a pet can reduce fear and stress, improve self esteem and responsibility and is the most accessible form of pet therapy.

Animal assisted therapy is the use of trained animals, usually dogs, to help in treatment and rehabilitation under professional supervision with a treatment plan.

Animal assisted activity is visits by pets to people in hospital or care facilities (such as nursing homes) that have a therapeutic outcome but there is no specified treatment plan.

Benefits of pet therapy

Research has shown that people who have an illness and have a pet live longer. Pet therapy can

- reduce stress levels
- reduce medical care needs
- make you feel safe
- boost your mood

- lower blood pressure
- improve fitness
- give unconditional love
- shift your focus beyond yourself and make you feel connected to the larger world.

Pets can be a source of stress to some people. They may worry who will take care of their pets when they die. In most cases, however, the need to take care of pets gives a reason for living and can prolong life.

Types of pets

It does not matter what the pet is to get some therapeutic benefit. It can be a dog, cat, bird or a fish. It is important that the animal is of interest to you. What matters is that the animal that you choose fits your temperament, interests and lifestyle otherwise it can be an additional source of stress. If you are choosing a pet to own, then be sure that you spend enough time with the future addition to your house before you decide.

Animal assisted therapy

Animal assisted therapy involves the design of a program with the use of an animal to achieve specific physical, social, cognitive and emotional goals. For example, a physical treatment goal can be to pick up a brush and brush a dog that eventually leads to the ability to fully groom a dog and attach a leash.

Animal assisted activity

Animal assisted activity usually describes services where trained animal, including dogs, cats, birds and rabbits visit people in hospitals or care facilities and give general benefit including social

interaction, making life more pleasant. The animal may belong to the person but is not housed with them, or it can belong to a staff member, volunteer or family member.

For more information about animal assisted activity and therapy, visit the website of The Delta Society of Australia, a non-profit organisation dedicated to the development of interaction between people and companion animals.

If you are interested in more information:

The Society has more information sheets included in the Healthy Living Series as well as a Managing MS and Symptoms series. Please see the website for more details.

References

MS International Federation MSIF

http://www.msif.org/en/resources/msif_resources/msif_publications/ms_in_focus/issue_5_healthy_living/index.html

The Delta Society

<http://www.deltasocietyaustralia.com.au/home>

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