# Pet Therapy for Anxiety

by EMILY JASON

## Can Owning a Pet Help Reduce Anxiety?

Often when we thing about health benefits from owning a pet, our first thought refers to guide dogs used by blind people. This is the most obvious and common benefit of owning a pet. However, a small percentage of people know that their pet can provide many therapeutic and health benefits.

### How Can Pet Therapy Help?

In most of the cases, people suffering from anxiety are ready to do everything they can to help cope with their problem. Whether it is medication, seeing a therapist, or seeking alternative methods, it doesn't matter as long as it provides the comfort that a person with anxiety is seeking. Unfortunately we often forget or tend not to notice that the solution of certain problems is really simple. There are numerous ways to deal with your anxiety issues but here we will focus on pet therapy – less known method for coping with anxiety, depression and stress.

### Benefits of Pet Therapy through Pet Ownership

**Owning a pet will help you meet new people!**

And this is not valid only for dog owners. Of course if you have a dog, your daily walks can help you meet new people with same interests. But the same can be valid for any kind of pet owners. Talking about your pet can be an interesting topic of conversation and can help you to establish new friendships. It is especially helpful for people who have difficulties when having to communicate with others, as it is a universal topic to begin a conversation. Talking with others about your pet can also help you to focus on more positive things in your life. You will notice that you rarely talk about your problems and worries (something that was your prior topic before) and talk more and more about the things that make you as happy as your pet.

**It will help you to make a new daily routine!**

Often people with anxiety spend most of their time worry about things that can happen or about the problems they have. Owning a pet requires you to pay much more attention on another living being and take care of it. This can distract you from your constant worrying about everything else and focus on more healthy habits. You will also have to make a new, more structured daily routine and think not only about yourself but also about your pet. You will have to be more organized and pay attention when you are feeding your pet, taking care of its hygiene and overall wellbeing. You will have to make a structured plan for your daily activities and conform them to your pet.

*Next page: benefits of pet therapy continued and potential pitfalls of owning a pet.*

### Benefits of Pet Therapy through Pet Ownership

**It will help you feel less lonely and much more loved!**

The greatest thing about pets (especially cats and dogs) is that you became the center of their lives and you will constantly feel their unconditional love. Your pet doesn't care if you have problems, what you look like, what your status is or how much you earn for living. Your pet will accept you no matter what and will give you in return its attention and unconditional love. Cats and dogs are a proven method to reduce stress and anxiety levels, making pet therapy extremely effective. After a long and exhausting day you can feel happier when your pet welcomes you at home.

**It can help you to increase your physical health!**

Having anxiety issues is related not only to your mental but also to your physical health. Often people who suffer from anxiety and/or depression are feeling extremely weak or they suffer from particular vitamin deficiency. This can be treated easily with long walks or some physical exercises. Unfortunately people with anxiety find it difficult to find motivation to do this. Having a pet can help you with that. Often people are not motivated to go outside if they have to do it for themselves but if you have to do it for your pet it looks easier. Having a dog requires daily walks outside, if you have a cat you will have daily activities like cleaning after her, feeding her and, the most important, playing with her.

**Potential Pitfalls of Owning a Pet**

No matter what you try as a therapeutic method for your anxiety, you will have to do research to learn all of the pros and cons. Owning a pet as a method of coping with anxiety has more benefits than negative features but you have to be careful. You have to carefully make your choice. Having a pet is a great responsibility and often people forget about that. When you make a decision to own a pet you have to know that you will have it for the rest of its life (which may be as long of a period as 10-15 years). You will have to be more organized and plan in advance. Even a simple travel for 2 days to your best friend can be tricky as you will have to think about your pet – whether you can take it with you or is there anyone who can take care of it when you are gone. As I said, owning a pet is a great responsibility and if you choose this as a way to deal with your anxiety you will have to be careful. Often people with anxiety who get a pet feel much more pressured from all the new responsibilities that they have. You should keep that in mind when making a decision to take care of a pet.