



Older Americans and Mature Pets



Pets can bring new meaning and purpose to the life of a senior who is living far away from friends or family. ©iStock.com

Pets can bring new meaning and purpose to the life of a senior who is living far away from friends or family. Having a pet in an elderly person's life can offer them a sense of well being, a sense of encouragement, and even a reason for living.

Being responsible for another life often gives new meaning to the lives of those who are living alone or far from loved ones. Caring for and providing a loving home to a companion animal also helps elderly people to remain active and stay healthy.

Improving Health

In addition to easing loneliness, pets may also make seniors healthier. Studies suggest that contact with animals can lower blood pressure. Research also indicates a link between pet ownership and an increased survival rate for cardiac patients. Other potential health benefits can include decreased stress, reduced bone loss, lowered cholesterol levels, and improved blood circulation.

What To Consider Before You Adopt

Although animals make great companions for people of any age, pets can have important benefits for seniors. But before adopting a new companion, seniors need to understand the amount of dedication that goes into caring for an animal. Seniors need to be sure they have the time and the means to care for a pet, both physically and financially.

It's also important to consider what kind of pet they want to adopt. Animal care professionals often advise seniors to consider adopting an adult dog or cat. An older animal may be a better fit for their lifestyle than a puppy or kitten who might not be housetrained. Older pets are often more easily physically managed by seniors than a stronger, more excitable younger animal.

Where To Go

As more people discover the benefits of animal companionship for older Americans, resources and programs have emerged to make finding and keeping a new pet much easier.

The first place to which seniors should turn is their local animal shelter. Adopting from a shelter has its advantages. Not only do they have a great selection of adult animals for adoption, but they also have purebred animals. In fact, on average, purebreds account for about 25 percent of a shelter's dog population.

If you have a specific breed in mind that's not available at your local shelter, breed placement groups (often referred to as "rescues") are also a reliable option.

Money Matters

Adopting from a shelter is not only a great way to help out a homeless animal, but it's also cost-effective. Adoption fees, which are extremely low compared with the cost of purchasing an animal from a pet store or breeder, typically include vaccinations as well as spay or neuter procedures.

Another advantage of shelters is that many of them offer senior programs. Check with your local shelter to see if it has a seniors program. If not, shelters can still offer a wealth of information and support to new pet owners.

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