

Seniors and Pets: The Transforming “Power of Paws”



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Over the course of our lives, it is likely there will be moments when we are “fed up to here” with family members, co-workers, even friends – basically, anything that resembles a human being.

It is less likely that we’re anything less than enamored with our pets (although the occasional in-home “accident” or wandering episode might cause an anxious moment or two).

Yes, we love our animal friends, and they love us back, unconditionally and with a fervor that cannot consistently be matched by any human being. While our hearts are warmed when we see a youngster lovingly interact with his or her first puppy or kitten, there’s also a special, indescribable feeling when we see how senior citizens and their pets relate to one

another. *Oxygen to the soul* is the only way I can describe watching this simple, yet wonderful interaction.

So, it is not surprising to learn that pet ownership among seniors can boost physical and emotional health. According to a 1990 study conducted at UCLA, and a later study by Alan Beck, director of Purdue University’s Center of Animal-Human Bond, pet ownership “can act as a health enhancer for seniors by improving morale, encouraging independence and providing stress relief.”

More to the point, Dr. Edward Creagan of the Mayo Clinic Medical School says, “*If pet ownership was a medication, it would be patented tomorrow.*”

Besides offering companionship to seniors, some pets also provide necessary functions (especially to the blind) and can even be trained to fetch essential items for their owners. But there’s little question that the emotional bonds formed between seniors and their pets is the best argument for pairing older folks with an animal.

“Power of Paws,” an initiative of Del Monte Foods, is an organization that takes things one step further, encouraging senior citizens to adopt older pets who may not have a loving home. True, older pets don’t live nearly as long as puppies, but an older pet’s diminished energy level may be just the right speed for a senior who isn’t as quick on his or her feet either. Love and companionship are pretty age blind. The result: Seniors enjoy an improved quality of life, and so do the animals. A win-win, for sure.

Keeping the promise,



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