

Pet Therapy

A dog with a happily wagging tail greets us at the door; a warm, furry cat jumps into our lap for a snuggle; a cockatiel makes us laugh as it learns to whistle a familiar tune that we have recently taught it. These are experiences that many of us may enjoy as pet owners and value on a regular basis. Indeed, research has demonstrated many emotional and medical benefits of regularly interacting with pets including lower blood pressure, lower blood triglyceride levels, lower heart rate and even increased survival rates after a heart attack. For those experiencing cognitive challenges such as Alzheimer's disease, the effects can be even more pronounced.

Often, people with Alzheimer's disease, and related forms of dementia, experience challenges such as anxiety, depression, agitation, and surges of afternoon energy levels known as Sundowning. Also, the confusion caused by a dementia syndrome may cause individuals to begin searching for pets who may have been in their lives many years ago. Presenting these individuals with a visiting pet has been shown repeatedly to relieve, at least temporarily, the difficulties mentioned above. Additionally, those who have begun to isolate themselves or to become mute as part of their disease process, have been known to increase their socialization and verbalizations when pets are regularly brought into their environment. Even physical therapy efforts may become more effective when pets are used to motivate someone needing increased walking or range of motion exercises.

Realizing the multitude of benefits associated with animal interactions for those experiencing memory challenges, long term care providers have begun scheduling pet therapy as a regular service offering for their residents. Dogs, cats, guinea pigs, rabbits, birds, chinchillas, and even horses are regular visitors to many long term care venues, including specialized care settings for those living with dementia. Watching the residents blossom in their interactions with the pets is all the evidence that is needed to convince the care providers to continue with these efforts.

The specialized memory care at our Legacy Neighborhoods and Legacy Lanes is provided to those living with the challenges of Alzheimer's disease and related forms of dementia. Pets are a welcome addition to any day on this memory care neighborhood and are a regular part of the dynamic Daily Rhythms activity program. For more information about the services offered at The Legacy, please contact your local Trilogy Health Campus.