The Benefits of Having a Pet

by SARAH BORIEN

The Benefits of a Pet When Suffering from Fibromyalgia

I was never allowed a pet when I was young. Both my parents are allergic to cats and dogs, so my childhood goldfish named Dragon was as close as I got to a friendly companion.

Now that I'm a grown up, I have two cats. I was looking for independent animals that could take care of themselves and wouldn't need too much looking after, and I seem to have ended up with the two neediest cats in the world. They're more like dogs or small children, so desperate for love and attention!

But, for all their whining and demands, there are so many benefits of having a pet – especially if you suffer from a chronic illness like Fibromyalgia.

Conversation Starter

Firstly, everyone likes to talk about pets. Even if you hate them, you'll still be able to talk about them! This is particularly good for Fibromyalgia sufferers because, for one thing, it stops us talking about our pain. It keeps us focused on other things going on in our lives, often finding humour and entertainment in the retelling of stories about our pets.

It's also a good way of making new friends, which can be particularly helpful if you don't work and spend a lot of time on your own. Dog walkers often start conversations with each other whilst out and about, and taking your dog to puppy school (or something similar) can widen your social circle.

Unusual pets out and about are also great conversation starters – walking your cat, rabbit or ferret on a lead is bound to encourage other people to talk to you!
[NB: I'm not suggesting you get a pet, just because it's a conversation starter! It's purely an added benefit.]

Keep you Fit

Not all pets keep you fit, but dogs are great at forcing you to leave the house for some gentle exercise. If you live near big open spaces then it's even better – your dog can run around whilst you have a gentle wander.

To a certain degree cats and pets that stay in the house can also keep you fit. Cleaning out rabbit hutches or litter trays requires a certain amount of energy which can be difficult for Fibro sufferers, but it's a good way of keeping you busy and giving you a small amount of exercise.

Happiness and Love

Having a pet is an easy way to feel guaranteed, unconditional love and comfort. When you're in pain and feeling low, curling up with a fluffy friend can be a great way to calm you down and remind you of the good things in life.

Plus, I’m sure my cats can tell when I don’t feel well. I lie down with a hot water bottle and my cats calmly curl up next to me, and I’m sure they know I’m in need of a cuddle. Animals are wonderful companions and a great way of keeping your spirits up.

A Sense of Purpose

It’s very easy to become reluctant to get out and about when you suffer from chronic pain – particularly if you’re experiencing a flare up. However, having a pet can give you a sense of purpose and routine. You have to get out of bed to feet your cat, you have to go out to walk your dog, you have to get up and clean your rabbit hutch. When you have a pet, you have responsibilities and these can be a great way of ensuring you don’t get stuck in a rut.

What benefits do you get from your pets?