How Can Pet Therapy Help With Fibromyalgia?

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A Look at Pet Therapy and Fibromyalgia

Pet therapy has grown into an acceptable form of treatment for many diagnoses. It helps to reduce stress and anxiety in patients who have Alzheimer's disease, depression, and other conditions. It can also be beneficial for patients with fibromyalgia.

There is no quick fix for fibromyalgia — no medication, procedure, or other intervention exists to make every symptom go away. This is a condition that encompasses an array of symptoms that seem unrelated, and requires many therapeutic approaches to address the problems it causes.

Patients with fibromyalgia often turn to complementary and alternative therapies to enhance the traditional interventions of the medical establishment. Many of these include massage, chiropractic treatment, spiritual healing, yoga, meditation and supplements.

The Benefits of Pet Therapy

Animal-assisted therapy is a complementary approach that many fibromyalgia patients are turning to. With the right pet, this therapy can provide many stress-relieving benefits. Studies have shown that reduced stress boosts the body's healing ability and alleviates pain.

Research has proven that spending time with a friendly dog can produce profound physical and biological changes:

- Heart rate and blood pressure decreases
- Breathing rate slows down
- Stress hormones, like cortisol, are reduced
- The body's natural pain killers, endorphins, increase
- The immune system is boosted

Another study measured the impact of a brief visit from a dog to fibromyalgia patients spending time in a waiting room. During a 10 – 15 minute period, some patients were given animal pet therapy while others weren't.

The measures of the subsequent questionnaire included stress level, calmness, fatigue and cheerfulness as well as pain level. Pain severity was reported as significantly less from those who had a visit with the dog, while slightly longer visits showed an even greater improvement. The group without animal therapy reported worse symptoms than before the waiting period.

The study proved that pet therapy can certainly boost spirits and, in turn, reduce pain response.

Pet Therapy for You

You can benefit from pet therapy if there is a local pet therapist nearby or if you have friends who don't mind letting you "borrow" their pets.

You could also adopt a pet of your own, however if you decide to adopt an animal make sure it is mild-mannered and obedient. You will want to check out the humane society for an older pet, as a younger one may be too energetic to offer any stress-relieving benefit. Of course, you will have to be sure you can financially take care of a pet — food, vet bills and vaccinations are extra costs that go along with having a furry companion.

If you can find the right pet, whether through adoption or therapy, you will find that your overall health will benefit and your fibromyalgia symptoms will lessen in response.