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Cancer can be ruff—therapy dogs may help

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Cancer can be ruff—therapy dogs may help

Dogs are often called “man’s best friend” for a good reason—just being around them may instantly help to make your day brighter. With a lick and a snuggle, therapy dogs may also be able to provide certain benefits to you or your loved ones who are living with cancer.

Pet therapy, sometimes referred to as animal-assisted therapy, has become more popular in recent years. From playing with children in hospitals to visiting people

living with cancer, it’s been shown that these furry, friendly visitors may provide important health benefits.

What are therapy dogs?

Therapy dogs are specially trained animals who visit with adults and children in the hospital to help them feel better both emotionally and physically. Most of these dogs live at home with their owners and make routine visits to cancer facilities.

There’s plenty of love to go around—visits usually last an hour or 2, and in that time, the dogs can connect with a variety of people within the treatment center. They typically stay with each person for about 15 or 20 minutes. Therapy dogs can go to individual rooms, treatment areas like chemotherapy suites, and lounges or group areas.

The emotional and physical benefits of therapy dogs

Living with cancer and going through treatments can be stressful. Spending time with a therapy dog has been shown to help lower blood pressure and stress levels. It can also boost levels of feel-good hormones (endorphins), which can help ease pain and discomfort.

Benefits of pet therapy can include:

• Decreased pain levels

• Improvements with anxiety and depression

• Less fatigue

• Improved mood

• Help fighting loneliness and social isolation

• Restoring a sense of emotional connection

In a recent study, researchers discovered that when cancer patients spent time with a therapy dog during chemotherapy and radiation treatment, their emotional well-being and quality of life showed measurable improvement. In another study examining animal-assisted activities (AAA) on hospital patients going through chemotherapy, symptoms of depression were shown to improve by as much as 50%

in the group that interacted with the animals.

Therapy dogs can also help with physical therapy. Did you know petting a dog can help improve your sensory and fine motor skills? It may even help you get out of bed. Walking or playing games with a dog can also help your balance and coordination.

How to arrange a visit

Many therapy dog organizations across America offer visits. Most offer services locally, but some will bring a dog to wherever you are. Some therapy dogs make regularly scheduled visits to facilities once or twice a week. If you are looking for a way to add pet therapy to your cancer treatment plan, start by discussing it with your healthcare provider or hospital liaison at your local cancer treatment center.

Types of support that animals can offer

Dogs and other animals can provide companionship and emotional support in other ways besides pet therapy. Whether you pass by a neighbor with a dog on your daily walk or are thinking of adopting your own, click through the images below to find out how animals can help bring joy to your life.

Article slides

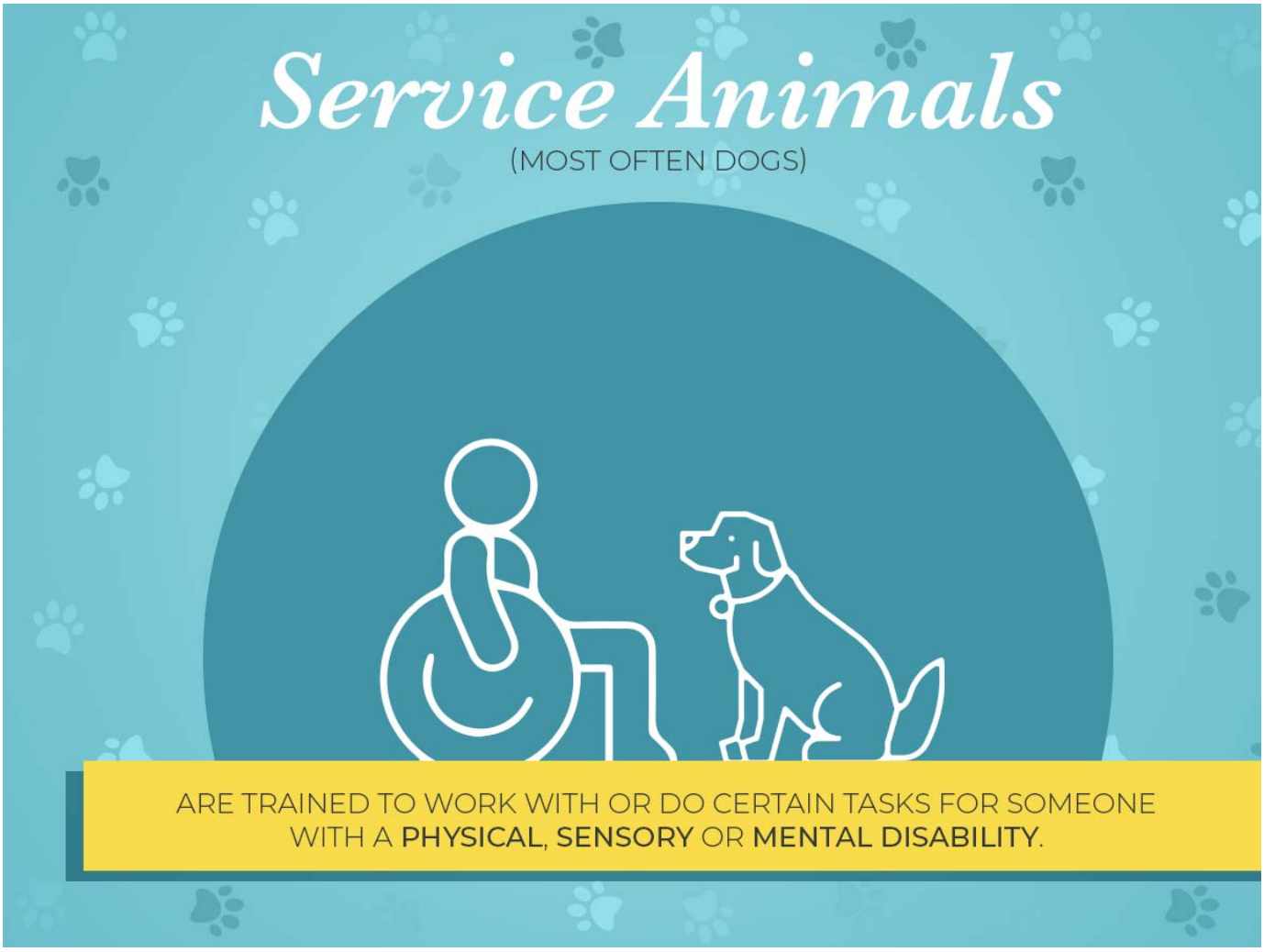
TYPES OF SUPPORT **ANIMALS** CAN OFFER



Therapy dogs visit with adults and children in the hospital to help them feel better, both **emotionally** and **physically**.


Pets and companion animals
CAN PROVIDE COMPANY, COMFORT AND SUPPORT ANYTIME.
SEE IF A FRIEND OR NEIGHBOR HAS ONE!


Emotional support animals
CAN HELP WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS, SUCH AS
ANXIETY DISORDERS, MAJOR DEPRESSION OR PANIC ATTACKS.



Make sure to talk to your healthcare provider before spending time with any animal, especially if you have a weakened immune system. Your healthcare provider can also help you understand any risks before adopting or buying a dog, so you can make sure you're doing what's best for you and the dog.

Therapy dogs come in all different sizes and breeds. The most common ones include golden retrievers, poodles, dachshunds, pugs and Labradors. Some have calmer temperaments and will be happy to lie on the bed with you rather than play fetch. See if a visit from a therapy dog may fit into your treatment plan—you may even make a new furry friend!