

A DOG CAN HELP



The benefits of having a dog

Dogs are one of the most popular pets in the United States. And there are good reasons for that. Dogs are known for being loyal, loving, and protective. If you have depression, owning a dog can help in many ways. Studies have shown that compared with people who are not pet owners, people who own a dog or other pet:

- ✓ Are more active. Being active can help keep you at a healthy weight and help you stay healthy
- ✓ Feel less stressed
- ✓ Feel less lonely
- ✓ Feel better about themselves
- ✓ Are happier
- ✓ Are more outgoing

And experts have found another benefit of having a dog as a pet: owning a dog may be good for your heart. In fact, studies have shown a link between dog ownership and lower blood pressure.



Levels of support from dogs

In addition to the benefits of having a dog as a pet, dogs can help people who have depression or anxiety. Talk with your health care provider about which of these options might be best for you.



Emotional support animals (ESAs)	ESAs are dogs that are used for emotional support. They do not require any special training. ESAs can give you companionship and help you stay healthy. You might be able to have an ESA in your home even if you live in a place where dogs are not allowed.
Therapy dogs	Pet therapy is a growing field that uses pets to help patients with health problems. Therapy dogs are trained to work in hospitals, nursing homes, and other types of facilities. Two types of pet therapy are: • Animal-assisted therapy: dogs or other animals help people deal with medical problems • Animal-assisted activities: animals provide companionship and pleasure for residents of long-term-care facilities Pet therapy is used to help people with depression or another mental condition. It can also help reduce pain and anxiety in people having medical procedures.
Psychiatric service dogs (PSDs)	PSDs are trained to help people who have a mental impairment. These special dogs perform tasks that help their owners function in everyday life. That's why these dogs are allowed to enter buildings and businesses where pets and even therapy dogs are not allowed to go.

How a dog can help

There are plenty of ways you can include a dog in your care plan. If you don't have a dog and don't plan to get one, make plans with a friend who has a dog and enjoy the benefits together!

Here are some ideas:



Be active! You can take a dog for a walk, go running, or play catch. Just be sure to talk with your health care provider before you change your activity level.



Sign up for obedience training with a dog. It can create a stronger bond between you and the dog. You might end up with a new friend and a well-behaved dog!



Pet or cuddle a dog. This can be relaxing, and it can help you take your mind off things you're worried about.



Talk to a dog. You'll get the dog's full attention...without any judgment.



Teach a dog a new trick. Reaching a goal can give you a feeling of pride and help you feel better about yourself.



Make something for a dog. Having a project, like making something for a dog to eat or to wear, can give you a goal to work toward. It can also be exciting for you when you complete the project.



Take a dog to a park. A dog is a natural conversation starter, especially with other dog owners. Taking a dog to a park can help you meet people and be more social.



Do you already have a dog of your own?

YES: In Table 1 below, put a check next to each activity you'd like to try with your dog. Then write when you'd like to do the activity (examples: every morning, by the end of the week). You can also fill in some of your own ideas.

NO: In Table 2 below, put a check next to each thing you'd like to do. Then write when you'd like to do it (examples: every night, by the end of the week). You can also fill in some of your own ideas.

Bring this sheet to your next appointment. Talk with your health care provider about how these things can fit into your care plan.

Table 1: I have a dog

What I want to do	When I'd like to do it
Take my dog to a park	☐
Make something for my dog	☐
Teach my dog a new trick	☐

Table 2: I don't have a dog

What I want to do	When I'd like to do it
Ask a friend who has a dog if we can get together	☐
Do some research about volunteering at a local animal shelter	☐
Do some research about getting a dog of my own	☐
Do some research about ESAs	☐
Do some research about where therapy dogs visit in my town	☐
Do some research about PSDs	☐



Remember—a dog can be an important part of your care plan to help you feel like yourself, without the symptoms of depression. Talk with your health care provider about the best ways a dog might be able to help you.

For more information, visit or call:

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: www.asPCA.org or 1-888-666-2279

Pet Partners: www.petpartners.org or 1-425-679-5500

Therapy Dogs International: www.tdi-dog.org or 1-973-252-9800