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Why You Should Adopt a Senior Pet

By M. Kathleen Shaw DVM, Vermont Veterinary Medical Association

There are many benefits to adopting a senior pet, for both the pet and for you! A common worry of older pet owners is that their pets will outlive them, making them reluctant to adopt. Yet they yearn for the companionship of a dog or cat. There are many people of all ages who don't want the hassle of training a young energetic dog and worry about the trouble that young cats often get into. One solution is to adopt a senior pet: the benefits far outweigh any negatives and there are options for providing a home for the pet should the need arise. Research has proven, too, that owning a pet has incredible health benefits for humans.

Senior pets, especially dogs, are often passed over by potential adopters in favor of puppies and younger dogs. The advantage of adopting a senior dog is that they have known temperaments and are fully grown. Older dogs are more likely to be housebroken and have doggie manners. If their training is still a bit lacking, they have the physical and mental abilities to pick up skills fast, unlike puppies. Senior cats are not as likely to climb your curtains and destroy your plants. Your furniture and carpet will thank you.

Senior dogs and cats are just as loyal and loving as younger pets, and they would love to prove it. Dogs can be trained at any age: in fact, they can be easier to train because they are calmer and have a greater attention span than a puppy. Senior pets are instant companions, ready to go for a walk or be the snuggle buddy you need from the start.

What about the benefits for you? Research has proven that the bond between people and their pets can increase fitness, lower stress, and bring happiness to their owners. Health benefits include decreased blood pressure, decreased cholesterol and triglyceride levels, and decreased feelings of loneliness and opportunities for socialization. Loneliness can be an unwelcome companion as we age and can lead to depression and physical problems. A senior pet can mold their schedule and personality to you and give structure and purpose to daily life. And let's not forget the joy of purring or tail wagging every day when you wake up.

For those worried about the care of their pets when they pass, consider including the care of your pet in your estate planning. You can name a temporary guardian and provide funds for your pets' care. Talk to your friends and relatives- many are willing to adopt.

One of the great joys in life is living with and caring for a pet. The benefits are tremendous for you both. Remember that older dogs and cats need homes just as much as the young ones, and love has no age limit. Consider adopting an older pet and saving a life.

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The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA) is a professional organization of 380 veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine.