Are Pets Good for ADHD?

by KRISTI LAZZARI

Is Having a Pet a Good Choice for Those With ADHD?

I've been thinking about getting a cat. It's been 14 years since I last shared my home with the little balls of attitude and I miss them — and my daughter has been begging.

We had a dog for four years, but we had to find her another home (she needed a place with a fence, something I don't currently have). As she was riding away I swore I would never get another pet. It was too hard to let her go.

I have misgivings about letting another animal into our home (and hearts). My daughter was never the most responsible with the dog and I ended up doing most — okay, all — of the care.

When we brought her home the kid swore she was going to do everything for her, but that didn't last very long.

I'm not sure if that had anything to do with my daughter having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), or if it's just what happens to most 10 year olds when they get a pet. I didn't mind because the dog was excellent at taking care of my daughter during panic attacks.

I think a cat would help my daughter with her ADHD and anxiety, depression, and self-harm. I worry, though, that the ADHD will get in the way of actually taking care of the animal.

As an adult with ADHD, I have to consider the good and the bad that having a new pet will bring.

Are Pets Beneficial for Those With ADHD?

I've thought a lot about the pros of a pet, and I'm convinced there are many benefits:

- **Schedule** – having a pet, especially a dog, requires us to maintain a schedule for care. Scheduling and planning are often difficult for those with ADHD, but having someone depending on them forces us to stick to a plan.
- **Exercise** – a dog is an excellent way to burn off excess energy. Exercise and playing with a dog have positive effects on loneliness and depression. It's a great way for those with ADHD to get rid of pent-up energy and release endorphins.
- **Non-judgment**– those with ADHD can constantly feel judged for their words and actions. A pet never judges and offers unconditional love.
- **Self-esteem** – being needed builds self-esteem.
- **Focus** – pets have a meditative effect. Stroking the fur of an animal such as a dog, cat or guinea pig, or even watching fish swim, is calming.
- **Good listeners** – sometimes just talking your problems through out loud helps. Pets are more than happy to lend an ear.
- **Fun** – pets are fun!

Is a Pet Right for Your Family?

Only you can decide if a pet is a good fit with your family's lifestyle.

How much care are you willing to give? Is your schedule jam-packed with outside activities? What kind of animal would you most enjoy?

There can be drawbacks to having a pet that you must consider, as well:

- **Time** – do you have enough time to walk a dog? Would you be able to spend time playing and exercising them? Would a pet that requires less maintenance, such as a fish, be better for you?
- **Schedule** – just as having a schedule is a pro for having a pet, it can also be a con. Are you willing to take the necessary steps to stick to your pet's schedule for care?
- **Cost** – face it, having a pet can be expensive. There are food and vet bills, and all the other necessary items they will need. Think about the costs involved before deciding what type of pet you would like to have.
- **Commitment** – just like having a child, having a pet is a huge commitment. Are you at a place in your life that you can take on that commitment responsibly?

Pets Are Awesome

If you are ready to face the commitment of having a pet, I believe they can make a world of difference for those with ADHD. Pets are therapeutic and they can make us laugh. Just think how many people spend hours watching cat videos online!

If you know you aren't quite there yet in regards to your own ADHD treatment, hold off until you feel more in control of your symptoms. There is nothing wrong with that!

Pets can help ease many of our ADHD struggles. They offer comfort and companionship, and can challenge us to be our best selves.

I remember many days when I couldn't calm my mind and stroking the fur of my cats or the dog helped me to relax. Whenever I was having a bad day they were always waiting with cuddles.

I think I'll go check the shelters for that cat!