How Pets Can Help Those With COPD

by ERIC PATTERSON

Having a Pet With COPD

With the negative effect of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) on your breathing, energy levels, and life overall, you will find yourself spending less time outside and in your community. You may find you retreat to the safety, security, and sanctity of your home, and because of this, you will want to make your home as comfortable as possible.

There are many ways to improve your perceptions of your home: you can invest in a new TV with the latest streaming video service so you are never at a loss for entertainment. You can purchase the latest electronics like smartphones, tablets, and watches to ensure you are connected to the people you care about the most. You can even buy exercise equipment to maintain the physical activity your doctor has been discussing with you.

Another way to increase your comfort experiences some level of debate within the COPD community: pets. With about 30 percent of American households having a cat and about 40 percent having a dog, a pet is at least a consideration in your life.

Adding a four-legged friend into the home can be a source of high levels of pleasure, but can also be the basis for increased discomfort and stress on your body and emotions.

To make the best decision possible for your unique situation, you need the best information comprised of the pros and cons of pet ownership while managing your COPD.

The Cons

It makes good sense to begin with the cons of pet ownership because these may serve as distinct deal breakers in your decision. If a drawback is too significant or too likely, you must make the choice to avoid a pet.

Noteworthy obstacles include:

- **Allergies.** Pet dander is tiny bits of skin that flake off of many animals, and is a primary source of allergies for pet owners and others exposed to pets. Having strong allergies to pets might make having one too great of a risk, especially considering it could trigger your COPD.
- **Physical strain.** Are you a dog person more than a cat person? Do you prefer big dogs over little ones? This could serve as another con because larger breeds will require a different level of care than smaller ones. Your physical resources will be limited and caring for yourself must remain the priority. Having a pet that consumes too much time, effort, and energy will be a deal breaker.

The Pros

The drawbacks may be too much for you to consider a pet, but if you are willing to be flexible, a pet may be a

welcomed addition to your home. The benefits of having a pet with COPD are many. They include:

Companionship

Perhaps the primary reason people are interested in pets is for companionship. If you live by yourself, you may find some level of loneliness and isolation. A pet is a great solution to this as a pair of listening ears will be available 24 hours per day.

They may not provide much verbal reinforcement, but a wagging tail or cuddle on the couch can do a lot to ease the physical or psychological burdens of the day. Of course a pet is not meant to replace your human friends; rather, a pet can be a way to supplement some of the lost opportunities for socialization.

Structure

Humans and animals alike respond well to structure. The emotional impact of COPD can serve as a demotivating force that pushes you towards a behavioral rut.

It can be a challenge to stay optimistic while finding reasons to carry on with your self-care. A pet can be an asset because their needs may motivate you to build a schedule and routine.

Once this structure is established, you can incorporate your own needs: basing the times you take medications around your pets schedule can make it easier to remember your pills, and preparing healthy meals for yourself while you prepare them for your pet can improve your physical health.

Physical Activity

Another way to improve your physical health is through the increased physical activity your pet demands. If COPD severely limits you, you should focus on pets that require a lower amount of care for your status.

Getting a German shepherd that commands five-mile walks might not be a great fit, so a smaller dog that is happy with a trip around the block would be more appropriate. Even if your pet does not need walks, the extra movement throughout the home can boost your level of physical activity with COPD to stave off sluggishness.

Safety

Service dogs have expanded well beyond the guide dogs of the past. A service dog can be taught to perform a number of essential tasks for someone with COPD.

In this case, the dog would extend past the concept of a pet and towards a member of the treatment team. Fortunately, all of the benefits of having a pet will still be available, with added skills like:

- Reminding you to check oxygen levels
- Waking you up if breathing is poor during sleep
- Alerting others during an emergency
- Carrying your needed medications

Deciding to have a pet with COPD may not be a simple choice. It will certainly require some thoughtfulness and a commitment to experimentation, but the reasons to acquire a pet will outweigh the cons in many situations.

If you feel something has been missing in your life since your COPD diagnosis, a pet might fill that void.