

A pet can be a loyal companion as we get older, particularly if we live alone or do not have regular contact with friends and family.

Quite aside from the joy of having a cat or a dog, studies show that pets can have a beneficial effect on our health and wellbeing.

Recent studies found that owning a pet can improve our general health in less than a month with pet owners reporting fewer minor ailments such as headaches, coughs and colds. Simply stroking a pet or watching fish swim can help us to relax, thus reducing our heart rate and lowering blood pressure.

Other studies indicate that owning a pet can reduce cholesterol, reducing the risk of heart attack, and can help to lift depression, as well as reducing loneliness and isolation. For example walking a dog not only helps to keep us fit but also gives us more opportunity to meet new people while we're out and about.



The **Cinnamon Trust** is a national charity which helps elderly people with their pets.

You can register yourself and your pet with them and if you become ill and need hospital or nursing home care they offer a service whereby your pet may be fostered with one of their volunteers. They aim to preserve contact between the pet and its owner.

They also offer a dog walking service for housebound owners.

These services are free although they do ask that you contribute towards the feeding costs of your pet.

These services are delivered by volunteers so will depend on the number of volunteers available in the area but they do all that they can to help. Call them on 01736 757900

Vet's bills are a significant expense. It is therefore wise to take out pet insurance. These however, may not cover routine check-ups, vaccinations etc. Look on price comparison websites to get the policy that suits you, or ask your vet for advice.

If you receive Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit you may qualify for PDSA funded care at one of their surgeries. Call 0800 731 2502 to get details.

The local organisation **Extra Help** offers all sorts of domestic help including dog walking. Their charges are £10 per hour and they may be contacted on 07590 664 889