



# Care Partner Information

## *Tips for Providing Older Adult Care*

### Older Adults and Pets

Pets can be good for older adults. Pets can keep them company and help them feel less depressed or nervous. They can also help an older adult stay active. But, there are important things to think about if an older adult has a pet, or wants to get a pet.

#### **Is the older adult able to care for a pet?**

Pet care takes time and money. The pet needs food and fresh water every day. It may also need exercise, like a walk. It may need vaccines and other health care supplies. It is important to pick a pet that fits the person's abilities and living space. For example, a large dog or a puppy with a lot of energy may not be a good pet for someone who lives in a small apartment, uses a walker, or is at risk for falls. Some pets are easier to care for than others. If a cat or dog is not a good fit, think about a bird, fish or another pet.

#### **Good questions to ask about getting or keeping a pet.**

Who will care for the pet? The older adult, a family caregiver or someone else?

Does the older adult or their family caregiver have money to pay for pet care?

Does the kind of pet match the older adult's abilities?

Does the older adult live in an apartment or home that would be safe and comfortable for the pet? If renting a home or apartment, what types of pets are allowed? Is there an extra fee?

How does the pet get along with paid caregivers, first responders or others who help the older adult in the home?

Does the older adult travel or do they spend a lot of time away from the home? Can the pet go along? If not, who will care for the pet while the older adult is away?

Does the older adult need their own pet, or can they get the same joy by visiting the pets of friends or neighbors, or volunteering at an animal shelter?

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on older adult caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for older adults. Available in English and Spanish at [www.aging.arizona.edu](http://www.aging.arizona.edu)

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### Safety

It is also important to think about the safety of the older adult and the pet. The table below lists some ways to keep older adults and their pets safe.

Safety for older adults and pets
<b>Falls.</b> Pets can get under foot and cause a fall. Be careful when walking or moving near a pet. Dogs may pull on a leash without warning. Be aware of tripping on a leash. If the pet likes to pull on the leash, try a training class.
<b>Plan for emergencies.</b> Have a plan for who will take care of a pet in emergencies. Put a note on the fridge (next to other important papers such as living wills and medication lists) to tell first responders that there is a pet in the home. List the name and phone number for the person who has agreed to care for the pet in case of an emergency.
<b>Other pets and people.</b> Not all pets like other people or animals. Keep other people and pets safe by gently, but firmly warning others not to get too close. If the pet doesn't like strangers, put it on a leash or in another room when visitors stop by. Make sure to have proof that the pet is up to date on its required vaccinations.
<b>Weather and wild animals.</b> Hot weather can put pets at risk of overheating. Make sure pets have plenty of water and a place to cool down when the weather is hot. If the weather is very cold or wet, be sure the pet has a warm, dry and safe place to be. Also be sure that wild animals, such as coyotes, cannot get into fenced yards or other places where a pet is kept.

### Finding a new home for a pet

If an older adult is no longer able to provide good care for a pet, think about asking others to help. For example, a neighbor may be willing to walk a dog or clean a litter box. Sometimes this may help the older adult be able to keep the pet.

In some cases, the older adult may need to find the pet a new home. Giving up a pet may be hard. Try asking friends and family, neighborhood or church groups, or using social media to find someone who will adopt the pet. Check to see if the new owner would allow the older adult to visit the pet. Several animal breeds also have special rescue groups that have foster families who can take the pet until it is adopted. If no one can be found to adopt the pet, they can be taken to local humane societies, or animal shelters.

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