

## **The Benefits of Canine-Assisted Interventions**

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**Introduction:** Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) is a common form of therapy that involves a therapist, a client, and a therapy animal. AAT has the potential to provide the field of rehabilitation with an alternative form of therapy that serves to improve and enhance the recovery process for users. Thus, the use of AAT is becoming more prevalent today. Canine-assisted interventions (CAI) are one such example. CAI are one form of animal-assisted therapy that use certified therapy dogs in therapy interventions. CAI have shown benefits in kids, adults, and older adults of varying physiological and psychological conditions.

**Methodology:** A review of literature was done to identify the benefits and advantages of CAI. The articles featured in the presentation address three separate populations: children (below the ages of 18), adults, and older adults (over 65 years old). All three categorized cohorts received benefits from CAI, as explained.

**Results:** Studies indicate that canine-assisted therapy aids in many different kinds of interventions, and benefits people of various ages, diagnoses, and settings. CAI benefits children by alleviating pain (Braun, Stangler, Narveson, & Pettingell, 2009), reducing ADHD symptoms (Shuck, Emmerson, Fine, & Lakes, 2015), and increasing positive affect in children with autism spectrum disorder (Funahashi, Gruebler, Aoki, Kadone, & Suzuk, 2014). Additionally, a study examining children's response to stress and pain post-op indicated that CAI facilitates rapid recovery of vigilance and activity after anaesthesia and modifies pain perception (Calcaterra et al., n.d.). Benefits for adults exposed to CAI include significantly decreased tension/anxiety, depression, anger, vigor, confusion, and fatigue and improved overall mood in hospital patients (Coakley, Mahoney, 2009), higher frequency of verbal and nonverbal behavior in a case of a man with aphasia (LaFrance, Garcia, & Labreche, 2007), and significant reductions in anxiety scores found after CAI for hospitalized patients with psychotic, mood, and other disorders (Barker, Dawson, 1998). In a nursing home, the presence of therapy dogs increased residents' verbal communication and interpersonal communication skills (Fick, 1993).

**Discussion:** The results of this review show that CAI can be an advantageous intervention strategy outside of traditional rehabilitation approaches. CAI can benefit people of any age and within many settings. Additionally, CAI does not have to replace or take away any other interventions that are being given, but can be a beneficial addition to most interventions, even just as a presence.

In conclusion, the findings of the review relate to occupational therapy interventions because dogs can be used to practice various occupations. The results of these studies have shown that

therapy dogs produce benefits in a variety of interventions and situations. In terms of occupations, a therapy dog could be used in walking, brushing, and caring for another, among others. A dog can also raise the mood and energy level of people, especially children in therapy sessions. Therapy dogs benefit interventions not solely as providing new occupations and interventions, but also as a calming and supporting presence during potentially difficult interventions that a patient may face. Canine-assisted interventions are an asset to occupational therapy practices.

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