

Pet-Assisted Therapy: Benefits for Mesothelioma Cancer Patients



Mesothelioma treatment often involves invasive surgeries and advanced pharmaceutical regimens. Most oncologists develop highly specialized plans for their patients – but many overlook the low-cost, low-tech option of a friendly, furry companion.

In the face of a terminal cancer and an aggressive [mesothelioma treatment regimen](#), many patients become stressed and anxious. Pain and fatigue escalate over the progression of their disease, and many feel increasingly isolated by their rare condition.

Surprisingly, [pet therapy](#) is a consistently effective intervention for each of these common issues.

Pet Therapy as a Complementary Cancer Treatment

In pet therapy, patients spend time with a trained animal (most often a dog) and its handler. The interaction allows patients to forget about their [prognosis and other health concerns](#) for a while, while giving – and receiving –

comforting affection. When surveyed about their experience, almost all patients felt that the therapy helped bring their spirits up and brighten their day.

Most pet therapy participants notice immediate benefits in their mood. One study found that just 10 minutes of pet therapy reduced patients' mood disturbances by 57 percent. Patients tend to feel less tense, anxious and angry after the sessions, which some researchers think may help facilitate recovery.

Mesothelioma patients can also derive specific physical benefits from pet therapy.

As stress levels go down, patient perception of pain and fatigue tend to drop as well. Respiration often improves, and vital signs can stabilize. Less stressed patients have an easier time eating and sleeping – two basic activities that many [cancer patients](#) struggle with (and often turn to additional pharmaceuticals to manage).

Although pet therapy isn't intended to take the place of traditional treatments, it can certainly reduce the side effects of such care. As more hospital administrators acknowledge the potential benefits (and the fact that patients tend to rate their overall care experience more positively after participating in a pet therapy program), we may see an increase in the pet therapy interventions as part of a complementary treatment program.

Author bio: Faith Franz has spent nearly two years researching and writing for The Mesothelioma Center. As an advocate for alternative medicine, she encourages patients to explore all of the treatment options that could potentially save their life.

Source: Coakley, A. B. & Mahoney, E. K. (2009). Creating a therapeutic and healing environment with a pet therapy program. *Complementary Therapy – Clinical Practice*; 15 (3). Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2798799/>