

Tips for seniors to cope with pet loss

As we age, we experience an increasing number of major life changes, including the loss of beloved friends, family members, and pets. The death of a pet can hit retired seniors even harder than younger adults who may be able to draw on the comfort of a close family, or distract themselves with the routine of work. For older adults who live alone, the pet was probably your sole companion, and taking care of the animal provided you with a sense of purpose and self-worth.

- **Try to find new meaning and joy in life.** Caring for a pet previously occupied your time and boosted your morale and optimism. Try to fill that time by volunteering, picking up a long-neglected hobby, taking a class, helping friends care for their pets, or even by getting another pet when the time feels right.
- **Stay connected with friends.** Pets, dogs especially, can help seniors meet new people or regularly connect with friends and neighbors while out on a walk or in the dog park, for example. Having lost your pet, it's important that you don't now spend day after day alone. Try to spend time with at least one person every day. Regular face-to-face contact can help you ward off depression and stay positive. Call up an old friend or neighbor for a lunch date or join a club.
- **Boost your vitality with exercise.** Pets help many older adults stay active and playful, which can boost your immune system and increase your energy. It's important to keep up your activity levels after the loss of your pet. Check with your doctor before starting an exercise program and then find an activity that you enjoy. Exercising in a group—by playing a sport such as tennis or golf, or taking an exercise or swimming class—can also help you connect with others.