



ANIMAL ASSISTED INTERVENTIONS IN 6 QUESTIONS

Animal assisted interventions refer to all activities offered by teams of professionals working with trained animals. The interaction with the animal brings physical and moral well-being to people with dementia.

1

For whom and why?

Animal assisted interventions are aimed at people with dementia who appreciate animals. These interventions have therapeutic indications to stimulate and improve physical, cognitive and psychological capabilities or are simply proposed for leisure and distraction activities.

3

What are the benefits?

Observed effect are an increase in social interactions, an improvement in quality of life, an improvement in balance and a decrease in behavioural and psychological symptoms (agitation, depression, anxiety).

2

How is the intervention conducted?

In the context of a therapeutic indication, objectives are set such as improving walking or reducing agitation. Sessions of 45 minutes once a week are conducted until the set objectives are achieved. The sessions are individual or in small group of up to 3 participants.

For leisure and entertainment activities, 1 to 2 sessions per week are conducted lasting 15 to 20 minutes for individual sessions and 30 to 45 minutes for group sessions of 5 to 8 participants.

There are many activities: walking with the animal, petting it, playing with it, talking to it, feeding it or watching it.

The sessions always take place in the presence of a therapist and/or care staff. The animal belongs to the therapist, an association or the institution where the participants live and is trained and used to these activities.

The animals include dogs, cats, horses, donkeys, hamsters, rabbits, chickens, etc.



4

How does it work?

Animal assisted interventions target and involve 5 areas:

- Physical: fine motor skills, balance, coordination of movements, physical and sensory- motor integration (control and coordination of gestures related to the perception of one’s environment and one’s own sensations).
- Cognitive: concentration, sensory stimulation, memory, language.
- Behavioural: relaxation, initiative, awareness, expression of verbal and non-verbal emotions.
- Social: social interactions and social inclusion.
- Physiological: blood pressure, heart rate, feel-good hormones.

5

When is it contraindicated?

Animal assisted interventions are not recommended if people are allergic to animals or if they are afraid of animals. Severe cognitive impairment and psychiatric disorders may interfere with the course of the sessions. These interventions should not be provided to people who may be overly agitated in the presence of animals or who may behave aggressively towards animals.

In all cases, it is necessary to discuss it beforehand with professionals.

6

Who can provide animal assisted interventions?

Animal assisted interventions are provided by professionals and/or volunteers who are trained to work with animals, have knowledge of dementia and are familiar with the animal they are working with.



Do not forget your glasses and/or hearing aids if you need them.



Your participation in the sessions is free. You will always be asked if you wish to participate.

This sheet is adapted from a chapter in the guide *Psychosocial interventions and dementia: understanding, knowing, implementing* which presents 10 psychosocial interventions.

