If your family includes a pet, you know the great love and companionship they can add to your life. But did you know pets actually give us a lot more than kisses and wagging tails? According to the American Heart Association, being a pet parent is linked to reduced depression and stress as well as lower blood pressure and cholesterol. If your pet happens to be a dog—or maybe a cat—you are more motivated to take daily walks. Perhaps you’ll stop along the way and chat with other pet parents out with their furry friends! Also, having a pet gives you a sense of purpose and provides some structure to your daily routine.

Here are ANIMAL PLANET’s top 5 benefits of having a pet:

1. Pets can help you beat the blues. In addition to lowering depression and providing a sense of purpose, pets also combat feelings of loneliness by offering companionship.

2. If your pet is a dog, there’s a good chance their need for exercise will help you get motivated, too! Those who walk their pups are less likely to be obese than those who don’t.

3. Having a pet in the home can actually lower a child’s likelihood of developing related allergies by as much as 33%. Research shows this can also lead to a stronger immune system overall.

4. A pet fills your heart with love, translating to improved heart health. Those who have experienced a heart attack tend to have better recovery rates if there’s a pet in their lives.

5. A pet is an instant icebreaker. Talking about your pet and sharing stories with others can help you improve your social skills.

If you’re a senior and wondering what type of pet might be best for you, 3rd Act Magazine has some things to consider:

**Should I get a dog?**
As mentioned, dogs are great companions and exercise buddies. Some can also be trained to provide supportive services to those with mobility, hearing or vision limitations. Look for a breed that is even-tempered and consider an older dog rather than a puppy.

**How about a cat?**
Cats require less maintenance than dogs as they are adept at grooming themselves and they are naturally neat. As with dogs, consider an older cat rather than a kitten.

**Maybe a bird?**
Many birds have energetic and bubbly personalities and are a fun addition to your household. Some sing and some just talk! Bird watching can have a calming effect on people of all ages, one reason why they are often part of an Alzheimer’s or dementia care program.

**What about fish?**
Watching fish swim in a beautiful tank can be very soothing. They are easy to feed and generally easy to care for. Services are available to help maintain a healthy fish tank.

So, there you have it… reasons why you need a pet and choices for your consideration. Whatever you may choose, enjoy the companionship and joy a pet can bring to your life!