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ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY AS A METHOD OF TREATMENT

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Nowadays, many diseases can be prevented and treated in different ways. One of not quite common methods is animal-assisted therapy.

Animal-assisted therapy (or zootherapy) is a scientific method of treating and preventing diseases that uses images of animals, their drawings, as well as real animals with which communication is safe to provide.

The positive influence of animals on humans has been known since ancient times. For example, in Ancient China, sages believed that an animal can understand a person or even cure him, because it experiences five basic feelings that a person experiences himself - hunger, thirst, pain, fear and love. However, a close connection between human and animal was formed only in the twentieth century by psychologist Boris Levinson and ethologist Konrad Lorenz, who explained this as a human need for unity with nature.

Currently, animal-assisted therapy is recognized in all countries. Many institutes are being created to study the effect of animals on people, seminars and conferences are also held on treatment methods using animals.

Zootherapy performs many functions:

- psychophysiological function
- psychotherapeutic function
- rehabilitation function
- the function of satisfying the need for competence
- function of self-realization
- communication function

It is customary to distinguish between undirected and directed animal-assisted therapy. Undirected zootherapy refers to interaction with animals at home without awareness of the therapeutic effect. For example, buying a child a pet that he will take care of. Directed animal-assisted therapy is used by specialists according to an individual program. For this type of therapy, specially selected and trained animals are used. Directed animal-assisted therapy, in turn, is divided into types depending on which animals are used - hippotherapy, canistherapy, dolphin therapy, felinotherapy. For example, hippotherapy is a type of animal-assisted therapy that uses horseback riding. When a horse moves, it transmits motor impulses to the rider, similar to the impulses of a person when walking. The movement of the horse's back muscles has a massaging and warming effect on the rider's leg muscles and pelvic organs, and increases blood flow in the limbs. Horseback riding trains muscles and strengthens joints. During them, many different exercises are performed in which the whole body is involved: shoulder girdle, arms, legs, head. Communication with a horse also helps children learn to listen, work, improves their mood and general physical condition.

Animal-assisted therapy is one of the safest and most natural methods of treatment, which has virtually no restrictions and is available to anyone, regardless of age and social status. In addition, even undirected animal-assisted therapy can have a significant effect on a person's condition, so having a pet, taking care of it means having a positive impact on your own physical and mental health.