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Over 65, nothing better against depression than adopting a dog (or a cat)

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When Ronnie is asked to describe his hero at school, he decides to tell the story of his grandfather's dog. Start like this **Hachiko – your best friend** a 2009 film directed by Lasse Hallström, based on a **true story**, which tells the emotional bond between a dog and its owner. The relationship that can be created between a pet and us humans has something therapeutic, even more so when the years advance and loneliness increases the risk of depression and sedentary lifestyle. To raise awareness of the importance of the company of a pet, on the occasion of Grandparents'

Day which will be celebrated on 2 October, Senior Italia FederAnziani has launched the campaign 'Adopt a puppy, find your [health](#)', with the aim of carrying out 10 thousand adoptions in 6 months.

A population of over 65s

In Italy there are 14.5 million people over 65. Among them, 20% are diabetic and 54% are hypertensive. Many, also due to loneliness, suffer from depression. "In Italy almost 8 million over 65s suffer from hypertension – he states **Giovambattista Desideri** of the SIIA Italian Society of Arterial Hypertension. To improve this situation, more movement is needed. The 2020-2021 data from the PASSI d'argento surveillance system highlight a share of sedentary people of 42%, which rises to 67% in the over 85s. Women carry out even less physical activity. Walking is certainly the most recommended exercise for the elderly and taking your dog for a walk or taking care of your cat's needs can really be a cure-all." Practicing physical activity is also very important for diabetics, especially when elderly. "L'exercise – he explains **Raffaele Scalpone**, President of AID Italian Association for the Defense of the Interests of Diabetics – helps to reduce weight and blood sugar, reduces blood pressure and increases the so-called 'good cholesterol'. Just walking 30 minutes a day can improve your [health](#): a walk in the park, for example, is exactly the type of activity we recommend."

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The damage of a sedentary lifestyle

The weight of years, ailments and loneliness easily generate incorrect behavior. “The worsening of [health](#) conditions and loneliness lead the elderly to spend more time at home, move little and let muscles, joints and circulatory systems age more rapidly – he underlines **Filippo Anelli**, President of Fnomceo National Federation of Medical Orders. For this reason, an external stimulus to exercise is fundamental, such as the awareness of having to take care of someone. The healthcare point of reference for the elderly is very often family doctors, to whom we invite you to talk to patients about this opportunity, to explain to them all the benefits they would experience”.

“We are very proud to participate in this important project – he declares **Alfonso Rossi**, President Vitattiva. Physical exercise can slow down aging and guarantee a better quality of life for those who practice it. Over the age of 65 it truly becomes an ally for [health](#), as well as offering greater social opportunities. We are alongside Senior Italia FederAnziani to promote this virtuous initiative.”

The effects on the National Health System

Changing lifestyles, in particular moderate daily physical exercise, such as that practiced when walking a dog, could significantly improve their [health](#) conditions, with positive effects also on the National [Health](#) System. “The most common [health](#) problems among older people are often caused or worsened by incorrect and inactive lifestyles – declares **Roberto Messina**, Senior President of Italy FederAnziani. This also translates into huge costs for public healthcare, which is faced with expenses for therapies and visits for millions of people. The SIC-Sanità Study Center has shown that if everyone over 65 took care of a pet, for example a dog or a cat, their medical conditions would improve so much as to allow savings of as much as 3 billion euros”.

[See also **Alzheimer's, what are the markers that reveal it**](#)

The ‘Adopt a puppy, find your health’ campaign

The initiative is supported by Fnomceo National Federation of Medical Associations, ANMVI National Association of Italian Veterinary Doctors, FIMMG Italian Federation of General Practitioners, SIIA Italian Society of Arterial Hypertension, AID Italian Association for the Defense of the Interests of Diabetics, Vitattiva and ASI Association Italian sportswoman. “Choosing the company of a pet also means a lot for less self-sufficient elderly people – says the Hon. **Alessandra Locatelli**, Minister for Disabilities – . Advanced age often imposes physical limitations that can be resolved with the help of a pet, as in the cases of guide dogs for people with visual difficulties. They greatly expand the possibilities for relationships with the outside [world](#), help in carrying out daily and domestic activities, and reduce loneliness. Adoption must be seriously considered, with the support of family members.”

The adoption of 10 thousand dogs

The campaign involves the distribution of posters in senior centers to encourage family members and caregivers to also consider this possibility. On the Senior Italia website, on that of ASI Associazione Sportiva Italiana and on Vitattiva there is a list of kennels and catteries that you can contact. The objective is to obtain the adoption of 10 thousand animals in 6 months, from October to March. “The primary prevention of diseases, including tumors, consists in adopting correct lifestyles – adds **Mgr. Vincenzo Paglia**, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life and Honorary President of Senior FederAnziani. Eating healthily and exercising reduces the risk of developing cancer by 40% and is particularly important for those who suffer from diabetes and hypertension, like many elderly people. A little daily exercise improves blood pressure and cholesterol levels and has effects on anxiety and stress. Taking a dog out for daily walks, for example, allows you not only to walk enough to stay healthy, but also to socialize with other people, enjoy company, feel better emotionally and combat the risk of depression.”

The benefits of Pet Therapy

Animals have always performed a therapeutic function in many fields with proven effectiveness. “We recognize the great importance of the animal [world](#) in fields such as pet therapy, in the so-called IAA, animal-assisted interventions, and also in sporting activities such as integrated disciplines which see disabled and non-disabled athletes competing together”, he adds **Fabio Salerno**, General Manager of

ASI Italian [Sports](#) Association. "In clinical practice we meet many over 65s with animals – he concludes **Raimondo Colangeli**, Vice President of ANMVI National Association of Italian Veterinary Doctors. Adopting a pet means removing it from shelters, guaranteeing it a better life too. In addition to physical well-being, taking care of a puppy also guarantees a psychological benefit, because the elderly person once again has responsibilities towards someone who depends on him and must resume schedules and routines: wake-up calls, outings in the case of a dog, meals. The cat, although it does not require walking outside the house, however needs care, food and playful [entertainment](#)".

[See also The "invisible" enemies before Covid and the war of the human body to survive epidemics](#)

The request for tax relief

The veterinarian is the reference figure to help in choosing the right species and breed depending on the person's characteristics. "The pre-adoption visits carried out free of charge in the studios – continues Colangeli – are important elements. To encourage those who live only on a pension to get an animal it would also be important to be able to guarantee reductions or deductions in VAT for medical care and food purchases. It is a request that like ANMVI we did years ago, with the collection of more than 100 thousand signatures. Senior Italia FederAnziani asks the same thing for people with hypertension or diabetes: we hope that our requests will be accepted".