

Pet Rabbits Prove Therapeutic for Pain

by Nancy Laracy

What could be better than a soft, cuddly adorable bunny to divert the chronic pain of fibromyalgia and an autoimmune disease?

I am a pet therapist who shares the healing properties of rabbits with children and adults who are sick, sad, or in pain. While most of us are used to hearing about therapy dogs and cats in hospitals and nursing homes, bunnies are the newest therapy animals on the radar.

Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) is proving to be a very vital, effective alternative treatment for pain. Two scientific studies illustrate the beneficial effects of AAT for chronic pain.

On Nov. 17, 2009, *Science Daily* reported that adults who used pet therapy while recovering from total joint replacement surgery required 50 percent less pain medication than those who did not. It stated: "Evidence suggests that AAT can have a positive effect on a patient's psychosocial, emotional, and physical well-being."

In January 2012, *Pain Medicine* reported that therapy dog visits in an outpatient setting could provide significant reduction in pain and emotional distress for people with chronic pain. AAT also significantly relieved the emotional distress and enhanced feelings of well-being for accompanying caregivers and the clinic staff.

A Journey through Pain – with a Bunny

I discovered the healing nature of loving, playing with, and caring for rabbits, specifically a rabbit named Bunnyboy, some years ago when my seemingly perfect life went off course. What should have been a routine viral infection turned out to be anything but. Suddenly, at 36 years, I found myself living with chronic pain while trying to raise my two beautiful children.

Initially, I tried every mainstream treatment to cope with the pain. However, when one terrifying reaction to a medication sent me to the emergency room, I realized that I had to find a new approach. I started going to a chiropractor, had weekly massages, walked on an underwater treadmill to relieve the pressure on my joints while strengthening my muscles, and forced my husband to sleep on a magnetic mattress designed to relieve pain. In the meantime, I taught myself to say "I need to manage my pain," instead of saying "I have to get rid of this pain."

Then, in the middle of a blizzard, by a stroke of luck (or perhaps fate) I bought an adorable Red Satin rabbit that became my avenue to overcoming chronic pain.



If you deal with chronic pain, your first thought may be that you don't have the energy anymore to take care of a pet. Bunnyboy, who was born with an immune system disease much like mine, needed constant medical attention on top of the normal care required by most pets. But I quickly found that I was on the receiving end of pet therapy.

I got up every day and cleaned his litter pan, fed him, drained his chronic abscesses, and administered his penicillin injections. And I played or cuddled with him as though he was my third baby.

He loved to be chased—racing around the house similar to a Nascar driver. He binkied across the room—suddenly rushing around at random while leaping and twisting in the air.

Unconditional Love on Four Feet

Bunnyboy suffered from so many ailments, yet he hopped around the house with a zest for life that amazed and inspired me. He never gave up and helped me not to feel so broken. Bunnyboy taught me that it was okay not to be able to do everything I used to. He could sense when my pain was the worst and he would snuggle deep in my armpit or sprawl across my chest. The warmth of his small furry body soothed my pain.

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