



# Effectiveness of animal-assisted therapy: A systematic review of randomized controlled trials



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## KEYWORDS

Animal-assisted  
therapy;  
Systematic review;  
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controlled trials

**Summary** The objectives of this review were to summarize the evidence from randomized controlled trials (RCTs) on the effects of animal-assisted therapy (AAT). Studies were eligible if they were RCTs. Studies included one treatment group in which AAT was applied. We searched the following databases from 1990 up to October 31, 2012: MEDLINE via PubMed, CINAHL, Web of Science, Ichushi Web, GHJ, WPRIM, and PsycINFO. We also searched all Cochrane Database up to October 31, 2012. Eleven RCTs were identified, and seven studies were about "Mental and behavioral disorders". Types of animal intervention were dog, cat, dolphin, bird, cow, rabbit, ferret, and guinea pig. The RCTs conducted have been of relatively low quality. We could not perform meta-analysis because of heterogeneity.

In a study environment limited to the people who like animals, AAT may be an effective treatment for mental and behavioral disorders such as depression, schizophrenia, and alcohol/drug addictions, and is based on a holistic approach through interaction with animals in nature.

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To most effectively assess the potential benefits for AAT, it will be important for further research to utilize and describe (1) RCT methodology when appropriate, (2) reasons for non-participation, (3) intervention dose, (4) adverse effects and withdrawals, and (5) cost.  
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## Introduction

Animals have been our companions since ancient times, and we are well aware of the many ways that some of them have aided us throughout history.<sup>1</sup> Animals are used to help humans in ways; for example, serving as working shire horses and guide dogs for the blind.<sup>2</sup> The modalities that use

animals as tools for improving physical, mental and social functions, and educational and welfare aspects of humans are called animal-assisted interventions (AAI).

To understand the different types of AAI and integrate some useful definitions, we accepted the classification of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA).<sup>3</sup> The AVMA classifies AAI into three category: (i) animal-assisted

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