

Robotic Pets for Seniors



Zia Sherrell | April 13, 2023


In this article...

- Discover how robotic pets, including robotic dogs and cats, can benefit seniors by improving their mood, health and general well-being now and in the future.

There's a common perception that seniors resist technology, but studies show that older people are embracing the digital age.

A 2019 report found that people over 60 spend more than half of their daily leisure hours [using TV, computers, or other electronic devices \(https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/18/americans-60-and-older-are-spending-more-time-in-front-of-their-screens-than-a-decade-ago/\)](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/18/americans-60-and-older-are-spending-more-time-in-front-of-their-screens-than-a-decade-ago/). In addition, nearly 75% of people aged over 65 are internet users, compared to just 14% at the turn of the century.

As seniors incorporate more technology into their lives, robotic pets may be the next frontier.



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What Are Robotic Pets?

Robotic pets are robots designed to look and interact like real pets. Sensors in the robots help them interact with external stimuli, including touch and sounds. For example, robotic cats purr and lick themselves and robotic dogs who bark with excitement. Most robotic pets have batteries and can be turned off or muted depending on the user's needs.

Robotic pets were originally toys designed for children. However, the creators of these toys have further built on the original technology and created new robotic pets for seniors.

Is It Helpful for Older Adults to Have Robotic Pets as Companions?

Robotic pets can be fitting companions for older adults. Having a robotic pet to interact with can reduce loneliness as they are engaging and entertaining. These robots can complement interaction with caregivers and loved ones rather than replace them, and they may even improve the person's longevity.

People who work in aged care units note that [many residents love robotic pets \(https://www.techenhancedlife.com/citizen-research/robotic-pets-dementia-patients-our-experiences\)](https://www.techenhancedlife.com/citizen-research/robotic-pets-dementia-patients-our-experiences), and these cyber animals bring out their nurturing side. They also provide comfort to many residents, much like a security blanket or living support animal.

However, robotic pets are not always received so warmly. Some residents reacted with indifference or even annoyance. The overwhelming majority of residents respond positively though, suggesting that robotics pets can be a great addition to the lives of many seniors.

Robotic pets are likely to advance further and bring even more benefits for older individuals as technology improves. For example, Hasbro is working on a new generation [Joy for All pet \(https://hcri.brown.edu/2017/11/13/hcri-partners-with-hasbro-on-next-generation-robot-for-older-adults/\)](https://hcri.brown.edu/2017/11/13/hcri-partners-with-hasbro-on-next-generation-robot-for-older-adults/) with artificial intelligence. This robotic pet could help seniors with tasks, such as retrieving their glasses or reminding them to take medication. A smart robotic pet with these capabilities could be incredibly valuable for those living with mild dementia.

How Much Does A Robotic Pet Cost?

The prices of robotic costs vary dramatically, depending on the pet and its capabilities. To illustrate, a first-generation Hasbro Joy for All cat or dog is a relatively affordable option costing around \$100. In contrast, more advanced robotic pets, such as [PARO the baby seal \(http://www.parorobots.com/\)](http://www.parorobots.com/), cost \$6,000 to \$8,000.

What Is a Good Pet for the Elderly?

A suitable pet for a senior person is inexpensive, low-maintenance, and affectionate. As many older individuals live in apartments and other smaller homes, an ideal pet doesn't require expansive spaces. They also don't need a lot of exercise, cleaning, or grooming.

Some good pets for seniors include:

- Cats, especially those with short or no hair
- Small dogs, such as Malteses and Shih Tzus, especially when older
- Small birds, such as parakeets, canaries, and cockatiels
- Several cold water fish
- Small reptiles, such as geckos and turtles
- Insects and arachnids, such as stick insects and tarantulas

Although these animals can all enhance someone's life, they also require ongoing food and may have medical bills.

Additionally, some seniors, especially those in some assisted living facilities or with serious cognitive and physical health impairments, may be unable to care for a pet. The worry about what will happen to their pets if they pass away or become ill is a major concern for others. For these seniors, a robotic pet could make an excellent choice of companion.

The Benefits Of Robotic Pets

Robotic pets can be a great alternative to real-life pets for seniors, offering companionship and entertainment without the responsibility.

As this technology becomes more commonplace, the price of robotic pets is likely to fall, making them even more accessible to older people.



About the Author

Zia Sherrell is a digital health journalist with over a decade of healthcare experience, a bachelor's degree in science from the University of Leeds and a master's degree in public health from the University of Manchester. Her work has appeared in Netdoctor, Medical News Today, Healthline, Business Insider, Cosmopolitan, Yahoo, Harper's Bazaar, Men's Health and more.

When she's not typing madly, Zia enjoys traveling and chasing after her dogs.

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