

## ASINOTHERAPY

While therapeutic interventions provided by donkeys are not as widespread in our country as horse assisted therapy, more and more professionals and institutions are involved in the protection of this species and in the development of actions in which the donkeys act as a key element to people rehabilitation.

So asinotherapy or donkey assisted therapy is an equestrian practice in which the donkey acts as a co-therapist animal, which means that the animal cooperates with a professional team to achieve therapeutic and/or educational goals previously planned for a particular patient.

In general, among the benefits that donkey assisted therapy reports, we can work several objectives:

-**Emotional:** Optimize **emotional expression**, as in the presence of the animal, patients express more through gestural and verbal expressions. Allows the development of trust feelings, and thus **improve self-esteem**, due to the bonding with the donkey and to the tasks associated with his handling and care. It helps us to work on **impulse control**, given that an animal who perceives an excessively high or violent energy, bearing in mind that a donkey is so intelligent and sensitive, he maybe refuses the contact, so the patient will have to regulate himself and to learn to control his impulsivity if he wants to work with the animal. Another aspect that we can work is relaxation and **stress and anxiety reduction**; because once the patient gets use to the contact with the donkey, it offers great moments of relaxation, in which we even perceive a decrease in blood pressure and heart rate, muscle relaxation (which is fantastic to work with a patient who presents spasticity).

- **Educative and occupational:** We can work **curricular contents** adapted to the level of the patient as well as the learning of **new tasks/jobs** and terms related to the ass and the farm. Also aspects such as **attention** and **memory**, that influence directly on learning.

- **Physical:** We can work **motor skills and coordination** due to the motivation that comes from working with an animal. Through activities adapted by a professional physiotherapist, and even without riding (walk, animal care and management) a patient with a problem of reduced mobility can improve motor level, showing more free and independent movements, and even in cases of patients with stereotypies, reducing abnormal movement patterns.

The asinotherapy can cover a wide range of groups; it depends on the quality and versatility of the professionals in charge of the therapy and on the adaptation done concerning the therapeutic activities. A good professional and multidisciplinary team will be able to work with a wide range of groups, provided that there are no major impediments.

- Developmental disorders.
- Mental, physical or sensory disability.
- Mental illness.
- Emotional disorders (including eating disorders, addictions, psychopathologies ...).
- Learning disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.
- Social exclusion

So far, we haven't talked about the objectives and groups to work with, but ... what are the general characteristics of a therapy donkey?

A fundamental requirement is that the donkeys that are chosen to perform AAT are usually young and healthy (it's not ethical neither recommended to work with senior or sick animals), except that the rehabilitation of the animal is part of the therapeutic process.

More specifically, donkeys involved in educational and therapeutic processes are characterized by:

- High sociability with people.
- Balanced character.
- Absence of behaviors that put at risk the patients (tendency to bite, kick, conflict with other donkeys, etc)
- Above all, trust in humans.

It's also possible to incorporate therapeutic programs in protective environments with a dual purpose, to contribute to the rehabilitation of persons through the rehabilitation of donkeys who have been rescued from abuse and neglect. Although a complicated life, this animal is so noble that, despite the adversities experienced, he's an excellent ally, giving us one of the most beautiful lessons we can learn: it's possible to start and from zero.

In fact, many donkeys who are collaborating in therapy are living in sanctuaries in which they are now happy and free after being rescued from miserable lives and environments. We have many examples in the United States, United Kingdom, Italy ... A great example of this without going any further, it's El Refugio del Burrito, in Spain, which rescues and cares donkeys from deplorable situations of indifference and abuse, making efforts to give them a new life, the one donkeys had always deserved but they have been denied. Like other sanctuaries they combine their work with animal-assisted therapy, in this case as we discussed, donkeys. The ass, due to its calm, docile, attentive, curious and intelligent character, is a perfect co-therapist.

**¿Do you want to learn more?**



**Formación en Intervenciones Asistidas con Burros**  
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