

How to Look After an Older Dog



Though you may have known your dog his or her entire life, you may be finding that as s/he enters his or her golden years, the lifestyle you share is changing. There are many elements and needs in a dog's life that change with time. Some of these needs are just fine, some aren't so great, and some are just different. It is important that you recognize them, though, so that you know what your dog is going through, and you can continue to provide him or her with the highest amount of comfort and joy.

Things you may notice in an aging dog include:

- 🐾 "Bathroom accidents" – even if your dog has been perfectly housebroken for years, as an older dog, s/he may begin experiencing less control over the bladder. However, you should never just assume that sudden bathroom accidents are only a sign of age. They may also be the sign of a urinary infection or some other physical condition that makes him or her incontinent. If this starts to happen, visit your vet to make sure that all is well.
- 🐾 Behavioral changes – as your pet ages, you may notice that s/he acts differently than when s/he was a puppy. Though this is normal, it is always best to consult with your vet to make sure that it's just "cranky old pooch" syndrome, and not changes in sight, hearing, or pain from something more serious.
- 🐾 Low endurance – though older dogs still enjoy going for walks, you may notice that s/he is getting much more enjoyment out of slower walks that aren't quite as long. Walks shouldn't be too much longer than 20 minutes, and should always end with a drink of water. Don't take this as a sign that your dog doesn't need to be walked anymore. Exercise is just as important to an aging dog as it is to one much younger.

Fortunately, there are some great steps that you can take to keep your senior dog healthy to make sure that s/he's enjoying the highest possible quality of life for

the longest time. These include:

- 🐾 Taking your dog for a thorough checkup every six months. Make sure that you're with a good vet with whom you feel that you can comfortably talk and ask questions when they come up.
- 🐾 Learn about the many conditions that are most common among older dogs, as well as their symptoms. Should you notice any of these symptoms, be sure to point them out to your vet so that you can discuss the best options for treatment. Use the table below for reference regarding the most common disorders, but make sure to have a more in depth look at other possibilities

Disease	Symptoms
Kidney Disease	Increased thirst and water intake, increased urination and accidents; weight, muscle and appetite loss; lethargy and anemia; rough coat; vomiting; bad breath
Diabetes	Increased food and water intake; increased urination.
Thyroid disease- Hypothyroidism (low)	Reduced activity, weight gain, hair loss, shivering and reduced cold tolerance; possible irritability.
Thyroid disease- Hyperthyroidism (high)	Weight loss; increased appetite; diarrhea; vocalization
Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (CDS)	Disorientation (confusion), wandering aimlessly, staring off into space; decreased or altered response to family members; abnormal sleep-wake patterns; loss of housetraining; increased vocalization.
Heart disease	Labored breathing; coughing; sluggishness, fatigue, or lethargy; shortness of breath; poor exercise tolerance; fainting or abdominal fluid.

- 🐾 Give your senior dog the best dog food that you can. Try to get one that has been formulated for a senior dog's nutritional and energy needs. Your dog may also enjoy two smaller meals instead of one big one every day.
- 🐾 Keep your dog at a healthy weight. Obesity will only make any possible problems worse, and will shorten the length of your dog's life.

- 🐾 If your dog has arthritis, talk to your vet about different possible dietary supplements that can make a difference, such as glucosamine.
- 🐾 Pay close attention to your dog's teeth. Brushing your dog's teeth every day and having them professionally cleaned when the vet thinks it's a good idea is a great way to avoid oral problems and dangerous infections.
- 🐾 Keep up your dog's vaccinations so that his or her immune system is as supported as possible against the most common ailments.
- 🐾 Keep your dog and his or her environment extremely clean, and keep on top of any flea or tick issues.

Best of all, don't forget to enjoy time spent with your senior dog. Do everything possible to keep your dog happy, comfortable, active, and interested in life. The better the quality of your dog's life, the healthier s/he will be, and the longer s/he'll live.

You'll find more about looking after an older dog at www.all-about-puppies.com.