

Senior Dogs

Senior dogs are the best! They have been good companions to you and your family for many years, and you know them well. Their loyal companionship has earned your special care to keep them well and happy for as long as possible.

The age your dog hits senior status, can vary from breed to breed. Old age is not a disease. Any change in your senior dog should be checked, as most things can be helped, at least in making your dog more comfortable, and some things can even be cured.

There are some relatively common medical problems that occur in senior dogs. Hip dysplasia that may not have bothered a younger dog may now bring on pain and discomfort.

Medications may help with pain and supplements such as glucosamine chondroitin sulfate may help create healthier joint fluid. You can also change you old dog's routine to eliminate the need to walk on slick floors, jump into vehicles, or climb stairs. Gentle exercise, padded bedding, swimming or massage can also help. Other orthopedic problems such as old injuries or osteoarthritis may benefit from similar measures. Being overweight is also a common risk factor for developing arthritis and losing a few pounds can greatly increase quality of life in older dogs.

Hypothyroidism is another common senior ailment that may have gone undetected in younger years. It is diagnosed through a blood test and the thyroid medication is a safe treatment with extremely gratifying benefits to those dogs that need it. Senior dogs are also more prone to cancers, so it is important to have any lumps or symptoms checked promptly. Another common condition senior dogs can experience is blindness or deafness. Dogs may cope very well with blindness, but it is important to have the condition checked to make sure it is not causing your dog pain. Deaf dogs can also cope very well and can re-learn a lot of their old commands through hand signals.

Changes can occur in your dogs kidneys, liver and other organs as well as medications needed by older dogs can shorten the time a dog can hold its bladder or bowels. Never blame an older dog for housetraining accidents. This is most likely a symptom that requires attention and can usually be treated.

A simple but wise precaution in senior dog management is to have annual health exams performed and to take a look at pertinent blood values so helpful information can be gained. X-rays and urine checks may also be recommended. Normal results are great news but abnormal values can also be helpful in catching a disease early, when treatment is more likely to be effective. Your veterinarian's role is to make these services available and your role is to make decisions about what is best for your dog.

Eventually in every dog's life, there comes a time to say good bye. The decision regarding euthanasia of a beloved pet may be the most difficult decision one has to make in one's entire life. Whatever the decision, it should be one that you can look back upon and know that the best decision was made and that you would make the same decision again.

So how do you know when it is time? There are a few questions that may help you make this difficult decision. Is your dog eating? Quality of life involves eating or at least interest in food. Is your dog free of pain, not just physical, but also psychological pain from the development of incontinence in a dog that has been housebroken for its entire life? Does your dog still enjoy its favorite activities? You know your pet better than anyone and only you can truly answer these questions. Your veterinarian is there to help guide you with this difficult decision, to answer any questions you may have, and to ensure your precious friend gets the peaceful passing that he or she has earned.

Most importantly, cherish your dog's senior years. They pass too quickly. It's the time when you have the companionship of a wonderful old friend. While it is important that your dog remains active, receives regular health checks, and proper nutrition, there is no substitute for the attention and affection only you can give on a daily basis. It is well recognized that the special moments spent with our pets are equally beneficial to our own well-being. Make every day count.