

The Senior Dog

Canine Health



CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

Older dogs, like older humans, have special needs and care concerns. Knowing how to care for your senior dog will improve the quality of life and the time you have together.

Defining "Senior" Dogs live an average of 12 to 14 years. Giant breeds like Great Danes have a shorter life span, 8 to 10 years, and are considered senior dogs at 6 to 8 years. A medium-sized dog is considered senior at 7 to 10 years. Toy breeds often live 16 years or more, and reach 9 to 13 years old before showing signs of aging. There is significant variation, depending on the dog's genetic background, breed, size, and care he has received over his lifetime.

Exercise Don't just assume he is "too old" to go for walks or a swim at the beach. Continue to take him along if he's used to going with you. Elderly dogs live longer, healthier lives if they remain active for as long as possible. If your dog is not well or cannot keep up anymore, he will tell you by his actions. Many retrievers still hunt at age 11 or 12. Agility trials offer competition classes for senior dogs using lower jump heights. Tracking is a sport your dog can start at almost any age. Swimming keeps pressure off the joints in dogs with arthritis. Jogging may have to become walking, but even limited exercise will help your pet. A slow walk to the mailbox or an easy game of fetch may be all he can do, but the longer he keeps moving, the longer he will be **able** to keep moving. Resist the temptation to carry your small dog everywhere. Allow him to stretch and use his muscles.

Feeding Many pet food companies make special foods for senior dogs, which usually have fewer calories and protein. Because your dog is not as active, cut down on the quantity you feed. An overweight dog suffers more stress on his joints, aggravating arthritis. The heart also has to work harder. Add carrots and other vegetables to his dinner if he's still hungry. Your vet can suggest supplements or medication for old age conditions like arthritis.

Teeth Dental care is one of the most important things you can do for your pet, but is often overlooked. A veterinarian can tell you if his teeth need cleaning. Excessive tartar and unhealthy gums can lead to infection and even organ failure.

Daily Routine Your dog will appreciate a schedule he can rely on. Regular meals (preferably two a day), walk time, play time, and bedtime will keep him comfortable while minimizing stress. Try not to make major changes in his life or yours. He will not be able to cope as well as when he was a pup. He'll probably need more trips outside. Install a pet door if he has trouble making it through the night. He may also need to drink more water during the day.

Avoid extreme temperatures. Bring him inside, especially on extremely hot or cold days. An older dog can't tolerate extreme heat and humidity in summer or freezing winter temperatures. Be sure he can get out of the sun or find shelter and warmth in the cold.

Red Flags Look for changes that may indicate illness:

- | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drinking less or Drinking more | <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty getting up | <input type="checkbox"/> Shortness of breath | <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty walking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lethargy | <input type="checkbox"/> Lumps | <input type="checkbox"/> Bad breath | <input type="checkbox"/> Vomiting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coughing | <input type="checkbox"/> Weight loss | <input type="checkbox"/> Limping | <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of appetite |

An annual check-up and blood analysis is recommended for senior pets.

- | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Common Health Problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Thyroid irregularity | <input type="checkbox"/> Arthritis | <input type="checkbox"/> Kidney disease | <input type="checkbox"/> Urinary tract disease |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Hearing loss | <input type="checkbox"/> Diabetes | <input type="checkbox"/> Heart disease | <input type="checkbox"/> Obesity |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Cancer | | | |