



Managing Age-Related Challenges in our Senior Pets

As our dogs reach the age of 6-7 years of age, they are considered to be entering their senior years. You may start to notice both physical and mental changes as this time approaches. There are things that you can do to ease discomfort and ensure your senior stays happy and healthy.

SIGNS TO LOOK FOR:

- Hearing and vision deficits
- Weight gain or loss of appetite
- Joint stiffness/weakness
- Dental disease
- Urinary incontinence
- Early dementia/sleeplessness and wandering

WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP?

- Double up on vet visits. Wellness checks every 6 months can help detect anything concerning early, such as heart disease, kidney failure, or cancer.
- Modify the environment to accommodate arthritis discomfort. Provide raised food dishes, orthopedic beds, and pet stairs or ramps to get up on raised surfaces. Also, slippery floors can be difficult so be sure to provide carpet or rubber runners if needed.
- Senior-proof their area if cognitive problems arise. Baby gate stairs, do not leave outside unattended, and provide consistency in their surroundings. Senior dogs may get confused and can easily become lost.
- Maintain a healthy weight through a balanced diet. Obesity shortens a dog's lifespan, increases their risk of developing many other diseases, and puts added strain on joints.
- Modify exercise to accommodate your senior dog. Short walks more frequently may be more beneficial than one long walk. Exercise may require more coaxing as your dog ages, but keeping their muscles toned helps support their aging joints. Find things that motivate your dog to be active.
- Ensure your dog is getting more frequent potty breaks. Older dogs may have more difficulty holding their bladder and may have accidents when previously house trained. Belly bands, diapers, or puppy pads may be helpful. It is important to remain patient and compassionate during this time.

- Provide regular grooming. As your dog ages, it may become harder for them to reach areas of their body to groom. Regular brushing also distributes the coats oils and allows you to check for any lumps or bumps.
- Provide professional dental care/cleaning. Infected teeth can increase the risks of heart and kidney disease, not to mention be very painful. Dogs hide pain well, and may not “tell” us when they are hurting.
- Keep your senior dog’s mind sharp. Be sure to continue to provide mentally stimulating toys, puzzles, and smells. Be creative and modify if needed for your dog’s comfort. A sniffing walk, or a car ride can also provide great mental stimulation.

Our dog companions have provided us with unconditional love and support through the years, and there is no better time to reciprocate!

If, after trying these suggestions, you are still experiencing undesirable behaviors in your dog, SUBMIT QUESTIONS by clicking the link under Ask A Trainer on the Behavior and Training page of the Wayside Waifs website: www.waysidewaifs.org.

Written by the Wayside Waifs Canine Behavior Team

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