

FACT SHEET

Care of the Elderly Dog

The life expectancy of a dog varies considerably according to the breed, with giant breeds usually living 8-10 years, and smaller breeds up to 14-16 years.

Longevity may be to some extent hereditary, but it is also dependent on the care received throughout the animal's life and the quality of nutrition received.

A dog given a good start in life, reared on a healthy natural balanced diet will have a much better chance of longevity, than a dog who has suffered from illness, infection or malnourishment in early life, as this can weaken vital organs which may lead to problems in later life.

Effects of aging

Old age in most dogs is usually considered to begin at about seven years of age, though the effects of ageing generally do not become apparent until later. You may start to notice grey hairs appearing round the muzzle and their coat may become less dense and glossy, they will also be less energetic and tend to sleep more. In some cases dogs appear to become confused and irritable. As with humans, hearing often becomes impaired and eyesight may not be as good as it used to be.

General health care points

You may have to make special allowances and adjustments to your existing routine to provide for your dog's extra needs in later life, just as you would when owning a puppy.

Older dogs generally require more grooming. This gives you the chance to monitor their health. Check for any lumps or warts, which can appear and continue to keep a careful eye on them. In many cases the lumps are benign tumours, however, if you are concerned contact your veterinary surgeon for further advice.

Check the teeth, as dental decay is very common in later life; make sure that the teeth are solid and the gums are not red and inflamed. This can be sore and painful and at worse will prevent your dog from eating. In some cases you may be able to brush your dog's teeth helping to reduce decay and the build up of tartar, or by feeding hard raw fruit and vegetables such as apples and carrots. If your pet's teeth are very bad, work will have to be performed by your veterinary surgeon under a general anaesthetic.

Check the eyes, ears and nose and regularly, gently cleaning away any discharges which might be present. If your dog appears to be going progressively deaf or blind then it is wise to keep him on a lead when exercising, especially near roads, as this will prevent accidents. Check your dog's nails: as a dog gets older and takes less exercise their nails will probably require clipping more often.

Always keep an eye on your dog's weight. Older dogs tend to either loose weight, possibly due to an underlying problem, or they put weight on due to their slower metabolism and reduced exercise. Be aware of your dog looking as though it has a distended abdomen, as this may not necessarily be due to excess fat, but to fluid building up from an inefficient heart and circulatory system. In this situation the dog requires treatment to remove the fluid and not a calorie controlled diet.

Make a note of any unusual behaviour. Behavioural changes can be indication of underlying problems. For example, continual barking can be due to your dog's loss of hearing, while coughing may be due to a heart problem.

Exercise

Exercise is very important, especially for the older dog, as it provides many benefits to the heart, lungs and joints, helps to keep the animal fit and aids with bowel function. It is important to know your dog's capabilities and not to expect too much, frequent short walks are the best course of action and will benefit the circulatory system.

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How can Naturediet help?

Diet always plays a major part in maintaining health and fitness. As your dog grows older his nutritional requirements will change as the energy requirement drops, plus the digestive system will begin to work less effectively, thus he will possibly find difficulty in digesting some foods.

You may find as your dog gets older that their appetite decreases, with thirst increasing, sometimes leading to incontinence. This is usually because the organs within the body, in particular the kidneys, are no longer working effectively causing your pet to drink more to compensate for the extra loss.

It is a good idea to feed older dogs two or three small meals a day rather than one large meal. This will ease the strain on the digestive system helping it to deal more effectively with the intake of nutrients. High protein diets can put excess stress on the liver and kidneys. Diets that contain added salt should be avoided, because salt can put excess strain upon the older heart. Naturediet does not contain any added salt.

Naturediet Senior/Lite may be fed to the older dog. Specifically developed for the senior dog it contains rabbit and turkey with rice and vegetables and contains vitamins and minerals that are well known for their beneficial properties regarding stiff joints. If you own an elderly dog prone to becoming overweight, it is very important that the weight is lost. Excess weight can cause problems by putting excess strain on the heart, lungs, and joints and by generally lowering the animal's resistance to disease.

Naturediet Senior/Lite is also low in protein and high in fibre, which is suitable for the older dog, but is also low in calories, and is therefore recommended for the treatment of weight reduction.

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