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## **Caring For Senior Dogs**

Special care is needed for senior dogs to keep them healthy and happy. This can occur sooner than you think. Very large breed dogs can show signs of old age when they reach 5 or 6 years of age. Medium to large dogs around 7, and small breeds around 10.

- Learn the symptoms of age-related illnesses like cancer, diabetes, Cushings, heart disease and hypothyroidism to name the more common conditions. Look online or ask your vet to help you learn the early signs. The earlier you catch the disease the more treatable it will be.
- Groom your dog regularly to check for lumps, bumps and growths, including inside the mouth. If you find a suspicious growth, see your veterinarian.
- Many senior dogs get arthritis. Many of these see great improvement with glucosamine supplements. Ask your veterinarian for the proper supplement and dose for your dog. There are also wonderful anti-inflammatories available for our dogs now though these should be only used when necessary since long term use can be damaging to the kidneys and liver. If you have wood or tile floors, you might want to buy rubber backed rugs or runners to help them with their footing on slippery surfaces. An inexpensive approach is to buy non skid plastic runners available by the roll at hardware stores. These worked wonders for my last senior dog. Make sure they have a comfortable, well-insulated bed. There are even orthopedic beds available now. You may want to consider buying or making a ramp to help them in and out of the car.
- Many senior dogs will gradually lose their hearing and eye sight. If your dog is squinting or rubbing their eyes, or seems to be in pain, see a veterinarian immediately as this could be glaucoma which needs to be treated right away to save the eye. If your dog is starting to bump into things or their eyes start to look glassy or filmy it should be checked out. If your dog suddenly seems stubborn and is not listening to you, it could be his hearing. Test their hearing by doing a down stay in one room and then call him from another. If he doesn't come have him checked out. Or better yet -- call him into the kitchen -- all dogs like coming to the kitchen!

- Take extra special care in the winter and summer. Senior dogs get cold and hot more easily. Heat exhaustion and heat stroke are common for high-drive dogs who don't want to quit.
- Senior dogs can gain weight more easily as their activity level and metabolism go down. Cut back on food or use senior formulated food. Only do this when they slow down and add weight. My 10 ½ year old Gordon Setter is still so active he is on a formula for young active dogs, and he is still really lean.
- Periodontal disease and cracked teeth are common in older dogs. Be sure to brush their teeth and gums regularly. Bad teeth can also lead to other organ failure. See my grooming segment on proper tooth care.
- Senior dogs can become incontinent so don't assume they have lost their housebreaking skills. There are doggie diapers available now. A doggy door can help as well.
- Older dogs become grumpier as the aches and pains of old age take their toll. Make sure your children or grandchildren are extra respectful and give them space.

With extra care we can make old age easy on them and even extend their lives. The more happy years we have with our dogs the better -- their lives are too short as it is.

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