

# The Hidden Culprit Behind Sudden Indoor Accidents

Senior pets are prone to these incidents, and while they can be unsettling, there are ways to support your aging animal's well-being without making them feel ashamed or embarrassed. Here's what you must do.

Reviewed by Dr. Arielle Walton

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- If your older dog is leaving urine puddles around the house, underlying medical issues, not aging alone, are often to blame
- Dogs with urinary incontinence may leak urine while sleeping or walking, unaware it's happening. Understanding the distinction from behavioral urination is key to effective care
- Conditions like estrogen deficiency, urinary tract infections, kidney disease, and neurological decline frequently cause incontinence in older dogs, especially females and certain large breeds
- Diagnostic tests such as blood work, urinalysis, and imaging help identify treatable causes, so your veterinarian can create a targeted care plan for your dog
- Using dog diapers, increasing potty breaks, and adjusting your dog's environment can significantly reduce stress and help your senior dog stay clean, comfortable, and confident

Many dog owners have experienced this unsettling moment — waking up or coming home to find a puddle of urine inside the house. If you have a senior dog (or two), chances are you've experienced these accidents, which become more frequent as your pet ages. While you might attribute these incidents to your dog's age, it could indicate an underlying medical condition.

Understanding the causes of urinary incontinence in senior dogs is crucial so you can take the proper steps to support your pet. With the right knowledge and guidance, you can take meaningful steps to improve your dog's well-being and your peace of mind.

## What Is Urinary Incontinence?

To put it simply, urinary incontinence is the involuntary leakage of urine due to your dog losing control of his bladder. It's distinct from deliberately urinating or having accidents due to poor house training. When your dog has incontinence, they are likely unaware they are peeing. Most of the time, they are in a relaxed state, such as when they're napping or in a relaxed position.<sup>1</sup>

Urinary incontinence can vary in severity; some may be small leaks, especially during sleep, while others are more noticeable accidents leading to more urine output.<sup>2</sup> However, one thing you must keep in mind is that dogs experiencing incontinence are not misbehaving. This issue is medical in most cases and should be addressed with compassion and prompt veterinary attention.

Although any dog can develop urinary incontinence, certain breeds are more prone to it, like Boxers, German Shepherds, Doberman Pinschers, English Springer Spaniels, Old English Sheepdogs, Weimaraners, Collies, and Dalmatians. Moreover, excessive weight can put pressure on your dog's bladder, cause abdominal issues, and reduce mobility. If your dog is overweight, they may be at risk of incontinence.

## Differentiating Incontinence from Other Urinary Issues

It is crucial to distinguish urinary incontinence from other common urination problems. For instance, dogs suffering from anxiety, confusion, or changes in routine may have accidents not caused by incontinence. Some behavioral issues, such as marking or submissive urination, are also not medical conditions and require different interventions.

In contrast, a dog with urinary incontinence may urinate while sleeping or resting, show no awareness of having an accident, or leak urine while walking or lying down. The concern is likely physical rather than behavioral in these cases, and a veterinary evaluation is necessary. According to Dr. Julie Buzby, DVM, CAVCA, CVA, and founder of Dr. Buzby's ToeGrips:

*"Senior dogs are often walking a tightrope of health that we need to keep in balance. If an owner notices a change — in water consumption, appetite and certainly dog incontinence — it warrants a veterinary visit."*<sup>3</sup>

## Common Causes of Urinary Incontinence in Older Dogs

There are multiple medical causes of urinary incontinence in senior dogs, and being aware of the underlying issue will help guide your treatment and management strategy. Here are a few examples:<sup>4</sup>

- **Hormonal changes** — Spayed, middle-aged female dogs are especially susceptible to urinary incontinence due to a decline in estrogen levels. This is because estrogen plays a role in maintaining the strength and function of the muscles around the urethra.

When estrogen levels drop, these muscles weaken, leading to involuntary urine leakage. This condition is referred to as urethral sphincter mechanism incompetence (USMI).<sup>5</sup>

- **Urinary tract infections (UTIs)** — UTIs cause irritation, pain, and inflammation, often resulting in frequent or urgent urination. You may notice symptoms like cloudy or blood-tinged urine, frequent licking of the genital area, and straining and discomfort while urinating.<sup>6</sup>
- **Kidney disease and endocrine disorders** — When your pet has kidney disease, they may drink more water, leading to frequent urination and accidental leakage. Diabetes and Cushing's disease also cause hormonal imbalance, resulting in increased thirst and urination.
- **Bladder stones or tumors** — Bladder stones and tumors can cause inflammation or obstruction in the urinary tract. This may interfere with normal urine flow or lead to partial incontinence.
- **Neurological issues** — Dementia and other disorders related to the nervous system can interfere with a dog's ability to control their bladder. Some dogs may also exhibit signs of cognitive decline, such as confusion, irritability, disorientation, and decreased interest in playtime.
- **Musculoskeletal problems** — Dogs with arthritis or other mobility-limiting conditions may find it difficult to reach outdoor areas in time to urinate. Although this is not true incontinence, the result is similar.

# Veterinary Diagnosis — What to Expect

Early diagnosis and treatment can significantly improve your dog’s comfort and prevent secondary complications, such as skin infections and bladder or kidney damage,<sup>7</sup> so when you notice this occurring in your senior pet, bring them to your integrative vet for a checkup.

Your veterinarian may recommend different tests, such as a urinalysis and urine culture, blood tests, hormone testing, and imaging studies. These will help identify infections, evaluate organ function, and detect tumors, stones, or structural problems.

Once your vet has identified the underlying cause, they will recommend a treatment and management plan for your dog. You can also explore natural remedies to support your pet’s urinary health, such as herbal blends to reduce inflammation, support bladder function, and promote a healthy urinary tract.

## Tips to Help Manage Incontinence at Home

While medical treatment addresses the root cause, managing the day-to-day impact of incontinence is equally important. The following strategies can help maintain cleanliness in your home while keeping your pet comfortable:<sup>8</sup>

- **Provide more frequent outdoor breaks** — Ensure your dog urinates throughout the day and evening.
- **Use dog diapers** — They absorb urine effectively and prevent messes on floors or furniture. Make sure to choose the appropriate size and style for your dog’s gender and body type to avoid discomfort.
- **Waterproof bedding and floor pads** — Put protective covers on bedding and place absorbent pads in areas where your dog rests.
- **Odor control** — Clean up messes as soon as they occur; use enzymatic solutions and other natural cleaners to eliminate lingering smells. This will help prevent repeat incidents.
- **Indoor potty areas** — Consider providing indoor potty pads or turf-style potties, especially if your senior dog has mobility issues.

Remember, every dog is different. Some may respond well to medication alone, while others benefit most from a combination of medical treatment and lifestyle adjustments.

## Be Patient in Supporting Your Senior Dog

Remember that your senior dog is not peeing on purpose; they may be embarrassed or confused, just as you are frustrated or concerned. With patience, compassion, and care, you can support your aging pet’s issues and let them experience their golden years dignified and comfortable.

### Sources and References

<sup>1</sup> [Veterinary Secrets, May 8, 2025](#)

<sup>2,5,7,8</sup> [WebMD, September 4, 2023](#)

<sup>3,4,6</sup> [Chewy, April 30, 2025](#)

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