

# Aging Myths That Can Make Your Dog Suffer Needlessly

Watch out for these old wives' tales, they can make aging much tougher than it needs to be on your pet. It's easy to write off certain symptoms as a natural part of aging, but to do so could rob your pet of years of vibrant health and comfortable living.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- As dog parents we know our best furry friends don't live nearly long enough
- The good news is that as your dog enters his senior years, you can do things to make the second half of his life as fit, fun and fabulous as the first half
- Around the age of 8 (younger for some large and all giant breed dogs), your dog's wellness and nutritional needs can require fine-tuning every four to six months
- If your dog seems physically uncomfortable, it's important not to assume it's just a natural part of aging
- Keeping your dog's aging body comfortable, feeding a diet that includes high-quality protein and insuring he gets regular physical and mental stimulation are just some of the ways you can help your dog sail through his golden years

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As devoted dog parents, we want our canine companions to be healthy, happy and with us for as long as possible. But what many people don't realize is that just as **puppies require extra care** and attention, so too do dogs in their golden years. Since our canine companions are considered seniors after the age of 7, it means we're given a unique and wonderful opportunity to make the second half of their lives as healthy and happy as the first half.

## 5 Tips to Keep Your Senior Dog Healthy and Happy

1. **Schedule twice-yearly veterinary visits** — Ideally, you should bring your pet to the vet at least twice a year, but this is especially true for senior and geriatric dogs.

Around the age of 8 (younger for some large and all giant breed dogs), your dog's wellness and nutritional needs can require fine-tuning every four to six months. In older pets it's very important to review weight, muscle tone, joint range of motion, diet, supplement protocol and exercise habits at least semi-annually.

The **senior pet wellness screen** is an excellent tool for early detection of changes in your dog's health so that treatment, including appropriate lifestyle changes, can begin immediately. Regular wellness screens allow your veterinarian to compare current test results with past results to check for changes that may need further investigation.

Ask your vet to perform a blood test to check your pet's internal organ health to make sure you are identifying possible issues early on. There's also a blood test that measures inflammatory fats you may want to consider. You can find more information at VRD Health.

2. **Take steps to keep your dog's aging body comfortable** — If your dog seems physically uncomfortable, it's important not to assume it's just a natural part of aging. You want to make sure she's not in pain, so a visit to your vet is in order. The sooner a health problem is diagnosed and treated, in most cases, the better the outcome.

Keeping your dog at a healthy weight and physically active will help control arthritis and degenerative joint disease as he ages. Chiropractic adjustments, water exercises and acupuncture can also provide enormous benefits in keeping dogs mobile in their later years.

There are a wide range of supplements that can be added to your dog's diet to help maintain healthy tendons, ligaments, joints and cartilage. These include:

- Glucosamine sulfate with MSM and eggshell membrane
- Omega-3 fats (krill oil)
- Ubiquinol
- Supergreen foods like spirulina and astaxanthin
- Natural anti-inflammatory formulas (herbs, proteolytic enzymes and nutraceuticals)

In addition, talk to your vet about Adequan injections, which can stimulate joint fluid very rapidly in pets with arthritis. Regular massage can help keep your senior dog's muscles toned and reduce the slackening that comes with aging. Massaged muscles are looser, which makes it easier for your pet to move around comfortably.

Massage also improves circulation, encourages lymphatic drainage and eases joint stiffness. If your dog has problems hearing or seeing, use safe, nontoxic odor cues such as essential oils to help him find his way around. Consider purchasing or building ramps for a dog who is having trouble getting into the car or up on the bed or a favorite chair.

3. **Don't skimp on high-quality protein in your dog's diet** — Contrary to what many pet parents and even veterinarians believe, aging pets need MORE protein than their younger counterparts, and the quality is of paramount importance. The more digestible and assimilable the protein is, and the higher the moisture content of the food, the easier it will be for aging organs to process.

The healthiest food for most pets, regardless of age, is whole, unprocessed and in its natural form — and this includes animal meat, which should be the foundation of your healthy dog's diet throughout his life. Foods that have not been dehydrated or processed are the most assimilable for the body.

Steer clear of any commercial pet food that contains a high percentage of fiber, no matter your dog's age or weight. The presence of fiber in commercial pet food is marketed to consumers as a healthy addition, very similar to how it's marketed when added to human food. But fiber in commercial dog food is typically nothing more than an inexpensive filler ingredient.

4. **Make sure your dog gets daily exercise** — Senior and even geriatric dogs still need daily exercise to maintain good health and a resilient frame. While it's true older dogs can't exercise or compete with the same intensity as their younger counterparts, they still need regular walks and other age-appropriate physical

activity. There are three types of strengthening exercises that can also be of tremendous help to aging canine bodies:

- Passive range-of-motion (PROM) exercises can benefit both incapacitated and physically healthy pets.
- Balance and proprioception (spatial orientation and movement) exercises help older pets remain flexible while also encouraging improved balance and physical stability.
- Targeted strengthening exercises are designed to work the big muscle groups that help with standing, walking and running.

Gentle stretching is also a great natural tool to improve the well-being and longevity of your dog.

5. **Give your dog regular opportunities for socialization and mental stimulation** — No matter how old your dog is she still needs regular social interaction with other pets and people. As is the case with humans as we age, if your four-legged family member doesn't stay active and involved in life, her world can become a confusing, scary place.

She needs regular exposure to other pets and people, but take care not to overstimulate her — short periods of socialization and playtime in controlled situations are ideal.

**Enriching your dog's environment** can help alleviate or stall the mental confusion and decline of cognitive function that often come with old age. In addition, sticking to a predictable daily routine can help reduce anxiety and mental uncertainty and treat release and food puzzle toys provide fun and mental stimulation. Supplements that can help improve mental decline in aging dogs include:

- SAME (S-adenosylmethionine)
- Commercial cognitive support products
- Medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs) such as coconut oil
- Also: jellyfish extracts, resveratrol (Japanese knotweed), ginkgo biloba, gotu kola and phosphatidylserine

Consult your holistic veterinarian for the right dose size for your dog.

## What's My Dog's Age in Human Years?

Every dog is different, but the following chart is a good guideline.

A Dog's Age in Human Years				
Dog's Age	Up to 20 lbs	21 to 50 lbs	51 to 90 lbs	Over 90 lbs
5	36	37	40	42
6	40	42	45	49
7	44	47	50	56
8	48	51	55	64
9	52	56	61	71
10	56	60	66	78
11	60	65	72	86
12	64	69	77	93
13	68	74	82	101
14	72	78	88	108
15	76	83	93	115
16	80	87	99	123
17	84	92	104	
18	88	96	109	
19	92	101	115	
20	96	105	120	
Ages in yellow = Senior      Ages in red = Geriatric				
Chart developed by Dr. Fred L. Metzger, DVM, State College, PA. – Courtesy of <a href="http://srdogs.com/">http://srdogs.com/</a>				

Sources and References

[PawCulture \(Archived\)](#)

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