

# Tips for caring for your senior pet

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Thanks to advances in veterinary medicine and pet care, dogs are living longer, healthier lives than ever before. For owners, this means they often end up dealing with the issues of old age more than they used to. When exactly your dog becomes senior depends on his size, breed and individual factors like activity level. Your veterinarian is the best person to tell you when you should consider your dog senior. Keep these tips in mind when caring for a senior pet.

## **1. Get a regular veterinary exam twice a year.**

An annual exam is sufficient for adult dogs, but senior dogs have more illnesses and chronic problems. Getting a check-up every six months is the best way to catch illnesses and disorders early, and begin treatment for maximum effectiveness.

## **2. Keep them active.**

Although senior pets will slow down as they age, the best way to keep them sharp and able is to keep them as active as possible. You may have to slow down the pace of runs and walks, but animals that don't exercise regularly, show their age more quickly than those that do.

## **3. Manage sensory failure.**

Like humans, senior pets begin to lose their sight, hearing and other senses as they age. Usually, this is a gradual process. Let your veterinarian know if there's a sudden change in one of these senses, it may be a sign of another problem. And take steps to manage your dog's sensory loss around the house by making sure things are where he expects them to be, like his dog dish, and get his attention in new ways if he's losing hearing.

## **4. Consider a special diet.**

As older pets become less active, it's important to adjust their diet so that they don't gain weight. Weight gain and dental disease are the leading factors for heart disease. You may also want to consider a special diet designed for senior dogs.

## **5. Manage your pet's pain.**

As chronic conditions like arthritis develop, your pet may feel pain that inhibits activity and causes discomfort. Consult your veterinarian about steps you can take or medications that may reduce the pain your pet feels. Reducing the pain will enable him to remain active longer, which in turn will promote and maintain good overall health.

## **6. Dealing with elimination problems.**

One unfortunately common problem faced by senior dogs is incontinence and other elimination problems. If you find that your dog is having trouble holding his urine the way he used to, or is wetting himself while he sleeps, consult your veterinarian. There are medications that may be appropriate, diet modifications or other changes that can improve the problem.

## **7. Get an Annual Dental.**

Dogs and cats don't show pain very well so it's up to us to notice any slight changes. Getting a dental cleaning yearly and any extractions that are needed is a good way to make your pet comfortable and happy. Most people say their old dog acts "like a puppy" after having a sore tooth removed.

