



Living with a senior dog has rewards as well as challenges that are a bit different than those encountered when living with a younger dog. This guide gives you advice on helping them live a happy senior life.



## TIP

Maintaining a good relationship with your veterinarian is critical when discussing care and quality of life for your dog in their senior years. Ideally, senior dogs should see the veterinarian every six months.

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## LIVING WITH A SENIOR DOG

Senior dogs have different care requirements than those of a younger dog. This fact probably doesn't come as a surprise to anyone. But how do you know when your dog is considered to be a senior?

It really depends on the individual dog. In general, giant breed dogs age faster than smaller breed dogs. A Great Dane is considered to be senior by roughly 5-6 years old whereas a Chihuahua would likely only be middle-aged then, and probably not considered a senior until 10-11 years. Large breed dogs fall somewhere in between. A Golden Retriever might be considered senior by 8-10 years of age. Genetics, nutrition, environment; all of these play a role in how fast your dog ages.

## SIX TIPS FOR LOOKING AFTER YOUR SENIOR DOG

Senior dogs have different care With good care—and good luck—our dogs can live a long and happy life. But as dogs age, their physical and behavioural needs change.

If you need to take care of a dog who is older, making subtle changes to your dog's routine, veterinary care and home environment can help them live a healthier and more comfortable life.

Here are the top six ways to care for aging dogs:

### 1. DON'T FORGET THE HEALTH CHECK-UPS

Make sure your senior dog has regular visits with your veterinarian. In fact, many veterinarians recommend that senior dogs should be examined twice a year, even more so if the dog has serious health issues. A thorough physical examination by your veterinarian may reveal health issues that can impact your pet's life and comfort level, such as dental disease, arthritis, heart disease, kidney disease and more.

## 2. NOTE ANY BEHAVIOUR CHANGES IN YOUR DOG

Watch your senior dog's behaviour carefully. This is important for all pets but doubly so for senior dogs. Changes in your dog's behaviour may be a symptom of disease. Watch specifically for changes in your dog's appetite and water consumption. Watch for changes in urinary and bowel habits and alterations in sleep routines. If your dog suddenly becomes irritable for no reason, it may be because they are in pain, having difficulty seeing, or having a hard time hearing properly.

Any changes in your senior pet's routines or behaviours should prompt a consultation with your veterinarian.

## 3. MAKE IT EASIER FOR YOUR DOG TO GET AROUND

Be aware that your senior dog may have pain caused by arthritis or other health issues that make it difficult for them to get around as well as they did when they were younger.

Consider providing ramps or stairs to allow your senior dog to access furniture or beds. Ramps on stairs may make it easier for your pet to get up and down the stairs and carpeting on slippery floors may help your dog gain their footing.

Your senior dog may need assistance getting into and out of the car as well.

## 4. CHOOSE AN AGE-APPROPRIATE DIET FOR YOUR DOG

Dietary requirements may change as your dog ages. It's important that you provide your senior dog a pet food that is age appropriate. Some older pets tend to gain weight and may need a diet for less active dogs.

Others may have difficulty holding their weight and may need a diet with a higher calorie content or better palatability. Older pets also may have diseases that can be manipulated and/or controlled at least partly through diet.

Your veterinarian can help you choose an appropriate diet for your senior dog based on your dog's individual nutritional requirements.

## 5. KEEP AN EYE ON THEIR DENTAL HEALTH

One of the most commonly diagnosed conditions in dogs, dental disease occurs in all breeds and sizes of canines. Left untreated, periodontal disease can lead to pain, tooth loss, and bacteria in the bloodstream that can damage internal organs. Home care such as tooth brushing and dental treats can help reduce tartar on the teeth, as can specialized foods meant to promote dental health. Once dental disease has developed, however, a fully anesthetised dental cleaning at the veterinary clinic is needed.

Start early, before severe periodontal disease develops.

## 6. MAKE SURE THEY ARE COMFORTABLE

Provide soft blankets and towels for your senior dog's bed. This will help him to rest easier and sleep better. There are even special orthopaedic beds made for senior dogs.

In addition to having a denser form to help cushion your senior dog's aging joints, some orthopaedic beds can be fitted with a heat and/or vibration source, which increases circulation and reduces stiffness — perfect for dogs with arthritis.

For further information on the management of your senior dogs health, please contact your vet or the team at The Lost Dogs Home Veterinary Hospital on (03) 8379 4498 or [vetclinic@dogshome.com](mailto:vetclinic@dogshome.com)



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