

SENIOR DOGS:

Special Concerns & Solutions

A greying muzzle is only one of what can be many changes a dog experiences as they reach their golden years. You can improve senior pets' quality of life by being aware of these common changes and taking action.

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Watch for

Limited Temperature Tolerance:

Pets' circulation can become less efficient in old age and they may experience loss of core fat and muscle, which can impact their ability to battle the cold.

How to help

- Limit senior dogs' exposure to cold by dressing them in a winter vest or coat that's easy-on and easy-off.
- Prevent overheating in warmer climates or hotter months with temperature-controlled environments, by limiting the dog's exposure to high heat times of day, and by offering ample opportunity for the dog to drink, rest, and access shade.

Watch for

"Slowing Down":

An older dog may be slow to rise, require extra effort in taking those first few steps, and no longer rush to greet you at the door. While some slowing down can be a normal progression of the brain and body, oftentimes senior pets may be experiencing underlying pain that should be evaluated by a veterinarian.

How to help

- Observe your senior dog's daily routine and movements carefully and describe the changes to your veterinarian. Ask your vet about pain medications. There are several medications for arthritis and other common conditions that can help your senior dog live their life to the fullest.
- With your veterinarian's help, explore complementary therapies such as heating pads, ice, or hydrotherapy.
- Enhance your senior dog's comfort with such additions as memory foam dog beds, non-slip flooring or rugs, raised food/water bowls, and more.
- Consider purchasing mobility devices such as ramps, stairs, or sling-type harnesses to help your senior dog.

Watch for

Worsening of Behavior Issues:

A dog's brain becomes less flexible and resilient to change as they age. They may become stressed more easily and no longer bounce back as readily as they did in the past. For instance, a senior dog who is uncomfortable when left alone can experience more anxiety and exhibit an increase in undesirable behavior, such as inappropriate elimination, when their family leaves.

How to help

- Always aim to address behavioral issues at their earliest signs, as they are likely to get worse if left untreated.
- Seek guidance from a Board-Certified Veterinary Behaviorist, Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist, Associate Applied Animal Behaviorist, or reward-based trainer working in partnership with your pet's Fear Free veterinary team.

Watch for

Cognitive Decline:

Similar to Alzheimer's in people, Canine Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome can cause disorientation, trigger a regression in house training, alter a dog's sleep and activity level, and impact their normal interactions. A dog with dementia may become increasingly agitated and on edge, or oppositely, may become more reclusive and withdrawn.

How to help

- Talk to your veterinarian about any significant change in your dog's behavior.
- Explore specially formulated senior diets and supplements under your veterinarian's guidance. These can potentially help combat the effects of aging.
- Ask your veterinarian about medications such as anxiolytics that might benefit a senior dog with dementia.
- Bring your senior pet for twice-yearly wellness visits compared to the commonly recommended once-a-year visits for adult dogs.