

SENIOR MOMENTS

Learn some new tricks to care for your old dog.

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Take good care of Fido in his senior years, and he can still be an active, happy dog.

We all want to slow the aging process for our dogs as well as ourselves, but of course there is no exact tool for doing this. Scientific research for a “fountain of youth” has pinpointed some of the culprits that affect how we and our animal companions age.

MANY AGE-RELATED HEALTH ISSUES CAN BE AVOIDED WITH A HOLISTIC APPROACH.

The major focus of research into the aging process has been placed on the destruction and damage of a system’s DNA, mostly by oxidation. Leading causes of oxidation are pollutants, toxins in the air, water and food supplies, disease, stress, hormone dysfunction, long-term consumption of a poor diet.

While some factors, such as genetics, cannot be changed, there are some “controllable” aspects of aging, which include eating a healthy diet that is free of additives, preservatives and fillers, and living a life that contains minimal stressors and plenty of exercise. Minimal vaccine protocols and conservative veterinary care with an emphasis on prevention are also important in helping to slow the effects of the aging process.

Many age-related health issues can be avoided or delayed with a holistic approach that includes nutrition, supplementation, an appropriate exercise regimen and preventive, routine veterinary care.

Age-related diseases include diabetes, chronic pancreatitis, chronic small bowel inflammation, obesity, Cushing’s disease, cancer and liver problems. The long-term use of steroids or certain other medications, as well as long-term consumption of

a poor (or biologically inappropriate) diet, excessive vaccines and insufficient exercise can increase a dog’s chances of developing one of these problems in his senior years. An overload of processed carbohydrates may contribute to many diseases, including pancreatitis and diabetes. Many holistic vets recommend a diet with minimal or moderate grain content and any grains that are included should be whole and unprocessed.

The first tangible signs of aging are slowing down during exercise and taking longer to get up. Some of the conditions include diabetes, kidney and liver problems, arthritis or other joint pain, obesity and dental disorders.

As a general guide for seniors and even for younger dogs, routine blood work and urinalysis can provide a useful snapshot of Fido’s general health and uncover any hidden problems before symptoms arise. Holistic vets recommend that vaccines should be minimal for senior pets (titer tests are useful in determining if most of them are even needed at all). Flea and tick preventives should be used only when necessary. Many vets recommend that the frequency of routine exams be increased from an annual to a semi-annual basis. Catching problems early can increase the success rate of treatment and

may allow treatment protocols to be less severe or invasive than if problems are ignored and allowed to progress.

If you’re a guardian to a senior dog, remain extra-vigilant about unusual behavior, health concerns or anything else that doesn’t seem quite right. And remember to give lots of love and hugs and gentle walks to ensure your senior Fido still feels like an important member of the family! **ff**

When to see the Vet

Warning signs that warrant a veterinary exam for any pet, but especially one in her senior years, include:

- Loss of appetite
- Excessive thirst
- A cough
- Lameness
- Incontinence
- Excessive appetite without weight gain
- Unusual growling/aggression, which can signify discomfort
- Unexplained vomiting or diarrhea
- Confusion or disorientation
- Vision and hearing problems
- Lethargy
- Sudden weight loss or gain

