



- The behaviour of some dogs might change as they get older. For example, they might seem disorientated or their sleep cycle might change. It's important to ask your vet to rule out any medical causes that could be causing these changes. There are also things that your vet may recommend to help them with their 'senior' moments.

- Although they may be less keen on a long run in the park, it's important to give your dog opportunities to keep active so they don't get bored – providing them with different toys and puzzle feeders can be a good way of keeping them entertained for longer.

- If your dog appears to be ignoring you, it could be because their hearing has deteriorated. Ask your vet to give them a check over.

Good company

- There are lots of ways to spend some quality time with your dog, even if they can't enjoy the long walks that they used to. For example, they may enjoy some gentle grooming, which also gives you the chance to check for lumps and bumps, or any places where they might be uncomfortable being touched.

- Make sure your dog can rest undisturbed when they want to – away from other members of the household who may be too boisterous.

Health checks

- There are some changes in our pet's health or behaviour that we may think are just down to 'old age', like being less playful or losing weight, but they might actually have a medical cause and need treatment. So it's important to be observant and take your dog to the vet if you notice a change in their behaviour or think something might not be quite right. Ask them as many questions as you like – no question is stupid – they're there to offer guidance.



- Older dogs may have poor hearing and/or sight, so try to avoid sudden loud noises, and make sure everyone knows to approach them quietly and slowly so that they don't get startled.

- Keep a close eye on your dog's weight – both weight loss and weight gain could be a sign that there's an underlying health issue, or may require a change in diet. Older dogs are more at risk of obesity, and it can cause serious health problems like heart disease, and make problems like osteoarthritis worse. It can also shorten a dog's lifespan. Vets can help you with a diet and exercise plan to keep your dog at the right weight.

- Senior dogs may need their nails trimming more often if they're exercising less. This is something your local vet can do for you.

- Remember to keep up to date with routine treatments and vaccinations – older dogs still need protection from disease and parasites.

Find out if your veterinary surgery runs clinics especially for senior pets and their owners.



Senior dogs

Helping your older dog stay happy and healthy



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On average, dogs live for around 12 years, although many live for much longer and individual animals age at different rates.

There is no one perfect way to care for your pet as they grow older. Every dog and every situation is different, but regular health checks are really important for ageing animals so health problems can be detected as early as possible. This can help prevent and manage disease, can be less costly and will help give your pet a better quality of life.



Helping your senior dog to stay active, healthy and happy



Home comforts for older dogs

- Older dogs prefer to have a predictable routine so try to minimise stress by avoiding too much change.
- They may need more rest, so make sure they have somewhere quiet and out of the way where they won't be disturbed by other pets or visitors. A soft, cosy bed away from draughts will help keep them warm and will be comfortable for aching joints.
- They may also need to go to the toilet more frequently, so make sure they have regular access to their toilet area. A loss of housetraining or changes in how often or how easily they find going to the toilet is something that your vet will be able to give you advice on.
- They may need to wear a coat to protect them from the cold weather and rain.
- Make sure everything your dog needs is easily accessible so they don't have to go too far to find their water, food, toys and bed.
- Smooth, slippery floors can be difficult for older dogs to walk on, so try putting a rug or carpet down to give them something to grip and help them get around more easily.



Food and drink

- As they get older, a dog's dietary requirements change – it varies with breed and size – but around the age of seven years old, your dog might benefit from moving onto a diet designed specifically for senior dogs. These diets provide the right nutrients and take into account that older dogs may be less active and using fewer calories. Always ask your vet about changing your dog's diet, and make any changes gradually to avoid stomach upsets. Your vet will also advise on whether your dog might benefit from having smaller, more frequent meals.



- Always make sure your dog has constant access to fresh, clean drinking water and monitor how much they are eating and drinking – mention any changes to your vet as there could be an underlying health reason.
- If you have other, younger dogs in the house, make sure your senior dog can access their own food without having to compete with their more agile housemates!



Normal behaviour

- Although they may be slowing down, senior dogs still need regular exercise! Not only will this help stop them putting on weight but it gives them a chance to explore and meet other dogs and people. They may need shorter walks though – little and often – and you may need to lift them in or out of the car or get a ramp.
- Slowing down a little with old age is normal, but if your dog seems stiff or has trouble with things like getting out of bed and going upstairs, talk to your vet as there may be treatments that can help. Some pets may suffer in silence, so try to be observant.

For more information visit: www.rspca.org.uk/dogs