

Old



Senior Dog 101

01

PART ONE

Dogs Rule

Adapted from a podcast with Dr. Fred Metzger, DVM

6-PART SERIES

*YOUR BEST FRIEND is a little slower on her walks, but she still loves to play. She sleeps more and her joints ache a bit, but she is as happy as she was the day you first met. She has become a little grey in the face, but she never complains. She is a member of an elite crowd and you wouldn't have it any other way because you know ... **Old Dogs Rule.***

To help celebrate the joy senior dogs bring to our lives, we will be publishing a six-part series "Old Dogs Rule" (compliments of the Canine Health Foundation) which will cover many aspects of caring for senior dogs. We hope you will enjoy!

Old Dogs Rule: Senior Dog 101

Thanks to advances in veterinary medicine, today's dogs are living longer, healthier lives. It is estimated that nearly 40% of veterinary patients are classified as "seniors." Just like people, dogs who reach senior or geriatric status have special health care needs.

Senior and Geriatric Defined

According to Dr. Fred Metzger, a diplomate of the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners, and a frequent lecturer on geriatric medicine, classifying a dog as a senior or as geriatric, depends a lot on the breed and his weight. "Dogs don't live as long as we do, so unfortunately, they go through the aging process a lot quicker than humans do. The key is trying to keep them in the younger stages as long as possible and making the change to geriatric very slowly."

The Metzger Animal Hospital Age Chart was developed by Dr. Metzger and takes into account the age and the weight of a dog. (See Chart 1) A larger breed dog like a St. Bernard will progress through the stages from adult to senior to geriatric patient much more quickly than a smaller breed dog like a Poodle. Generally speaking, though, most veterinarians consider a dog a senior at age eight and geriatric at age 12.

Importance of Senior Dog Well Visits

"The number one thing you can do to help your older dog is to have annual visits to the vet," said Dr. Metzger. During these visits the veterinarian will draw blood, conduct a urinalysis, and do a thorough

physical exam. By establishing a baseline — what is "normal" for your dog, the veterinarian is able to know more quickly if something seems out of the ordinary and may require additional testing.

Blood work and a urinalysis can alert a veterinarian to health issues such as diabetes, kidney disease, and hypothyroidism. A physical exam focuses on checking a dog's teeth, listening to her heart and lungs, palpating the abdomen, and checking her eyes. Each part of a senior wellness exam can help a veterinarian understand how quickly that particular patient is aging.

Another important part of a senior wellness exam is checking the lumps and bumps that older dogs have on their skin. In many cases these can be lipomas, benign fatty tumors, but some can also be cancerous tumors. Dr. Metzger recommends that veterinarians take fine needle aspirations of the lumps found on older dogs. This allows cells to be collected and viewed under a microscope. The procedure is painless and most dogs feel no discomfort.

"A great physical exam combined with laboratory work is the number one way a person can detect disease early in their dog," said Metzger.

Common Health Concerns for Older Dogs

"Aging to me is a natural disease," said Dr. Metzger. "We're never going to stop aging, but we want to change the rate of aging and with nutrition, diagnostic testing, wellness visits and weight management, we can slow the transition from senior to geriatric dog."

Heart, kidney, and liver disease are all health concerns that tend to be more prevalent in older dogs. Senior and geriatric dogs can also be



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impacted by osteoarthritis and cognitive dysfunction. Environmental factors such as living in a house where people smoke can negatively impact older dogs. Genetics also play a factor in how a dog ages. Some breeds are more predisposed to specific health concerns than others. A dog's immune system is also impacted by aging and may not function as well as it did when the dog was younger.

Overall, many of the health conditions humans deal with as they age are mirrored in dogs. By making annual senior dog wellness visits a priority dogs can live not just longer, but live well.



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PREVENT TREAT & CURE



Lab's Unlimited Live Wire MH MNH9, "Sugar."



How old is your dog in people years?

age	weight				
	1-20	20-50	50-90	>90	
1	7	7	8	9	
2	13	14	16	18	
3	20	21	24	26	
4	26	27	31	34	adult
5	33	34	38	41	
6	40	42	45	49	
7	44	47	50	56	
8	48	51	55	64	senior
9	52	56	61	71	
10	56	60	66	78	
11	60	68	72	86	
12	64	69	77	93	
13	68	74	82	101	
14	72	78	88	108	
15	76	83	93	115	geriatric
16	80	87	99	123	
17	84	92	104	131	
18	88	96	109	139	
19	92	101	115		
20	96	105	120		
21	100	109	126		
22	104	113	130		
23	108	117			
24	112	120			
25	116	124			



Beckylou's Bayou Beamer MH MNH9, "Beamer."