Age-related Behavior

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Consider the following scenario:
Your old dog has never been overly fond of children anyway. He has a dental problem that causes him pain, and arthritis, which makes him unable to move fast. A child comes running up to him and when he normally would just walk away from the child, he is unable to move fast enough, so he snaps at the child.

Is it normal age-related behavior?
Our pets get a little "crotchety" as a natural course of getting older. Older dogs, in particular, can become less tolerant of changes in daily routines.

Some normal age-related behaviors can be modified with the same training techniques you would use on a younger pet, but they will entail some work on your part. Keep in mind that your old friend's reaction time will naturally be slower.

Common age-related behaviors

- **Separation anxiety.** Older dogs are more sensitive to changes in routine such as your absence or being left alone. This may cause behaviors such as destructiveness, whining or house soiling. For more information, see our article on Separation Anxiety.
- **Decreased appetite.** Older pets tend to eat less, which often means they are not getting the nutrition their bodies need. A vitamin supplement formulated especially for older dogs like Vita-MinTabs Senior will help ensure your older pet gets the necessary vitamins and minerals his body needs for optimum health. Also, a gravy-like substance added to your dog's food will help boost his appetite and provide additional nutrients.
- **Increased sleeping and lower activity levels.**
- **Aggression towards people.** The encounter with the child in the beginning scenario is an example of this.
- **Increase in vocalizations.** This may be a result of failing vision or hearing problems or may be part of separation anxiety.
- **Noise sensitivity.** Thunderstorms or fireworks may make your older dog nervous.

Factors contributing to these behavior changes include decline in organ function, decline in hearing and vision, and age-related diseases.

Cognitive Disorder (CD): A more serious problem...
The natural slowing of body processes and the decreased blood and oxygen to the brain can lead to a more serious disorder known as a cognitive disorder or CD.

Some brain changes that physicians see in Alzheimer's patients are similar to the brain changes that veterinarians see in CD patients.

Signs that the situation may be more serious:

- Decreased reaction to stimuli, which you may notice as your old dog not recognizing you, old friends or family members.
- Confusion or disorientation. Your dog may get lost in his own back yard or get trapped in corners or behind furniture.
- Pacing and being awake all night or a change in sleeping patterns.
- Decreased attentiveness or staring into space.
- Increased irritability.

Although there is no approved CD medication for cats, the use of medications for CD has been shown to be very effective in dogs.

The drug Selegiline or L-deprenyl, (brand name Anipryl), although not a cure, has been shown to alleviate many of the symptoms. The dog will have to be given it daily for life, but so far, a lot of dog owners have said that it has made a dramatic improvement in their dog's behavior and overall condition. Owners also report that their dogs really seem to be enjoying life

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again.

As with all medications, there are side effects, and dogs with certain conditions should not be given Anipryl. Dogs on Mitaban for external parasites should not receive Anipryl. Your veterinarian will discuss the possible side effects with you.

If you are concerned that your pet may be experiencing behaviors that go beyond normal aging, talk to your veterinarian; he/she may be able to recommend a treatment that could enhance the quality of life for your loyal companion.

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