

## Age-related Health Conditions

*Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff*

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Here is a brief list of some of the more common health conditions your old friend may need help with as he enters his golden years.

### Urinary incontinence

Defined as not being able to control the expelling of urine, this can take the form of dribbling after urination, leaking urine when sleeping, or urinating small amounts all day long. In older dogs, incontinence may be caused by:

- Not being able to get up "in time."
- A growth or mass that blocks the urethra.
- Stone formation in the bladder caused by increased alkalinity of the urine.
- Hormone responsive incontinence - Most common in older, spayed females when resting, sleeping, or with sudden excitement, this condition has to do with the lack of muscle control around the urethra and the inability to "hold it."
- Lack of adequate exercise or access to the yard.

To deal with incontinence at home, you may want to bathe the skin around the urethral opening to help prevent urine scalding from leakage. To protect your home and furniture, consider products like [Drs. Foster & Smith Female Pet Bloomers](#), [Drs. Foster & Smith Male No-Leak Wraps](#), or [Drs. Foster & Smith Piddle Pads®](#). And be sure to have a bottle of [Drs. Foster & Smith Urine Power Away](#) on hand to prevent staining and to keep your home smelling clean and fresh.

Whatever you do, don't punish your older dog for any "accidents" she makes. This

is not a behavior issue, it is a medical one, and your pet cannot control its effects. Take her out more often, do what you can to prevent odor and stain problems in your home, and understand it's certainly not something she can control.

### **Arthritis or stiff joints**

Many pets - like many people - suffer from arthritis and other bone and joint problems as they age. Because there is no cure for degenerative arthritis (also called osteoarthritis), treatment is usually aimed at relieving the pain, providing comfort, and trying to slow down the degenerative process.

If your dog shows signs of arthritis (limping, difficulty getting up after resting, stiffness) we recommend that you read our article: [Arthritis: Definition, Signs, and Treatments](#). It will help you understand the signs of arthritis, and what you can do to help your pet live a happier, more pain-free life.

### **Kidney disease**

Reduced blood flow to the kidneys may cause scarring or other changes that make your pet's filtering function less efficient. This can lead to toxin and waste buildup in the blood stream, which may then lead to conditions such as mental dullness, ulcers of the gastrointestinal tract, loss of appetite, vomiting, and even death.

### **Liver disease**

Liver disease can be caused by any number of factors, including viral or bacterial infections, long term feeding of table scraps, ingestion of toxins, to the natural deterioration of the liver. Since the liver is a major player in breaking down the body toxins, a malfunctioning liver can lead to body system failure. Age-related liver diseases include hepatitis, an inflammation of liver tissue and cirrhosis, shrinkage and scarring of the liver. Any liver disease may prevent the liver from performing effectively.

### **Formation of lumps or masses**

In simple terms, veterinarians refer to any progressive unnatural growth of cells in the body as a neoplasia, which may be benign (cells which reproduce only slightly more rapidly than normal cells) or malignant (cancerous - cells that undergo uncontrollable growth and spreading).

As in humans, neoplasia is more common in older pets and requires testing to determine if lumps or masses are benign or malignant. See your veterinarian if you feel new lumps on your pet, or if any lumps or masses feel as though they are getting larger.

### **Heart disease**

As they get older, many smaller dogs are predisposed to myocardial infarction (a deadening of the heart muscle caused by "hardening of the arteries") and larger dogs to atrial fibrillation (a persistent interruption of the normal heart rhythm that is often fatal).

### **Sight or hearing loss**

With progressing age, many pets lose some or all of their hearing and their sight. While there is little you can do from a medical standpoint for these conditions, you can make your pet's life as comfortable and full of love as possible. Be sure children are aware of your pet's condition and tell them not to "surprise" the dog by coming up suddenly behind them or startling them in any way.

### **Checking up on your pet**

The care you give to your pet throughout his life is a large determining factor in how he ages. Feed him a nutritious diet, offer proper vitamin, mineral and other nutritional supplementation, and help him maintain the right weight throughout his life and your pet is more likely to age gracefully.

As your pet ages, keep a closer eye on his movements, behavior, and habits. Look for the signs of aging, such as loss of appetite, excessive sleeping, irritability, changes in his gait, weakness, and incontinence, and be prepared to treat him with a little more love and care than ever before.

An annual Geriatric Checkup with your veterinarian will help identify medical problems early while they may still be treatable, and may help you prevent other problems that could shorten your pet's life.

Most importantly, pay a little more attention to your dog as he gets older. You are most likely to be the one to notice changes in behavior, eating habits, and activity levels and can take whatever action is necessary to ensure your loyal companion enjoys the best quality of life possible in his final years.

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