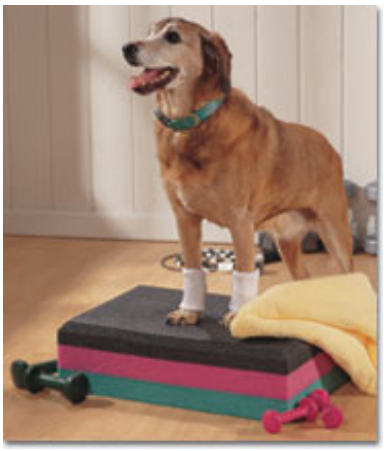
Exercise and Older Pets

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Senior Dog Care: Exercise Keeps Joints Limber to Reduce Pain and Slow Dog Arthritis Old Pets Still Need Exercise



All of a sudden one day you notice the shining white creeping into your older dog's muzzle. He steps a little more carefully now but most times seems to be just as energetic. Or your cat does not jump up as readily, but is just as fascinated with the birds outside the window. So what's the problem? Nothing - yet. If your dog or cat is over the magic year of seven, though, now is the perfect time to get him into a regular program of exercise.

Inside your aging pet, metabolism is slowing, organ function (including brain function) is slowing, and the response to disease via the immune system is not what it was when he was a youngster. In addition, senior dogs may need to urinate more frequently and thus need more walks.

It is very easy to watch our senior dogs or cats lie around snoozing. They look so content and they have done so much for us. But you would be surprised what good a little exercise will do your senior - how it can improve quality of life and perhaps even slow the progression of aging, including the advancement of dog arthritis.

Exercise stimulates all tissues as it increases blood flow. Tissues become oxygenated and toxins are removed from them more readily. In addition, exercise helps bowel function enormously. This is especially important in older pets.

Without adequate use, muscles weaken and atrophy. This becomes a vicious cycle - as exercise decreases, the muscles weaken and the less they can do.

Making sure your senior gets enough exercise may seem like a difficult task, but try one or more of the following tips:

- If you choose outside exercise, make sure the weather is suitable for the type of exercise you're doing. Remember that dogs can suffer from heatstroke (and frostbite) and you must especially be careful about older dogs. Bring along small chewy treats to reward good behavior, especially if you'll be encountering other pets or traffic.
- Walking is excellent. Start out with 10-15 minutes a day and slowly increase to 1-2 hours, three times a week.
- Spend more interactive playtime with your older pet. More walks, more games of fetch, and more tug-o-war. You both will benefit.
- The pain of sore joints may be what's keeping your senior from wanting to exercise. If your older pet suffers from dog arthritis or other joint pain, you may wish to try a glucosamine supplement like Joint Care Primary Plus 1+, or Joint Care 3.
- Good nutrition is more important than ever in an aging pet and especially one getting regular exercise. Make sure to provide your senior with a high-quality food. Although aging pets generally have a more difficult time gaining weight, care must be taken not to let him get obese, either.
- If you haven't already, get your senior on a good vitamin and mineral supplement.
- Although it is not possible or desirable for everyone, a younger companion for your pet may be what he needs to get him back into action. It is surprising how young a senior will act with a puppy or kitten around!

Exercises Especially For Dogs

- Moderate walking twice a day.
- Swimming with your dog or tossing a flexible toy, a ball, or one that floats on the water for him to fetch. Swimming is especially good for arthritic dogs since it is a low-impact activity - and that means less jarring of joints.
- Fetching on land with a Soft Flex Bumpy Ball, or a favorite toy.

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- If you prefer inside games, try hide and seek. A human-canine form of hide and seek is an effective and fun way for your dog to use his scenting abilities and it's great exercise. It also promotes that special bond between owner and dog. Best of all, your dog is always "it" and likes it!

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