How You Can Best Take Care of All Your Senior Dog's Needs

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Approximately fifty million dogs live with us in our country today. Millions of these dogs are over the age of seven and that number increases as we get older and canine healthcare gets more sophisticated.

An older dog doesn't need much more care than his younger counterpart. Depending on his condition though, he may need different food, prescription medication, or nutritional supplements. With a keen eye towards subtle changes and the care he is used to, you can help his golden years remain happy and healthy.

Head/Brain: A senior dog's happiness is paramount to his overall health. Make sure his attitude and alertness are at their peak with needed attention to such things as exercise and play. However, keep an eye out for changes such as disorientation, confusion, change in sleep habits, loss of housetraining and other signs that may indicate senility, which may be treatable with prescription medications. Be sure to mention changes to your veterinarian.

Nose (Sense of smell): An adult dog's sense of smell is about 100X more powerful than our own. Senses wane, though, as your dog gets older, so he may not smell his food as well, and may not want to eat as he once did. Try adding broth or other flavoring to his food or warm it up in the microwave to bring out the food's odor and he may be more eager to eat.

Eyes: Senior eyes may not see as well as before. You might notice what you think is a cataract, which is actually a discoloration of the eye called nuclear sclerosis that occurs as your dog gets older. Cataracts can severely impact vision; nuclear sclerosis does not. It is especially important to keep seniors' eyes clean by using aneye cleaning solution.

Ears: Many senior dogs may not hear as they did when they were younger and may seem disobedient as a result. Also, it is essential to keep your senior's ears clean, since a senior may not be able to fight off infections as easily as a younger dog. Follow a regular ear cleansing protocol - why not make it part of your grooming routine?

Dental: We can't say enough about oral health for seniors. You'll notice your dog's teeth are not as sharp as they once were, but be wary of foul breath, tartar buildup, tooth loss, or red gums which can mean gum disease. Easy ways to help includehard treats and rawhide, and a regular dental program that includes brushing teeth and visits to the veterinarian.

Heart: Some older dogs are at risk for developing diseases of the heart. Know the signs so you can get early treatment from your veterinarian. Some common signs include weakness, reduced exercise tolerance, irregular or rapid breathing, coughing, lack of appetite, weight loss, abdominal swelling or a fainting episode.

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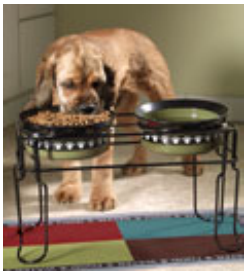
Digestive System: Some seniors don't eat enough (see Sense of Smell, above); others have a propensity for obesity. Foods formulated for seniors with higher fiber and lower fat may help. Remember, though, that an older dog's digestive tract can be delicate, so if you change your pet's food, do it slowly.

Joints: Help maintain your dog's healthy joints with supplements containing ingredients such as glucosamine and chondroitin, and keep up some form of exercise. Other things that can assist your dog's joints include ramps, elevated feeders, and an orthopedic bed.

Skin and Haircoat: A senior's skin and haircoat tend to be dry. Make sure he has the right ratio of fatty acids to help keep his skin healthy.

Feet: Pets that chew or lick at their feet could have allergies, or be bored. Constant licking causes the foot to be moist all of the time, leading to hair loss, lesions, and infections. Use a product like No-Chew Deterrent Spray to discourage licking, and then try to determine the cause.

We Recommend		
Drs. Foster and Smith Dry Senior Dog Food	Ultralight Bifold Ramps	Drs. Foster and Smith Eye Clens® Eye Wash and Eye Pads
Drs. Foster and Smith Ear Care Kit	Dental SmartBones	Drs. Foster and Smith Dental Care System
 Drs. Foster and Smith Bridgeport Stoneware Feeders	Cosequin®	Drs. Foster and Smith Padded Harness

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