

Teach an Old Dog New Tricks - The Best Care for Your Senior Pet

Would you be surprised to learn that your senior pet needs to see their veterinarian MORE often, not less? It's true! As our pet's age, they are more susceptible to illness from both infectious and metabolic disease. Your older friend has been with you for a long time and deserves to be as healthy and comfortable as possible during his or her golden years. Working together with your veterinarian, you can achieve this goal.

Pets, especially seniors, are great at hiding signs of pain and illness which is why your veterinarian is such an important part of your pet's wellness team. Your vet can detect subtle changes in your loved one that may otherwise go unnoticed in their early stages.

Please don't just assume that your furry friend is just "getting old". Medical advances have made it possible for us to help you give your senior pet a much better quality of life. Talk to a high-quality veterinarian today. If your veterinarian doesn't seem interested in senior pet care, find one who is.

In addition, speak up for your pet! Tell your veterinarian about any changes you've observed, including:

1. Weight, appetite or elimination habits.
2. Behavior
3. Skin and Coat
4. Mobility, Difficulty climbing stairs or jumping, Stiffness
5. Drinking/urinating more frequently
6. Bad breath/swollen gums
7. Changing hair coat, skin or new lumps or bumps.

There is so much we can do to help your pet live the longest, happiest, healthiest life possible!

In addition to making certain your senior pet is visiting the veterinarian at least one to two times yearly, there are some modifications you can make in his daily activities to improve his quality of life.

1. **Get Movin':** Walk every day if possible. Have more vigorous play sessions when possible. The more we move, the healthier our bones, joints and muscles are and the more, pain free mobility we have for a longer period of time.
2. **Take a Class:** You CAN teach an old dog new tricks! Learning doesn't stop just because we age. Your senior pet would LOVE to spend some quality time with you learning a new language (positive reinforcement obedience, clicker training) or a new sport (agility, flyball, tracking). Think of all the fun you'll have!
3. **Field Trips:** Get out and about. If they are friendly and well-behaved (and, if not, consult a positive reinforcement obedience instructor), take them everywhere you possibly can with you. Children's sports, show and tell, pet stores, some lawn and garden or home stores allow pets, visiting with neighbors, talk to your boss about a "bring your pet to work day".
4. **Think Environmental Enrichment:** Our doggies get bored waiting all day for us to come home. Feed using a food puzzle, not a dish. Use treat puzzles too. When you're home, you can teach your pet to "help" by retrieving things. Dogs can be taught to retrieve shoes, keys, blankets, tissues and can even help bring in the groceries. A well-trained dog just loves to "help".
5. **Therapy Dog:** Most senior pets LOVE people. You'd be surprised how fun the training is to certify your dog as a therapy dog - there's no age limit!! :). When certified, you can pick a program that suits you both, from visiting children in the hospital, detention center or schools to visiting the elderly in nursing homes.

So get out there, teach that old dog some new tricks (and I'm not just talking about Fido).