

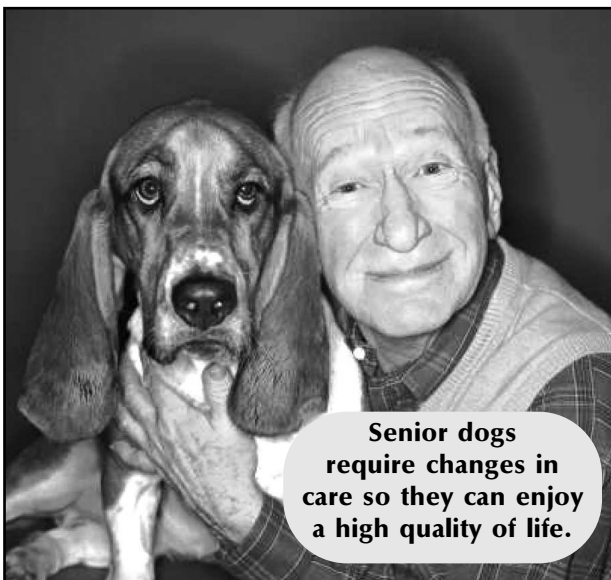
Help senior dogs maintain high quality of life

Man's best friend often joins him as a puppy and accompanies him throughout his life.

Dogs mature at faster rates than human beings. While many have heard the rule that every human year equals seven dog years, the reality isn't so cut and dry. Size and breed play roles in determining a dog's age equivalent. According to the pets division of WebMD, the first year of life for a dog may be roughly equivalent to 15 years for a human. Dog food manufacturer Purina says that by its 10th year, a small, medium and large dog is 56, 60 and 66 in human years, respectively.

Thanks to advancements in veterinary care, dogs are living longer lives. Pet owners may have to adapt their care and exercise regimen to accommodate the changes in their pets. Senior dogs show some distinctive signs of aging that are on par with what humans experience. These include cloudy eyes, gray hair (in dogs this starts around the muzzle and spreads to other areas of the face, head and body) and loose skin. Elderly dogs also may begin to experience stiffness in their legs, particularly the hind quarter. To ensure a dog's quality of life remains consistent through its senior years, pet owners can take the following steps.

- Have a candid conversation with the vet. Make an



Senior dogs require changes in care so they can enjoy a high quality of life.

appointment with your dog's veterinarian to discuss a plan for making the dog comfortable and happy as the animal ages. Your vet can make recommendations regarding which type of foods the dog should eat and how much exercise it needs.

- Make accommodations based on disability. A dog may develop arthritis or another degenerative disease that causes a general slowing down. Dogs may not be

able to walk as far or play games as long as they used to. Some dogs also struggle to find a comfortable position when attempting to lie down or sit. Dogs also may have difficulty getting up and down stairs. As a result, aging dogs may need some extra help getting around. Invest in ramps and ergonomic pet beds and bowls to help ease aging dogs' discomfort.

- Examine and modify dogs' diets. Food needs can change as dogs become less active. Keeping dogs lean can prevent a host of illnesses. PetMD says more than half of American pets are overweight, and obesity can contribute to disease and put stress on pets' joints. Let your vet be your guide in choosing high-quality, low-calorie foods and treats. He or she may also recommend supplementation to alleviate stiffness and address other needs.

- Keep up the exercise. Exercise helps slow down the degeneration of joints and helps keep dogs healthy. Continue walks, but pare them down if your dog can't keep up. Swimming is a low-impact exercise that is great for senior dogs. Look for a dog swim vest, which can help the animal maintain some buoyancy.

- Be patient. Elderly dogs will need extra care, and that can be taxing. Exercise patience and you will see that the pampering and extra attention will help prolong your dog's happiness through its golden years. —Metro

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