

## Sr. Dog Adoption

**Make a newly adopted senior dog part of your family.**

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Healthcare Costs In 1997, Karen Mickley of New York City adopted 12-year-old Cocker Spaniel Tucker, whom she ranks as the most important experience of my life. Tucker lived to the ripe old age of 18, but he had some expensive health problems, including recurring dental problems and heart disease that required intermittent hospitalization. Adopting an older dog needing expensive veterinary care is compassionate and admirable, but assess your finances realistically before you take on the responsibility.

If good health is a top criterion as you're looking for a senior dog, Paul Bannow, DVM, of Sunset Veterinary Hospital in San Francisco, suggests that, as your first step, you check potential adoptees for visible signs of health problems. Is the coat full and clean? Teeth clean? Any limping? Any lumps? Use your nose, too; unusual odors can mean trouble.

Next, talk to shelter staff. Shelters and rescue agencies vary widely in veterinary care spending. Ask what treatments and vaccinations, if any, the dog has received. Find out whether he has been tested for heartworm (treatment is expensive). If you want to rescue a purebred, research breed-characteristic health problems before you check out potential adoptees. This way, you can ask the rescue staff informed questions, such as whether a Cocker Spaniel suffers from recurring eye infections or a German Shepherd Dog from hip problems.

Then, schedule a veterinary examination soon after adoption. With recent protocols recommending basic boosters (except rabies) every three years instead of annually, you may want to consider getting titer tests done to determine your new dog's need for vaccinations.

Typical costs for a veterinary checkup include: nose-to-tail exam, \$40 to \$60; blood panel, \$80 to \$125; urinalysis, \$25 to \$40; and heartworm test, \$35 to \$45. Investing upfront in healthcare is money well spent. For example, promptly treating a urinary tract infection can prevent it from becoming chronic and help the dog avoid housetraining mistakes.

Consider buying pet health insurance to cover future expenses, and stay alert to special programs or offers that help with healthcare costs. Adoption through some rescue organizations includes a limited period of free pet health insurance, and some shelters offer financial help to adopters over 60.