

Welcome Home

How to make a newly adopted senior dog part of your family.

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Posted: Fri Jul 2 00:00:00 PDT 2004

Both Contreras and Fine advise giving an older dog a place of his own where he can get away from noisy activity or other pets if he's tired or if play gets too rough. Be patient: Don't expect love and rollicking play at first sight. Give your animals the necessary space and time to get used to each other.

Nutrition and Exercise Ultimately, your dog should have food appropriate to his age and condition. However, a sudden change in diet can cause housetraining mistakes. During the first week after your senior has moved in, continue giving him the same brand of food he was eating. Then, working with your veterinarian, plan a diet that addresses the dog's age and any health issues such as flaky skin, excess weight, or arthritis. Buy the best food you can afford. Change food gradually, incrementally substituting 10 percent of the new food at each meal. Give two meals per day rather than one; older dogs do best on that schedule.

Proper nutrition and exercise will keep an older dog slim and can even help extend his life. Be careful about doing too much too soon, though. During the first walks or play sessions, watch to see if he gets out of breath. Note stiffness, also, especially upon rising. Aside from age, being in a shelter may have put him out of shape. To help your senior dog build strength slowly and safely, take several short, moderately paced walks per day rather than fewer but longer walks, and use short-distance throws when playing fetch. To increase his comfort, consider massage and a glucosamine and chondroitin supplement.

So much has been said about witnessing the miracle of the birth of puppies. Adopting a senior dog, however, brings its own kind of miracle: the re-birth of trust and well-being in a dog that was formerly confused and neglected. There is little that compares to knowing that you have played a part in such a miracle.