

Own a Senior Dog?

Check out five tips for living with an older dog.

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If you decide to adopt a senior dog, or if your own dog has reached old age, follow these tips to help make your remaining years together a little more golden.

1. See a doctor

Knowing about your dog's physical health is essential, says William Fortney, DVM, head of small-animal care at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kan. He suggests a full examination by a veterinarian, including a physical and blood work. "If there are problems, it is best to know that up front. Dogs get cancer, too. They can become senile. Their eyesight can go. The same things that happen to people as they get older happen to dogs." Advances in veterinary science are helping dogs live longer, healthier lives, but owners must pay attention to their dogs and seek medical help to address age-related problems and diseases.

2. Show understanding

For adopted senior dogs, adjustment time varies widely; lasting anywhere from a few hours to several weeks and the new owner must be tolerant during this period. Flexibility is also important for owners whose dogs' needs and abilities change with age, says Teri Goodman of The Senior Dog Project. "The most wonderful aspect is that if you remain open to it, a relationship with a dog can change and grow and take on new, deeper dimensions even after you've been together for years."

3. Get a makeover

Senior dogs, especially adopted ones, often do not look their best. Good grooming, clean teeth (brushed three times a week), and trimmed nails make for a happier and often healthier dog.

4. Exercise in moderation

Running or jumping may be inappropriate for a dog that could have arthritis, heart disease, or other age-related ailments. However, a good walk or even swimming can boost a dog's spirits and physical well being.

5. Watch what he eats

Obesity is the most common ailment for dogs. However, many adopted senior dogs have been malnourished. As dogs age, protein becomes more important, so don't cut corners on dog's food.

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