

## On the Offense for Senior Dogs

### Four proactive health strategies to implement now.

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Work with your veterinarian to provide preventive health care. Annual or semi-annual exams and consultations with your veterinarian will help prevent and detect senior-specific health problems. A thorough physical examination can identify abnormalities of the skin, teeth, heart, lungs, and other body systems. If you find a lump or bump between exams, however, don't wait for your dog's next appointment; the bump may be cancerous.

When scheduling a routine exam, ask for additional time to consult your veterinarian about your senior dog's health issues. Ask how to stay alert to signs of such typical behavioral issues as separation anxiety and phobias, as well as canine Alzheimer's disease, also known as cognitive dysfunction syndrome. Discuss quality-of-life issues related to the progression of chronic diseases, such as arthritis, diabetes, or congestive heart failure.

If your senior dog takes any long-term medications, such as NSAIDs for arthritis, thyroid medication, or phenobarbital for seizures, ask your veterinarian about possible long-term side effects. He or she can perform blood tests to check for an effective, nontoxic medication level.

Ask for annual blood and urine panels starting when your dog is 8 to 10 years old. This can help with early detection of such conditions as kidney failure, diabetes, thyroid disease, and other hormonal disorders.

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