

Signs of Old Age in Dogs

The common signs of animal aging.

Jon Geller, DVM

Q. I have a 14-year-old Australian Shepherd/Lab mix. He has some health issues typical of aging. His sight is somewhat compromised, he has bad breath and most worrisome are his hind legs, which seem to fold beneath him occasionally. We've had to restrict his access to the stairs at times because he can go up the stairs without incident, however, he falls when descending. He is currently on Rimadyl. My question is this: How do I know if he's in pain? My choice is not to intervene with invasive diagnostics or treatments due to his age, but I don't want him to feel anymore pain.

A. Your 14-year-old Aussie sounds like many other geriatric canines with dental disease, impaired vision, deafness and arthritis.

Fortunately, there are excellent treatments for osteoarthritis. In addition to non-steroidal inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as Rimadyl, there's a morphine-like drug called tramadol, which has minimal side effects. Prescription diets with nutraceutical additives, such as glucosamine and chondroitin can also help. Other non-prescription medications are unproven but may benefit some dogs.

Finally, a high-quality orthopedic dog bed is very important. Remember that exercise is not beneficial to dogs with arthritis, so allow your old guy to enjoy his sedentary lifestyle. Ask your veterinarian about tramadol, a prescription diet and other options.

Best, Jon Geller, DVM

- Get More Advice From Dr. Geller -