

Cutting-Edge Care for Older Dogs

Advances in treatment of 15 geriatric diseases for dogs parallel those for humans.

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PainRed flags: Subtle changes in behavior, including sleeping more, eating less and not wanting to go for walks. Trembling, whining and limping are other clues.

What's wrong?: Pain is the body's response to injury or inflammation.

Treatment: New non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as carprofen and etodolac, provide superior pain relief. Skin patches containing the narcotic fentanyl provide continuous medication for cancer pain. Synthetic morphine-like drugs such as butorphanol, provide relief without extreme sedation. For chronic pain, combining anti-anxiety medications with pain relievers works effectively. Acupuncture provides relief.

Cushing's DiseaseRed flags: Excessive thirst and urination, patchy hair loss, distended abdomen, weakness, excessive panting and restlessness.

What's wrong?: The adrenal glands are overproducing cortisol, the body's natural cortisone. Cortisol has anti-inflammatory effects and regulatory functions on most body systems. In most cases a benign growth in the pituitary gland, a gland in your dog's brain that tells the adrenals to make cortisol, or a benign or cancerous growth on the adrenal gland(s) is behind the overproduction of cortisol.

Treatment: L-deprenyl is safe and can help some dogs with the pituitary gland form of Cushing's. Many dogs require treatment with the more potent drug Lysodren. If a tumor on the adrenal gland is to blame, surgical removal of the adrenal gland cures the disease.

HypothyroidismRed flags: Unexplained weight gain, lethargy, dry, brittle coat or patchy hair loss, failure to regrow clipped hair, slow healing of wounds, skin and ear infections and seborrhea.

What's wrong?: The thyroid gland is not producing enough thyroid hormone, which regulates the body's metabolic rate.

Treatment: Daily supplementation of the missing hormone thyroxine.