

Cutting-Edge Care for Older Dogs

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

Susan Bertram, DVM

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Advances in treatment of geriatric diseases for dogs parallel those for humans, ranging from simple nutritional therapy to sophisticated surgical techniques.

ArthritisRed flags: Stiffness when rising from a lying or sitting position, limping and reluctance to climb stairs.

What's wrong?: Obesity, inherited joint disorders, such as hip dysplasia, and inappropriate exercise cause excessive stress on joints. Over time rough, abnormal bone builds around a joint and cartilage surfaces erode so they no longer glide smoothly.

Treatment: New drugs, such as carprofen and etodolac, relieve pain and increase mobility. Acupuncture also may reduce discomfort. Obese dogs must lose weight to reduce stress on joints. Mild to moderate, low-impact exercise, such as walking or swimming, help by making supporting muscles stronger. Dog food and supplements with the nutraceuticals glucosamine, chondroitin sulfate and antioxidants may decrease inflammation in joints and heal and protect cartilage.

BlindnessRed flags: Dilated pupils, excessively "glowing" eyes, tripping and running into furniture or doorways. A cloudy-looking pupil or surface to the eye, or a red, painful eye may signal a need for emergency care to preserve eyesight.

What's wrong?: Cataracts block light from passing through the lens of the eye. The retina, which functions as the "projection screen," can be damaged by glaucoma, an excessive fluid build-up within the eye, or high blood pressure. Progressive retinal atrophy is an inherited deterioration of the retina.

Treatment: Early treatment for cataracts, glaucoma or high blood pressure is essential to rescue eyesight. Surgeons use ultrasonic vibration to break up cataracts and follow up by implanting artificial lenses. For glaucoma, laser surgery is used to decrease the eye's ability to produce fluid, thereby reducing pressure on the retina. Veterinarians control high blood pressure, caused by kidney or heart disease, by prescribing medications, such as propranolol. No treatment is available for progressive retinal atrophy.