

## Turn Back the Clock For Your Dog

**You can keep your old dog young with these 10 tips.**

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When I met Hathaway, he stood stiff and spraddle-legged with arthritis. He could not see. He could not hear. But he could smell perfectly and, after nosing around, showed his approval by wagging his tail. He was 24 then, a grand age for a Terrier-Poodle mix, for any dog.

Hathaway was charming, poised and debonair, but he never was young. Not for his owner, Margaria Fichtner of Miami, who found him lying on an expressway. The veterinarian treating the dog assessed him to be 9, already a senior dog. Fichtner never hesitated. She took him home and they enjoyed 15 years together before Hathaway died in December. "I never had any house problems with him because he was older," she recalled. "He was so good-natured."

Luck brought Hathaway to Fichtner, who gave him the love and care he needed, but luck had nothing to do with his long life.

Aging begins when the body's systems begin to show wear - metabolism slows, respiration becomes more labored, muscles and bones degenerate, digestive and adrenal secretions decrease. As a result, your dog becomes more vulnerable to infection and disease. The timing varies from dog to dog. It isn't breed-specific - it has more to do with the size of your dog. Small dogs like Hathaway tend to age slower than large dogs. The reason mystifies gerontologists and makes it hard to gauge when aging in a dog actually begins.

"Dogs are kind of a different species, with such a wide range of life expectancies," said Michael Hayek, Ph.D., a researcher at Iams in Lewisburg, Ohio, who specializes in geriatrics. "As a general rule, we talk around 7 years old as the age to start thinking of prepping your dog to a senior stage. You're hopeful you're going to slow down aging."

10 ways you can help:

1. Know your dog. Many conditions of old age have early warning signs: Weight loss and increased drinking might indicate diabetes. A lump or mass might indicate a cancerous growth. Difficulty getting up and stiff movement may suggest arthritis. Depression or aggression might indicate senility.

John M. Simon, DVM, of Royal Oak, Mich., and author of *Anti-Aging for Dogs* (St. Martin's Press, \$16.95) recommends giving your dog a weekly exam at home. Watch for changes in behavior. Inspect its eyes, ears and mouth, and run your hands over its body to check for any new lumps or bumps.