

## Living With Your Senior Dog

I admit that I enjoy calling my dog a puppy, but he is 11 years old and in fact a senior dog for his size. That does not stop me from treating him all to differently from any other life stage. Having a senior dog requires specific needs to still be taken care of, exercise, food, and training. Sounds very much like what you would be doing with any dog of any age. So, let's talk about the difference within these categories.

Let's start with exercise. As your dog turns into a senior: small and medium size dogs 10+ years, Large breed as early as 5 years of age, depending on breed. Keeping your senior's dogs' size not weight in mind you should still be trying to walk your dog once a day for around 20 minutes. They enjoy the time with you, but they benefit from lack of muscle degradation, bone issues, and weight problems. Unless your dog has severe hip dysplasia or a broken bone that hinders from proper walking a walk a day can keep your vet away. If you cannot exercise your dog physically, exercise them mentally. You can feed your senior dog half their meal for the morning and use the other half to hide in a Kong or in their toys to mentally stimulate them to look for food and move around among the house setting. There are multiple ways to exercise your senior dog, with technology on our hands you can find fun and interactive games for you and your senior pup to keep healthy.

The next big thing a senior dog needs is a proper diet. You may need a vet to help you out depending on how your dog's metabolism has changed over the years. Senior dog foods are usually lower in protein, high in fiber, and mediocre on fat. The liver of a senior dog cannot handle breaking down certain proteins as they get older and require a higher quality protein but lower amount per feeding than that of puppy or adult dog food. The fiber is higher to create a feeling of fullness without high calories but also to help with gastrointestinal problems that senior dogs can get. Fat is how a dog gets their energy unlike humans where we get it from carbohydrates. You do not want too much fat as your dog may not have the stamina to burn off that energy. A balanced senior diet works best from most companies. Ask your vet what they think would be best for your senior dog before quickly switching over.

Lastly, the one thing most people forget to do with their senior dog is continuing to train with them. Reviewing commands your dog should know is a great way to keep your senior's dogs' mind from becoming stagnant. It may be difficult to train old dogs' new tricks, but it does not mean it's not possible. If you are consistent and willing as well as have treats to offer, I'm sure your senior dog will try with you, just be positive. As a trainer I have seen friendly dogs become protective or even aggressive because the owners stopped working with their dogs. A simple practice of commands such as sit and down around the house reminds your dog what's right and wrong. It helps keep their mind from becoming bored. When a dog gets bored, they find new ways to cope; bark at people as they pass by your house, digging, howling, protection, and on occasion aggression.

I love my senior pup, so I feed him a proper diet, personally Purina Pro Plan has a wonderful senior diet. I make sure he has a job and gets his exercise around the acre land. He also knows that I randomly like to test his memory of commands from a simple sit to a long sit stay. Keep your senior pup happy and healthy. Remember to never hesitate to ask for professional help whether it's a dog walker for exercise, dog trainer for training, or a veterinarian for food and health tips.

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