

Golden Years

If your dog is seven years or older, he has entered his golden years. In middle and old age, the metabolism slows, the digestive system has more difficulty absorbing nutrients, and joints and muscles become weaker. Diseases such as arthritis, diabetes, kidney failure, hypothyroidism, heart disease and various cancers are more common. The good news is that many illnesses respond to treatment if discovered early. Here are some simple steps to keep your senior dog healthy and happy.

Routine Veterinary Visits

Even if your dog seems fine, he should visit the veterinarian at least twice yearly. Remember, dogs age the equivalent of four or more years for each calendar year. Your veterinarian will perform a comprehensive physical examination and listen to your dog's heart and lungs. He will check for signs of illness, especially conditions that occur commonly in older dogs. Your veterinary visits are also a great opportunity to ask questions.

Diagnostic Tests

When people reach middle age, routine tests such as blood analysis, cancer screening, and evaluation of the heart are recommended to maintain good health. The same is true for older dogs. The reason, in both dogs and people, is that some illnesses are not visible during a physical examination, but can be detected in other ways. Tests recommended for dogs seven years or older are listed below.

Comprehensive Blood Panel Each type of blood cell is counted and the chemical components of the blood plasma are measured. This provides information on the health of the bone marrow, kidneys, liver, pancreas and thyroid, and can help to detect infections.

Complete Urinalysis The concentration and chemical constituents of the urine are measured. Cells and other solids in the urine are examined microscopically. The urinalysis provides information on the health of the kidneys and bladder, and is also useful in the detection of diabetes.

Chest X-Rays X-rays allow visualization of the internal organs of the body. Chest x-rays are recommended to assess the condition of the heart and lungs and to detect tumors.

Abdominal X-Rays X-Rays of the abdomen are helpful to detect tumors and to assess the condition of the kidneys, bladder, intestine, and spleen.

Electrocardiogram This test measures electrical impulses within the heart, using sensors placed on the skin. The ECG is helpful in detecting heart conditions.

Vaccinations

Just as he did when he was younger, your dog continues to benefit from the protection of regular

vaccinations against infectious disease. Your veterinarian will recommend a vaccine program tailored to your dog's age, lifestyle, and health status.

Nutrition

Healthy older dogs require a diet that is lower in calories, while still rich in essential nutrients such as high quality proteins, essential fatty acids, vitamins and minerals. Special diets are available to address the more specific requirements of dogs with medical conditions. Your veterinarian is your best advisor in selecting a diet that will keep your dogs tail wagging.

Exercise

Your dog may be slowing down, but he still needs exercise. Regular exercise can help keep him limber and prevent obesity. Be sure to tell your veterinarian if your dog has pain when he stands up, walks, or goes up and down stairs. There may be medication available to keep him more comfortable.

Dental Care

Keeping your dogs teeth and gums healthy is critical to his well being. Dental disease is painful and can lead to infection in the internal organs, such as the kidneys and heart. Your veterinarian should check your dog's teeth regularly. He will let you know when your dog needs a professional dental cleaning. Under general anesthesia, all of the plaque, tartar, and bacteria are removed from the teeth. After your dog's teeth are clean, it is your job to keep them healthy. Tooth brushing, dental diets and soft chew toys are highly effective.

