

Getting Older

Ageing is a genetic process and your dog ages at a much faster rate than you do. Dogs are classed as mature at 18 months. The life expectancy of a dog ranges from 8 to 16 years and varies according to state of health.



Signs of ageing

Ageing changes occur gradually and may not be obvious to you, as you see your dog every day. You might see changes in coat colour, greying of the muzzle, sleep

pattern, appetite and thirst, body shape, reluctance to exercise and behaviour. Many of these changes also develop as symptoms of diseases, so have your dog checked by your vet regularly.

Many veterinary practices run senior or geriatric clinics dedicated to offering advice on diet and care for the older dog. Routine healthcare such as annual vaccination boosters, worming and flea control should not be overlooked and should be continued throughout your dog's life into old age.

Diet

There are some notable differences in the nutritional requirements of the older dog. Senior life stage diets take into account altered life styles, levels of activity and declining organ function. Your vet will be able to give you advice when changing from an adult to a senior diet.

Some older dogs require up to 20% fewer calories as they become less active, so weigh your dog regularly (every 3 months). Many veterinary surgeries have scales as well as breed weight guidelines. Adjust the food intake to maintain optimum weight. Obesity is likely to put more strain on the heart, lungs, muscles and joints and may result in a shorter life expectancy. If your dog is overweight, speak to a vet about a calorie control diet.

As activity levels fall, older dogs may start to demonstrate muscle wastage.

Supplements such as Cod Liver Oil capsules and Glucosamine will help prevent joint deterioration. Normal, healthy senior dogs should receive the same levels of protein as younger dogs but it must be of high quality. Feeding them little and often avoids overloading their digestive system. Their appetite may reduce as the sense of smell and taste diminishes.

Old dogs require extra attention from you. Be kind and considerate and recognise this need for greater input into your dog's life. Older dogs also tend to need to go to the toilet more often as a result of muscular weakness. Give them more opportunities to go out during the day, later at night and earlier in the morning.