



CANINE LIFE STAGE: SENIOR

So, you just used the AAHA Canine Life Stage Calculator to determine that your dog is in the senior stage of life. Knowing your dog's life stage helps you provide a lifetime of optimal care.

A dog's life can be divided into four stages: puppy, young adult, mature adult, and senior. The stages are based on a dog's maturation and aging process. Because dogs evolve as they mature, they require different approaches to healthcare as they progress from puppy to senior pet. In fact, there are at least 10 health-related factors based on age, size, lifestyle, health status, and breed that your veterinary team regularly assesses to keep your dog healthy, happy, and safe.

When you understand your dog's life stage, you and your veterinary team become partners in providing your dog with an individualized healthcare approach to every veterinary visit. The end result: a lifetime of optimal care your dog needs and deserves!

SENIOR DOG CARE 101

There is a saying in veterinary medicine: "Old age is not a disease." Yes, your dog is now a senior. But that doesn't mean they have to stop living an enriched, healthy, and comfortable life. Senior dogs often develop many of the same age-related issues seen in older people, but good preventive healthcare can keep these years golden! Your dog should have a physical exam at least twice a year, including routine bloodwork and additional screening tests if needed.

Your veterinarian will continue to perform thorough physical exams on your senior dog. This includes taking your dog's temperature and checking their body and muscle condition, skin, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, heart, lungs, gastrointestinal system, urinary system, brain, nerves, bones, joints, and lymph nodes. Now that your dog is in the senior



life stage, tell your veterinarian about your dog's mobility and activity at home. This will help detect early signs of orthopedic disease and arthritis.

Below are some topics you'll want to discuss with the veterinary team that are specific to your dog's senior life stage.

YOUR SENIOR DOG'S LIFESTYLE AND SAFETY

Just like humans, your dog's sense of awareness and ability to see, hear, and move may not be as good as it once was. Sometimes little changes in their environment go a long way. Your veterinarian may recommend making adaptations in your home, on walks, or getting into/out of the car. How you play with your dog may change, too, such as choosing to play in your yard, rather than going to dog parks. Talk to your veterinarian about daily exercise (both mental and physical) and ways to keep your dog safe and comfortable.

All dogs, regardless of their life stage, have to travel safely and with minimal stress. Call your veterinarian prior to your dog's visit to learn how to acclimate your dog to travel and determine the most effective way to transport them for their visit.

INFECTIONS BETWEEN HUMANS AND ANIMALS

Infections transmitted between humans and animals are called zoonoses. They are transmitted in different ways, such as bites, raw food, and feces, so talk to your veterinary team about disease prevention. Let the veterinary team know if there are children, elderly, or immune-compromised family members who may have exposure to your dog.

SENIOR DOG BEHAVIOR

Your veterinarian is the best resource for accurate and current information regarding your senior dog's behavior. Discuss any changes you have noticed in your dog's relationship with you, family members, other animals, and people. Does your dog seem antisocial or "grumpy"? Share any behavior concerns you have about your dog's cognition (i.e., mental awareness or attitude). Many issues can be addressed and corrected with early intervention of medical, dietary, or pain management.



YOUR SENIOR DOG'S NUTRITION

The amount and type of food you feed your senior dog is important for many reasons. Excess calories lead to excess weight and poor muscle condition, which makes moving aging joints difficult. More than 50% of dogs suffer from obesity and obesity-related illnesses—don't let your dog follow the crowd. Maintaining an ideal weight and body condition will help keep your senior dog active.

Also, your senior dog may have a medical condition that is effectively managed by food with specific nutrient levels. Many people have opinions about the best food to feed dogs, but your veterinarian has the most medical training when it comes to your dog's nutrition, so let them help you. Together, you can choose a quality food with targeted nutrition and calories based on your senior dog's needs.

Supplements can help senior dogs maintain a good quality of life. If you are thinking of or are already using supplements, like CBD, be sure to discuss this with your veterinary team so they can help you make the safest choices for your pet.

PARASITES AND SENIOR DOGS

Parasites, including intestinal parasites, heartworms, ticks, and fleas, affect dogs of all ages. Your senior dog needs a year-round medicine to prevent intestinal parasites, which are found in your dog's feces and can be transmitted to humans, so talk to your veterinarian about how to keep everyone in your home protected. Keep your senior dog's heartworm preventive and flea and tick control up-to-date as well. Once per year, you can expect your senior dog to be tested for tick-borne infection, heartworm disease, and intestinal parasites.

VACCINATIONS FOR SENIOR DOGS

Given to keep your dog's immune system strong to fight against infection, vaccinations are a crucial component to keeping your senior dog healthy. Several vaccines were likely administered routinely throughout your dog's life as the primary defense against serious infectious illnesses. Depending on your senior dog's vaccine history, lifestyle changes, and risk of exposure to disease, your veterinarian may adjust your dog's vaccine schedule and/or recommend antibody titer testing to determine protection from a few specific viral infections. Your veterinarian will advise which vaccines are necessary to keep your dog healthy.

YOUR SENIOR DOG'S TEETH

Even senior dogs can have healthy mouths and good breath! Periodontal disease can be prevented through regular dental examinations by your veterinarian and proper home care. If left untreated, periodontal disease can lead to chronic pain, infection, and poor quality of

life for your dog. Because so many dogs are affected by dental disease, your veterinarian will perform an oral exam during your visit. Based on the exam findings, a dental health plan can be designed and discussed. The plan may require anesthesia to obtain X-rays to further evaluate and treat periodontal disease. If you have concerns about anesthesia, tell the veterinary team. They will be happy to answer any questions.

It's never too late to talk about home dental care. Maximize your dog's health and ask your veterinary team about dental products approved by the Veterinary Oral Health Council (vohc.org) that help keep your dog's mouth in tip-top shape.

YOUR SENIOR DOG'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Your veterinarian will perform a thorough reproductive exam, regardless if your senior dog is spayed, neutered, or intact. During the exam, your veterinarian will look at your dog's prostate, mammary glands, and other reproductive organs to ensure they are in good health.

BREED-SPECIFIC INFORMATION FOR SENIOR DOGS

There are breed-specific health concerns that can affect your senior dog's quality of life. At your visit, your veterinarian will want to continue to screen for cancer and orthopedic, kidney, liver, heart, gland, and eye abnormalities that may be breed-related. Early detection is one of the most effective ways to keep your senior dog healthy and bright!

Understanding your senior dog's unique needs is the first step to providing a lifetime of care that will lead to a happy and healthy canine companion.

Looking for a veterinarian for your dog?

Find an AAHA-accredited veterinary practice by using the Hospital Locator at [aaha.org/locate](https://www.aaha.org/locate).

