

This Chart Proves Your Dog Is Older Than You Think

Is your dog ready for 'retirement,' even though you believe she's still a happy-go-lucky pup? Check this chart to find out the true age of your dog. Because your loving guidance will help her age with grace, mobility, and health.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dogs age much faster than humans. For example, a large breed dog at age 10 is the equivalent of a human in his or her mid-60s
- Older dogs should not have to suffer pain or discomfort as part of the aging process. There are many things pet guardians can do to help their dog stay active and mentally stimulated throughout the senior years
- Areas to focus on to keep an older dog happy and healthy are physical and emotional comfort, a fresh food diet rich in high-quality protein, and regular exercise and socialization

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Are you the parent of a senior or geriatric dog? I ask because many people don't realize how quickly dogs age compared to humans, and are surprised to learn their still-active "puppy" is actually middle-aged or even heading into her golden years.

By the time most large breed dogs are 10 years old, they're considered retirement age by human standards. Giant breeds age fastest of all, but even the littlest guys at age 18 are the equivalent of a 90-year-old human.

A Dog's Age in Human Years				
Dog's Age	Up to 20 lbs	21 to 50 lbs	51 to 90 lbs	Over 90 lbs
5	36	37	40	42
6	40	42	45	49
7	44	47	50	56
8	48	51	55	64
9	52	56	61	71
10	56	60	66	78
11	60	65	72	86
12	64	69	77	93
13	68	74	82	101
14	72	78	88	108
15	76	83	93	115
16	80	87	99	123
17	84	92	104	
18	88	96	109	
19	92	101	115	
20	96	105	120	
Ages in yellow = Senior		Ages in red = Geriatric		
<i>Chart developed by Dr. Fred L. Metzger, DVM, State College, PA. – Courtesy of http://srdogs.com/</i>				

The good news is it's possible to keep your dog reasonably youthful – or at a minimum, mobile and comfortable – into old age. Caring for a happy, healthy senior means providing:

- Physical and emotional comfort at each stage of your dog's life
- Balanced, species-appropriate nutrition – especially high-quality protein
- Ongoing, regular opportunities for exercise, socialization, and mental stimulation

How to Keep Your Senior Dog Comfortable in Body and Mind

Physical discomfort shouldn't be a part of the aging process for your pet. While it's true that as we get older our body parts start showing signs of wear and tear, there are steps you can take to make sure your aging dog doesn't suffer undue discomfort.

Twice-yearly vet visits are very important for older pets so that you and your vet can stay on top of physical and mental changes that may indicate an underlying painful condition or disease process. The sooner a health problem is diagnosed and treated, in most cases, the better the outcome.

Keeping your dog at a healthy weight and physically active will help control arthritis and degenerative joint disease as he ages. Chiropractic adjustments, stretching, water exercises, and acupuncture can also provide enormous benefits in keeping dogs mobile in their later years.

There are also supplements that can be added to your dog's diet to help maintain healthy tendons, ligaments, joints, and cartilage. These include:

- Glucosamine sulfate with MSM, perna mussel, and eggshell membrane
- Omega-3 essential fatty acids from marine sources
- Ubiquinol

- Supergreen foods like spirulina and astaxanthin
- Natural anti-inflammatory formulas (herbs including turmeric, proteolytic enzymes, and nutraceuticals)
- Adequan injections, which can stimulate joint fluid very rapidly in pets with arthritis

Regular massage can help keep your senior pet's muscles toned and reduce the slackening that comes with aging. Massaged muscles are looser, which makes it easier for your pet to move around comfortably. Massage can also ease the stiffness of arthritis, which helps your pet maintain his normal gait and active lifestyle.

If your dog is having some urine dribbling or incontinence as a result of his age (and not caused by an underlying condition that should be addressed), provide him with more frequent potty trips outside. You can also reintroduce him to his crate if he was crate trained initially, and place "tinkle pads" in locations repeatedly soiled.

If your dog has problems hearing or seeing, use odor cues like essential oils or other aromatherapy products to help him find his way around. Consider purchasing or building ramps for a dog who is having trouble getting into the car or up on the bed or a favorite chair.

Cover hard flooring (linoleum, tile, and hardwood) with non-skid rugs, yoga mats, or carpet runners in areas your dog is prone to slipping on. Provide non-toxic, supportive dog beds (covered in an unwashed old tee shirt, if possible) where you find him most often choosing to rest.

For sleep problems in older dogs, try increasing his daytime activity level. Let your pet sleep in your bedroom. Sleeping near you should help ease any anxiety that is contributing to his nighttime restlessness. Diffusing lavender oil can help you all have a more restful sleep, as well.

Guide your dog with clear cues and easy-to-follow instructions, especially if he's showing signs of mental decline. And when you talk to your dog, keep your voice quiet, calm, and kind.

How to Feed Your Aging Dog an Anti-Aging Diet

Contrary to what many pet owners and even some veterinarians still believe, studies indicate dogs (and cats) need *more* protein as they age, not less.

In 1994, Dr. Delmar Finco, a veterinary nutritionist, discovered protein requirements actually increase as pets age.¹ Even in animals with kidney failure, restricting protein doesn't improve their health or longevity.

Since Dr. Finco's research was published, veterinary recommendations have changed. These days, we recommend that pets struggling with under-functioning kidneys and livers be fed excellent quality protein that is highly digestible and assimilable. We also recommend you restrict phosphorus in the diet, but not necessarily protein.

We know that dogs, as carnivores, require lots of high quality protein not only to maintain good organ and immune function, but also to maintain healthy muscle mass as they go through life and the aging process.

Some foods are metabolically stressful and some create low metabolic stress for dogs. Foods that generate the least amount of metabolic stress are whole, raw, organic, non-GMO, and in their natural form. These foods are biologically appropriate. All the moisture in the food remains in the food.

I recommend serving your older dog food in its natural state to provide needed protein and moisture, and to insure the highest level of biologic assimilation and digestion.

How to Keep Your Older Dog Physically Active and Mentally Alert

Senior and geriatric dogs need daily exercise to maintain good health and a resilient frame. Obviously, older dogs can't exercise or compete at the same level as their younger counterparts, but they still need regular walks and other age-appropriate physical activity.

There are three types of strengthening exercises that can also be of tremendous help to aging canine bodies:

- Passive range-of-motion (PROM) exercises can benefit both incapacitated and physically healthy pets
- Balance and proprioception (spatial orientation and movement) exercises help older pets remain flexible while also encouraging improved balance and physical stability
- Targeted strengthening exercises are designed to work the big muscle groups that help with standing, walking, and running

No matter how old your dog is she still needs regular opportunities to socialize with other pets and people. As is the case with humans as we age, if your four-legged family member doesn't stay active and involved in life, the world outside your door can become a confusing, intimidating place.

Enriching your dog's environment can help to alleviate or stall the mental confusion and decline of cognitive function that often come with old age. Sticking to a predictable daily routine can help reduce anxiety and mental uncertainty. Puzzle and treat-release toys provide fun and mental stimulation.

Supplements that can help improve mental decline in aging dogs include glutathione, MCTs (coconut oil), Apoaequorin, S-adenosylmethionine (SAME), vitamin B6, natural vitamin E, resveratrol, ginkgo biloba, and phosphatidylserine.

Sources and References

[Whole Dog Journal](#)

¹ [American Journal of Veterinary Research, 1994 Sep; \(55\)9:1282-90](#)
