

How Fast Is Your Dog Aging? That Depends, so Consult This Handy Chart

Our canine companions' lifespans are short - far too short. They age much faster than we do. Your dog may still look and act a lot like a puppy even though age-related challenges may be taking place. This chart can help you know when to start addressing 'senior' needs.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- The lifespan of a dog is much shorter than that of a human, and typically, the larger the dog, the shorter the lifespan
- Veterinarians and pet parents don't see eye-to-eye as to when dogs enter the senior or geriatric stage of life, but as a general rule, giant breeds are considered seniors at 5 years of age and geriatric at 10. Dogs up to 50 pounds reach senior status at 7, and fall into the geriatric category at age 12 to 14
- Three things you can provide for your dog to keep him healthy and happy in his senior years are physical and emotional comfort, high-quality protein as part of a balanced, species-appropriate diet, and lifelong opportunities for exercise, socialization, and mental stimulation

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All of us who love dogs are acutely aware that the lifespans of our canine companions are short — much too short. And while the years we spend with a beloved pet seem to fly by, dogs don't just suddenly die when they reach a certain age. They grow older in stages just as we do, but at a tremendously accelerated rate compared to humans. Your four-legged friend may still look and act like a puppy much of the time, but there are age related changes taking place inside him despite his youthful good looks and high energy level.

The lifespan of a dog depends primarily on his size, breed (or breed mix), and health status. As a general rule, giant breed dogs are considered senior citizens at 5 years of age, and dogs under 20 pounds move into the range at about 7.

Of course, every dog is a little different, but this is a good general guideline to determine your dog's age in human years, as well as when he's considered a senior, and the age at which he enters the geriatric stage of life:

Your Dog's Age in Human Years				
Dog's Age	Up to 20 lbs	21 – 50 lbs	51 – 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 blue = Geriatric

Chart developed by Dr. Fred L. Metzger, DVM, State College, PA. – Courtesy of [Dog Owner's Home Veterinary Handbook, 4th Edition](#)

Vet, Pet Owner Perspectives Differ on When Dogs Enter Senior and Geriatric Stages of Life

If you're surprised to learn the age at which your dog is considered senior or geriatric, you're not alone. According to information collected by VetStreet, while most veterinary professionals consider all dogs seniors at 5 to 7 years of age, a majority of pet guardians believe 7 to 9 years is more accurate.¹

Owners of small dogs don't consider them senior until around age 11, medium-sized dogs around age 9, and large and giant breed dogs around 7. This is slightly at odds with veterinary professionals, who consider small, medium, and large dogs senior at around 7, and giant breeds at around 5.

When it comes to using the G-word to describe patients, veterinary professionals tend to view small and medium dogs as geriatric around 11, large dogs around 9, and giant breeds around 7. Contrast that with dog parents, who feel small dogs aren't geriatric until they reach age 13, medium dogs at 11 to 13, large dogs around 11, and giant breeds at around age 9.

So if you're shocked to hear your veterinarian refer to your canine companion as "senior" (or, less likely, "geriatric"), try not to worry or take offense. Just like humans, as pets get older their healthcare needs change. Rest assured your vet isn't so much labeling your dog as putting her in a special care category to insure her wellness exams cover potential age-related health challenges.

And this is a good thing, because for purposes of supporting her health, mental status and quality of life as she ages, it's really not a bad idea to think about ways you can take extra-special care of your pet as she crosses the 7 year threshold and beyond.

Three Important Ways to Help Your Dog Age Gracefully

1. **Provide physical and emotional comfort** — Twice-yearly vet visits are very important for older pets, as they insure you and your veterinarian can stay on top of any physical or mental changes that may indicate an underlying disease process.

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 comfortably mobile in their later years. Regular massage can help keep your pet's muscles toned and reduce the slackening that comes with aging.

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 and eggshell membrane, perna mussel, omega-3 fats (krill oil), ubiquinol, supergreen foods like spirulina and astaxanthin, and natural anti-inflammatory agents (herbs, including curcumin, proteolytic enzymes, and nutraceuticals).

2. **Provide high-quality dietary protein** — Contrary to what many pet guardians and even veterinarians believe, studies indicate dogs (and cats) need more protein as they age, not less.

The reason many senior dog food formulas boast reduced protein content is because the poor-quality protein they use is difficult to digest, especially for older dogs. The rendered protein sources used by most major pet food manufacturers put chronic strain on the kidneys and liver, so by the time a dog is into her senior years, her organs can no longer do their job efficiently. This is why commercial reduced protein diets for senior pets were created.

It's an unfortunate situation, because your dog actually needs more protein as she ages – not less – in order to maintain healthy lean muscle mass and good organ and immune function. But the type of protein most dogs thrive on is whole, unprocessed, and preferably raw.

3. **Provide exercise, socialization, and mental stimulation** — No matter your dog's age, she needs daily exercise to be optimally healthy in body and mind. Your older dog obviously can't exercise or compete at the same level as a youngster, but she still needs daily walks and other age-appropriate physical activity.

Your aging dog also needs regular social interaction with other pets and/or people. Much like her human family members, if your dog doesn't stay active and involved in life, the world can become a confusing, even threatening place. She needs regular exposure to other pets and people, ideally through short periods of socialization and playtime in controlled situations.

Enriching your pet's environment can help alleviate or forestall the mental confusion and decline of cognitive function that often come with age. Sticking to a predictable daily routine can help reduce anxiety and mental uncertainty. Puzzle toys and interactive games provide fun and mental stimulation.

Supplements that can help improve mental decline in aging dogs include S-adenosylmethionine (SAME), apoaequorin, vitamin B6, vitamin E, resveratrol, ginkgo biloba, and phosphatidylserine.

Sources and References

PetPlace.com

¹ [VetStreet August 4, 2014](#)