

Dogs live longer nowadays

- *They're healthier*
- *They have better vet care*
- *But mostly—it's in the genes*

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Adults

- **Behavior**
 - *Remains virtually the same from three to eight or so*
 - *Most behavior problems have their roots in adolescence, and should be addressed at that time*
 - *If you haven't solved a behavior problem by then, you may not solve it at all*

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How old is old?

- While the average life span of a healthy dog is about 12 years
 - *Small dogs live longer than large dogs*
- Some poodles have been known to live more than 20 years
- Many big dogs - Great Danes, Bernese Mountain Dogs, Leonbergers, Irish Wolfhounds tend to live seven to eight years
- However other big dogs - Malamutes and other northern breeds, some Rottweiler lines - live 12 to 14 years
- Medium sized dogs tend to live 12 to 16 years



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Physical Changes



- Graying hair
- Cloudy Eyes
- Protruding backbone
- Balance issues
 - *Particularly back legs*
- Bone loss
- Teeth problems

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- Slower metabolism (they don't need as much food)
- Difficulty in adapting to temperature extremes
 - *(luke and exercise)*
- Decreased immunity
- Digestive issues (old dog breath!)
- Mental issues



- The brain literally slows down, as cells begin to die
- Dogs begin to get confused
- Sleep cycle changes



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- Senile dementia is likely by the age of 16 – sometimes substantially earlier
- Disorientation
- Roaming in circles, barking at nothing, being withdrawn...
- Alterations in housetraining

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Ow, I Hurt!



- Arthritis is very common – but dogs do not tell you
- they do what they can, and limp later
- They lose their senses and their elasticity
- They can become aggressive if handled roughly or approached inappropriately
- (example – BC with compulsive owner)

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- **Changes in social relationships**
 - *Cedes leadership to younger dogs*
- Or leadership is taken away

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Behavior Changes

- Becomes more food or less food oriented
 - Sometimes will steal food or start eating junk
 - Sometimes required special, home-cooked meals (Deb's dog)
- Follows owner around more, needs more (or less) petting, but gets irritable easily
 - Seems inconsolable at times
- Sleeps a LOT

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Anxiety and Phobias

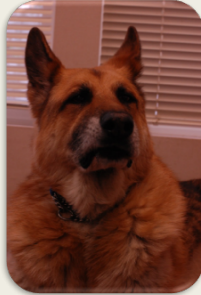
- Sound phobias tend to increase over time
- Thunder or fireworks fear
- Sensitivity to noise... thunderstorms that never bothered him before may now make your older dog tremble and even hide



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Separation anxiety and Claustrophobia

- Older dogs often destructive or bark or whine or lose control of elimination
- Vocalizing... may be due to loss of hearing or to separation anxiety



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Uncharacteristic Aggression

- May be due to painful joints, a drug reaction, or intolerance for new people and new circumstances; your older dog likes things to remain the same

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What Actions We Can Take

- General Advice – Physical
 - Frequent, short walks, rather than long ones
 - Groom often – it improves circulation
 - Smaller meals more frequently – keep weight down
 - Soft bedding for old joints
 - Warm areas for sleeping
 - Potty breaks after each meal
 - Watch diet – some food is too rich

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The Senses

- What to do if your dog can't hear?
 - *Leave a light leash on whenever you're in an unfamiliar situation*
 - *Use touch to remind your dog where you are (it really doesn't do any good to shout!)*
- Get dog used to light touches, so he or she doesn't startle

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What to do if your dog is going blind?

- Keep furniture in predictable locations
- Avoid startling the dog, by telling him when you are near
- When walking, keep him close to your leg so that he can feel where he's going

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When it's time

- Many people tend to hold on too long – it's our responsibility to know when to let go
 - *Dog loses interest in eating and exercising*
 - *Dog is very confused*
 - *Dog is in pain*

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Aging People...Young Dogs



Case History #1

- Woman in her 80's
 - Lives alone, with daily help
 - Fragile but mobile
- Few if any signs of dementia
 - Lives in an expensive area, used to getting what she wants
- Has always had big dogs - doesn't "like" small, yappy dogs



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...Case History

- Has always wanted a German Shepherd Dog, so...
- Her doting son bought her one from a well-known and reputable kennel
- Female, adolescent, strong, stable (thank god!), energetic, intelligent, etc.



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...Case History Issues

- Excessive mouthing
 - (she was bandaging her ankle when I first saw her)
- Unable to exercise on her own
 - (lives on a cliff, dog runs up and down outside stairs to exercise herself)
- Unable to control in or outside the home
- Unable to obedience train, as the dog didn't listen to her
- LOVES the dog!

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Case History #2



- Woman in her 80's, mentally sound but physically weak
 - Just lost her husband of 25 years
- Has Tibetan Terrier Mix who was good when her husband was alive
- Dog is leash aggressive, though fine off leash
- Very demanding of her attention, sometimes bites her
- Protective of house, fearful of attention from strangers

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Case History #3



- Couple in their 70's, have one mini poodle, acquired a standard (because they'd always had one)
- Got it from Rescue, with little history
- Independent
- Territorial
- Stranger aggression
- Woman (primary caretaker) cannot walk without cane, due for two surgeries

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How Old is Old?

- Many people remain physically and mentally active well into their 70's and 80's
- Some are mentally active, but physically lack the strength, coordination and/or agility to handle dogs
- Some are going downhill mentally

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Potential Problems Associated with Aging

- Dog Energy vs People Energy
- Exercise needs
- Communication
- Demand barking
- Physical play
- Fragile skin
- Balance issues



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Social status

- *Sometimes dogs will not obey or respect older people, as they sense a lack of controlling ability*
- Older people often become more nurturing (particularly men), which can be good or bad depending on the dog

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Helping Seniors with their Dogs

Realize their physical and mental limitations

- Think of ways for permanent management
- *Blocking doorways or halls*
- *Blocking access to kitchen counters for counter surfers (many dogs are opportunistic – even though they have learned not to behave in a certain way, they may when they sense they can get away with it)*
- *Double doors to the outside – particularly if there is no fenced front yard*

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Training

Particular cues that are appropriate for aging clients

- **WAIT**
- at doors, top of stairs, bottom of stairs, going into and out of cars
- before eating
- **MOVE**
- A cue to teach dogs to move out of the way
- **GET DRESSED**
- An exercise in which the dog actually stands for or pokes his head into a halter, harness or other equipment
- With small dogs, this may include jumping up on a piece of furniture so that the owner doesn't have to bend down

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Appropriate Equipment

- Gentle leader or Halti (easy to put on)
- Short leashes for big dogs
 - Leashes with handles are particularly good
 - Snap should be large enough to be easily manipulated
- Retractable leashes should be discouraged, as they can be lethal



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Helping Hands

- List of appropriate
 - Dog walkers
 - Daycares
 - Mobile Veterinarians
- Plan for if the dog lives on after the owner dies



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Case History #1

- (Very old woman with very young GSD)
 - Provided permanent barriers in the kitchen (dog would climb up on her back)
 - Provided traditional harness to hold the dog
 - Referred to dog walker, daycare and board and train
 - Crate Trained dog
 - Taught dog to go up and down stairs in front of her
 - Taught "move"
 - (Hope that she comes to her senses)

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Case History #2

- Woman in 70's with Tibetan Terrier
 - Recommendations
 - Blocking windows (Artscape)
 - Blocking stairs unless in use for exercise
 - Taught wait at door
 - Taught "get dressed" including jumping on sofa (dog ran away when being prepared for a walk)
 - Recommended walking outside the neighborhood to control leash aggression
 - Set up play sessions with other dogs

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Case History #3

- Poodle
 - Fitted with GL (they didn't like it)
 - Covered windows, which both dogs used for daily entertainment
 - Set up day trainer to help with control
 - Set up dog walker
- Money for both was very limited
 - Suggested returning to rescue

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Case History #3 – outcome

- Dog bit a gardener while on a walk
 - Surrendered to local shelter where euthanasia was likely
 - Luckily, at the last minute, a friend of the former owner adopted him

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Self Assessments for Shelters and Rescues

- As people age, they still *feel* the same emotionally and – most of the time – intellectually, so it can be difficult to convince them that this dog isn't for them – best if they do it themselves

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Self assessment

- This dog may be a match for me if I can...
 - *Pick up the dog if needed (i.e. if the dog is injured or needs help being put in a car)*
 - *Hold the dog fairly easily if he is pulling on the leash*
 - *Give or provide the dog with as much exercise as he or she needs*
 - *Have a place for him or her to go should I not be able to care for him*
 - *Have time or have the means to properly train the dog*

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Self Assessment

- I may be a match for this dog if he
 - *Does not jump up and tear my skin*
 - *Is small enough so that I can handle him easily*
 - *Has a compliant personality so that he will wish to please me without coercion*
- Is not a bully
- Is not fearful with a tendency to run away

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Self Assessment

- This dog is probably not a good match if he...
 - *Is so big or powerful that I have trouble handling him*
- Pulls on the leash, jumps up, or barrels into me
 - *Has exercise needs that I may not be able to meet*
 - *Is very strong willed and does not listen to me*

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