

# Caring for Your Older Dog

By Sherry Woodard

Whether you have been sharing your life with your dog for years or a senior dog has just joined your family, having an older dog has many benefits. For one thing, adult dogs often need very little house-training. If given access to a dog door, most will routinely go out to eliminate; a few need to have the door flap clipped up for a day or two so they get the idea. Dog doors are great for those senior dogs who have to answer the call of nature a bit more frequently.

Adult dogs have usually passed the restless, destructive chewing stage that young dogs and puppies go through. They are more mellow and need less exercise than young dogs. Even adult dogs, though, need things to do and chew. They enjoy light exercise, practicing basic commands, and finding hidden treasures with their noses. Dispensing toys like Buster Cubes, Kongs, and TreatStik can be loaded with appropriate treats for your dog and placed around the house to encourage working for food.



Keeping dogs social is also important for their emotional health. Many dogs love going out to see other doggie friends or having friends over for a visit. Some dogs seem to become much younger when they have an active social life or when a new, slightly younger dog is adopted into the family. Of course, your old dog will want to help choose the new addition!

As our dogs age, there may be physical changes to address. They may need a change in diet or some arthritis pain medication. The older dog's eyesight or hearing may start to diminish. You can accommodate failing eyesight by keeping the furniture and water bowls in the same locations. A hard-of-hearing dog can wear a vibrating collar and be taught that when it vibrates, a treat is forthcoming. Once that association is taught, the dog will look for you to hand her a treat if the collar vibrates. Instructions to make a vibrating collar are found at the bottom of this web page: [www.deafdogs.org/resources/vibramakers.php](http://www.deafdogs.org/resources/vibramakers.php).

If at any time your dog's behavior changes, a trip to see your veterinarian is in order, since a dog's health can affect his behavior. Don't wait for your routine examination or yearly blood work; medical needs can change at any age.

Sharing our lives with dogs into and throughout their adulthood teaches us how precious their lives are. I buy them comfy beds, hand-feed them, and tell them I love every hair on their bodies (even the ones they have shed). Enjoy every moment with your older dog!

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