

14 COMMON DISORDERS OF SENIOR DOGS

Signs of aging are inevitable in older dogs. The body doesn't snap to quite as readily as it used to, and perhaps it may take your senior a little longer when called. Aging can also predispose dogs to certain illnesses. By being aware of some concerns regarding older dogs, you can be a more educated and prepared guardian for your aging companion.

Routine veterinary care is particularly important now. In many cases, early detection may prevent long term problems and anguish for you and your senior dog. The following is an outline of some of the most commonly diagnosed illnesses known to afflict older dogs.

1 . Nutritional Concerns. A proper diet is very important in the care of a geriatric dog. Obesity is a very common and serious concern because it directly correlates to a decreased longevity, and may contribute to other problems. Proper nutritional management is a very important part of the care for your geriatric dog, especially since it is something that you can control.



Your dog should be kept close to normal weight (upper left); more than 15% above normal is considered clinically obese and health risks must be considered.

2 . Dental Disease. Dental disease and gingivitis (inflammation of the gums) are common findings in the older dog. Untreated dental disease usually leads to tooth loss, and may serve as a reservoir of infection for the rest of the body. In this manner, severe dental disease may pose a risk to other body systems, such as heart, kidney, and liver disease. Dr. Flanary & Dr. Walter recommend after the age of seven that your senior have their teeth cleaned every six months.

3 . Arthritis. Degenerative joint disease, also known as arthritis, is another very common issue affecting aging dogs. While it is to be expected that older animals will tend to slow down with age, animals with arthritis may feel much more comfortable if appropriately treated. Signs of arthritis in dogs include difficulty rising, trouble climbing stairs or jumping, falling on slippery floors, having difficulty getting comfortable or being restless at nights. Drs. Flanary and Walter would be glad to discuss some of your options with the

many anti-inflammatory medications that can be prescribed to improve your pet's quality of life and comfort level.

4 . Eye Disorders. As dogs age, their vision worsens. Just as in people, cataracts can develop resulting in cloudy vision. Sometimes tear production lessens and the surface of the eye is not properly lubricated. Dry eye (keratoconjunctivitis sicca) is a common problem affecting older dogs, especially small dogs with bulging eyes such as the Shih Tzu, Pekingese and Pug.

5 . Kidney Disease. Kidney disease is one of the most common metabolic diseases of older dogs. With early diagnosis through blood testing, some dogs can do quite well on a special diet and medications. The biggest key is to diagnose kidney disease early. This is one of the primary reasons doctors at Flanary Vet Clinic recommend that you do routine screening blood tests in older dogs. Once the symptoms of kidney disease appear, 80% of the kidney function is already gone.

6 . Bladder Stones. Older dogs tend to have an increased risk of developing bladder stones. Often, these stones cause few problems, but can cause an obstruction if the dog attempts to pass a large stone and it becomes stuck in the urethra. Periodic abdominal x-rays or ultra-sound can help determine if bladder stones are developing in your dog and if treatment is necessary.

7. Endocrine Disorders. The two most common endocrine disorders affecting older dogs are hyperadrenocorticism (Cushing's disease) and hypothyroidism. Cushing's disease is a disorder resulting in excessive secretion of cortisol resulting in illness. Hypothyroidism is an underactive thyroid gland, which also affects the health of your dog. Both disorders are treatable, and proper treatment may dramatically improve your dog's overall attitude and strength.

8. Heart Disease. The most common heart disease in the senior dog is chronic valvular heart disease. Thickening and irregularities of the valve of the heart may lead to abnormal blood flow within the heart chambers, eventually causing heart enlargement and heart failure. Early detection of this disease and proper therapy may slow the progression of the heart disease.

9. Diabetes. Aging dogs tend to have a higher risk of developing diabetes. Whether due to diet, poor insulin secretion or resistance to insulin, diabetic dogs can often be helped with medication.

10. Skin Tumors. Skin lumps and bumps are common findings on the elderly dog. On the basis of the size, location and aspiration results, Dr. Flanary or Dr. Walter may recommend removal of one or many skin masses. If not removed, monitor the lumps for changes in size and shape.

11. Urinary Incontinence. Older dogs may sometimes become incontinent, leaking small or even large amounts of urine when lying down or when sleeping. Medications can sometimes help.

12. Prostate Problems. If your dog is an intact male, he is at significant risk of prostatic disease. Prostatic infections, abnormal enlargement, abscesses, and cysts are all potential problems in the intact male. Tumors of the prostate occur with equal frequency in both neutered and intact males.

13. Cancer. Unfortunately, cancer is a significant problem facing the senior dog. Not all cancer needs to be fatal. Surgery, chemotherapy, even radiation therapy is available that can significantly extend your pet's quality time or produce a cure. The prognosis depends on the type and location of the cancer.

14. Behavioral and Cognitive Dysfunction. As dogs age they may become more "set in their ways," more inflexible, less patient and more irritable. Sometimes they will forget learned behaviors including normal urinary and defecation habits. Older dogs may sleep a lot more, and be less responsive to external stimuli. These signs may be related to underlying disease, or may be due to the gradual decline in their senses and cognition (thought process). Sometimes medication can help.



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OTHER CONCERNS FOR SENIORS

As dogs age, their organs also age and do not function as well as they once did. Various liver diseases are common in aging dogs, including cirrhosis. Another concern with elderly dogs is the potential to develop anemia. Whether associated with kidney disease, cancer, chronic disease or primary bone marrow disorders, anemia can cause your dog to be profoundly weak and, without treatment, may even become so severe that emergency medical help is needed.

Today dogs are living longer and healthier lives. If there is a problem with your senior, don't assume it is just because of old age, and that nothing can be done. With appropriate treatment, many conditions can improve.



*Call Flanary Veterinary Clinic today at
270-898-9738 to schedule an appointment
to discuss your senior dog.
www.flanaryvet.com*