

Caring for dogs, elderly dogs in particular

As we get older we seem to notice that our body's not quite as agile or supple as it once was and also energy levels are not the same. Well, dogs are no different, older dogs have special health needs and may require more attention and care than younger animals. Everyday health problems associated with older pets include: Arthritis, circulatory problems, ear infections, hearing, sight and smell disorders, dental problems, incontinence, weight problems, and kidney disease and much more. Arthritis/Rheumatism are most commonly seen in dogs of a greater age and this has given rise to the misconception that the problems are caused by wear and tear of joints. In fact, much of the pain and restriction of movement is due to muscle tension (spasm) rather than pain within the joint itself. The muscle tension is caused by the accumulation of waste metabolic products in the muscle. But there is much you can do to prevent or delay these problems so that you have a healthy and happy pet even into the twilight years! Here are a few facts and tips to help you and your doggy friend: How old is elderly? This depends on the breed and on the individual pet. Larger breeds tend to age more rapidly than smaller ones. In general, "elderly" means over eight years old for a medium sized dog and five years old for a larger dog. What changes, as my dog gets older? As dogs grow old, their organs become less efficient and their ability to fend off infections and diseases is reduced. Changing dietary needs Elderly dogs have special dietary needs for a number of reasons. First, older dogs slow down. Like humans, they tend towards being more sedentary as they get older. Therefore, they need fewer calories. Also, digestion and absorption can become a problem because as the organs age, they are not as efficient. A highly digestible diet is required. Less phosphorus and protein will help pets with kidney problems, for instance. Feed smaller portions more often by dividing the daily food allowance into two to four small meals.

Here are a few ideas as to what is digestible; the scientific term is called BV (Biological Values) All proteins are not equal!

54% Whole ground corn

60% Whole ground wheat

68% Corn gluten protein

72% Whole ground rice

82% Dried meat by-products

88% Dried meat

89% Dried lamb

94% Dried chicken by-products

98% Dried chicken meat

100% Dried eggs

Digestion is often blamed on a diet being "too rich". This is a falsehood which some manufactures are happy to maintain because it implies that their food is of a high standard. When in reality the reverse is generally the norm. Low quality foods containing indigestible ingredients are more likely to cause problems than food of a high quality that is easily digested.

Feeding a food that is maladaptive can affect the biology and the behaviour of dogs.

Foods to avoid: Sugar, Chocolate, Dairy Products, GRAIN and yeast. Grains in particular have a devastating effect on the health of a dog. Dogs and cats have no nutritional need for grains although it is the base ingredient for many dog foods! Grains are mucus-forming and may contribute to many health problems including allergies, ear infections, skin problems, bloating, joint

problems, malabsorption, and digestive disorders. It may also weaken the immune system and pancreas.

Feeding cows milk: Milk is a hormonal growth fluid produced by a mother animal to nourish a youngster of her OWN SPECIES. Only rarely would a wild carnivore/omnivore catch and eat a lactating prey animal or just .fed new born. Even so, this meal would contain little milk and in a form different from what is available commercially. Milk and products made from milk, contain foreign hormones and lactose; a sugar. Sugar comes in many forms and is addictive. It damages the

pancreas, and drains vitamins and minerals from the body. Yeast also thrives on sugar. In a 1993 study, unhealthy candida yeast overgrowth was 200 times greater in animals receiving dextrose than in the control groups that did not receive sugar. Milk is also mucus forming.

A very reliable remedy to rid your property of pesky ants is to mix yeast with sugar. The ants eagerly eat the mixture, which then expands, causing them to bloat, or explode, and die. Commercial yeast's are not natural food for dogs and cats, and do not offer any nutrients that cannot be obtained from species-appropriate sources. Yeast is a fungus, and most pets cannot tolerate it. Consuming yeast may also encourage yeast overgrowth within the body, which can lead to many health problems, including those of the digestive and urinary systems. Feeding yeast can unbalance your pet's calcium/phosphorus ratio due to yeast's high phosphorus content. Different forms of yeast include brewers, nutritional, bakers, torula and primary.

Varied diet and a high quality dog food will still go a long way to protecting your pet's coat, energy levels, and proper digestion and elimination. Supplemental vitamins should also be considered. Vitamin and mineral needs of elderly dogs often change. As their digestive systems weaken, they may not extract the full value of the foods they eat.

What to watch for.

Assess your pet's appearance and behaviour on a regular basis. Watch for changes in sleeping, eating, or urination. If your pet refuses food, is unduly reluctant to go out, is in pain or has a problem urinating, you should seek the advice of your veterinarian.

In addition, keep the following in mind:

Dogs with arthritis should still be exercised, but not excessively, as that can make their arthritis worse. Also, a glucosamine supplement can ease arthritis pain.

Older dogs are more susceptible to diseases of the heart and lungs. Alert your veterinarian at once if you notice coughing, wheezing, breathing difficulties, or weakness.

Dogs are especially prone to ear infections later in life. Check for discharge from the ear, persistent head shaking, or pawing of the ear.

Make allowances for declining hearing, sight and smell. For example, your dog may not obey you simply because it does not hear a command. Eye problems such as infections, cataracts, decreased night vision, or even blindness can also occur. Watch for signs such as discharge from the eyes, or signs of impaired sight, such as bumping into furniture.

Examine your dog's teeth and gums regularly. If they look inflamed or damaged, consult your veterinarian. Gum disease or infection leads not only to tooth loss, but may also cause more serious problems if the resulting bacteria enter the bloodstream. **TOOTH TARTAR AND GUM DISEASE**

Gum disease is usually related to the formation of tooth tartar. A popular

belief is that tartar is caused by the lack of abrasive food to clean the teeth. Many people mistakenly believe that feeding dry dog food keeps the teeth clean. One need only look at the teeth of dogs fed on most brands of dry food to realise that this is not so. I am sure that a dentist would not

recommend eating biscuit as a method of teeth-cleansing. It is true that bone and hide will help to clean the teeth but the real cause of tartar is an accumulation of waste matter in the body.

These wastes are dissolved in the body fluids including the saliva. When the saliva washes over the teeth much of this debris settles out and forms plaque which hardens to form tartar .

The most effective way to prevent tartar and gum disease is to feed a high-quality food which prevents waste products accumulating in the system.

Urinary incontinence is no fun for anyone, especially the pet that has been house-trained for years. Older dogs may suddenly urinate in inappropriate places. This may be due to their aging nervous system, but could also point to disorders of the urinary tract, prostate, or other body systems. If a pet suddenly becomes incontinent, or urinates more frequently, consult your veterinarian.