

# HOW TO DETERMINE YOUR DOG'S AGE

Dogs age at a rapid pace and before you know it your best friend might be considered a senior dog. As your dog ages from adult to senior you may notice some changes and special requirements that need to be met. Knowing what to expect can better prepare dog owners to deal with their new senior pet.

## **When my dog is considered a senior?**

For most dogs around 7-years-old is when they are considered senior. This number may be higher for small breed dogs and slightly lower for large breed dogs. For information on better estimation of your pet's age in comparison to human years, please read [Dogs and People – What is the Age Comparison?](#)

## **What changes can I expect as my dog becomes a senior?**

- You may first notice changes in your dog's activity level. Similar to people, elderly dogs may not have the same amount of energy they once did.
- It is common to see weight changes in your senior dog.
- With the change in your senior dogs' activity level metabolic changes could result in weight gain or loss.
- Many diseases are more prevalent in senior dogs. These diseases include, but are not limited to: dental, heart and kidney disease; as well as diabetes, arthritis, cancer and cognitive function disorder. The following symptoms are common signs that your senior pet may be ill:
  - Increase thirst or urination
  - bad breath
  - difficulty climbing [stairs](#) or jumping up and/or increased stiffness or limping
  - excessive panting or barking
  - confusion or disorientation
  - changes in skin and hair coat

If you notice any of these symptoms you should have your senior dog checked out by your veterinarian.

## **How can I keep my senior dog happy and healthy?**

There are several changes you can make to your pets routine lifestyle to maintain health for your senior dog.

- Consider changing from adult to senior dog food. The nutritional value in premium dog foods, are designed to meet the needs of your pets age and lifestyle. For information on

how to select a nutritionally balanced diet for your senior dog, please read [Feeding Your Senior Dog](#).

- Increase the frequency of your dog's routine veterinary examinations. Thorough veterinary visits are a great way to detect the early onset of illness that might not be noticed at home.
- Pay attention to detail- the smallest change in your senior dog could be the sign of an early onset illness. Small changes in behavior, attitude and daily routine may indicate that your pet is not feeling the best.
- Tailor your schedule to your senior dogs' needs. Remember your senior dog will need daily exercise and possibly more frequent [bathroom](#) trips.

Keeping your senior dog happy and healthy may require some special attention, but utilizing some of the simple steps above can help your senior dog easily maintain a wonderful senior lifestyle and make the transition from adult to senior a little easier.

If your dog is five years old, that means he is the same physiologic age as a 35-year-old person, right? Well, actually not. The theory that every year in a dog's life is the same as seven years in ours is commonly known but unfortunately not very accurate.

For example, a one-year-old beagle has passed puberty. A seven-year-old child likely has not. A seven-year-old Mastiff is considered geriatric, but a 49-year-old person is not.

For a more accurate comparison between physiologic age of dogs, follow this formula:

A one-year-old small or medium sized dog is about 15 human years old. When the dog reaches two, he is the equivalent of a 24-year-old person. After that, each year is about four human years. This means that a nine-year-old dog is about the same as a 52-year-old person.

Large and giant breed dogs initially age slower but then age quickly. At one year of age, he is about the same physiologically as a 12-year-old child.

After that, each year follows the standard seven human years.

The average canine life span is around 12 years but differs from breed to breed. By the time most dogs reach seven years of age, they are entering their senior years. For giant breed dogs, five years old is considered the beginning of old age. The record for the longest canine life span is 29 years.

As dogs age, their health and stamina slowly decline. Their bodies lose the ability to repair themselves, maintain normal body functions and adapt to the stresses and changes in the environment. In addition, around age 7 for most dogs and age 5 for giant breed dogs, metabolism slows down and older dogs require fewer calories.

The proper diet is very important in the care of an aging dog. However, there is no best food to feed a geriatric dog; the best food depends on the specific problems or nutritional requirements of the individual animal. Most foods for older dogs are lower in protein, sodium and phosphorus to help their aging hearts and kidneys. Increased amounts of certain vitamins have also been found to be beneficial in the senior dog.

Obesity is a very common problem of older animals and should be taken seriously. It directly correlates to a decreased longevity, and may contribute to other problems.