



FREE GUIDE

The senior dog care guide

What actually changes, and when to act on it

Introduction

There's no single day a dog becomes "senior" — it's a gradual shift that starts earlier in large breeds (around 6-7 years) than small ones (often 10+). This guide covers the real changes worth watching for, what's a normal part of aging versus worth a vet visit, and how to adjust care as your dog gets older.

What normal aging looks like

Slower to rise, a bit more sleep, some gray around the muzzle, less interest in long hikes — these are typical, gradual changes, not red flags on their own. The key word is gradual: aging happens over months and years, not days.

What's worth a vet visit, not just 'getting old'

A common mistake is writing off a real, treatable problem as 'just aging.' Sudden changes — new limping, confusion, house-training accidents in a previously reliable dog, noticeable weight change, increased thirst or urination — deserve a vet visit regardless of age. Many of these have manageable underlying causes (arthritis, cognitive decline, kidney or thyroid issues, diabetes) that respond well to treatment when caught.

Adjusting the home and routine

Small changes make a real difference for joint comfort and confidence: non-slip rugs over slick floors, a ramp or steps for the couch/car if jumping has become harder, a slightly raised food bowl for dogs with neck or joint stiffness, and shorter, more frequent walks instead of one long one.

- Non-slip surfaces on stairs and slick floors
- Ramp or steps for furniture/car access
- Orthopedic bedding for joint support
- Shorter, more frequent walks over one long one
- Consistent routine — older dogs often handle change less easily

Vet visit frequency and what to bring up

Many vets recommend moving from annual to twice-yearly checkups once a dog enters their senior years, since problems can progress faster at this stage. Come prepared with specific observations (when did the limping start, has water intake changed) rather than a general 'seems slower lately' — specifics help a vet actually narrow down what's going on.

Senior dog care checklist

- ☐ Distinguishing gradual normal aging from sudden, worth-a-vet-visit changes
- ☐ Non-slip surfaces added where your dog navigates slick floors or stairs
- ☐ Ramp or steps available if jumping onto furniture/into the car has gotten harder
- ☐ Walk routine adjusted to shorter and more frequent rather than one long walk
- ☐ Moved to (or discussed) twice-yearly vet checkups
- ☐ Tracking specific changes (dates, details) to report clearly, not just 'seems off'

Summary

Aging is gradual and mostly manageable with small home adjustments — the changes worth real concern are the sudden ones, which deserve a vet visit rather than being written off as 'just getting old.'

This guide is for general education only and is not a substitute for advice from a certified trainer, veterinarian, or veterinary behaviorist. If you're seeing signs of distress, aggression, or a sudden change in behavior, please consult a professional who can assess your pet directly.