



Degenerative **conditions**

The behavioural changes of senility in dogs are well recognised and may include a number of different symptoms. It is important to distinguish if their condition is due to age or a medical problem. A common problem is a growing lethargy leading to a lack of interest in life.

Behaviour & Senility

Other more specific indications of senility include sleep disorders, decreased awareness and reaction to sight and sound, loss of appetite, episodes of collapse and loss of house training.

Dogs may appear disorientated, or adopt new behaviour like howling or barking for no reason. Dog owners will often describe their dog as getting senile in the same tone as their great auntie Flo.

An older dog may become increasingly irritable, especially if in pain or discomfort and keep this in mind if there are children in the household.

Any changes should be reported, as the vet will be able to determine if the cause is likely to be part of ageing or a medical disorder.

Dogs produce harmful free radicals on a daily basis. In young, healthy dogs antioxidants neutralise these free radicals and equilibrium occurs. Unfortunately, as animals age, they increasingly produce more free radicals and a decreasing amount of antioxidants. This leads to an excess of free radicals, which damage the cells especially DNA and the lipid membranes and proteins. This in turn can lead to the development of disease and related problems.

What age-related symptoms would my dog show?

Animal behaviourists identify four distinct symptoms:

the signs...

- Disorientation
- Loss of house training
- Irregular sleep patterns
- Reduced interaction

You will clearly recognise some of these symptoms.

Treatments and diets are now available that can relieve the old age behaviour - some owners even describe their pets as being like a new dog!

Incontinence

Unfortunately, some dogs may become incontinent in the latter years. Urinary incontinence is more common than faecal.

Older female dogs may start to leak urine, especially when they are asleep. This is commonly due to a weak bladder sphincter muscle, but may also be caused by disorders of the urinary tract. In male dogs, the prostate can cause urinary problems.

Changes in your dog's mental status may lead to incontinence. He may simply forget that he needs to go. If your dog is wetting in his/her sleep or urinating more frequently, please tell the veterinary surgeon. Medicines are available that can be given in his food to help.

Never withdraw or limit drinking water to prevent accidents. If you notice your dog is drinking more than usual, you should discuss this with the vet and make a note of how much water is being consumed over a 24 hour period.

Other Clinical Problems

A loss of sight or hearing is a common problem in older age. Most dogs cope well with going deaf but practical tips such as waking your dog with a gentle touch, or making sure he knows when you have left, can be helpful. Blindness can be due to cataracts, or other clinical conditions. Most dogs cope very well with loss of sight. Keeping furniture in the same places at home will allow a blind dog to remain safe and confident. Remember a deaf or blind dog will require extra attention when away from home.

Kidney disease can affect the older dog as can liver problems.

Diabetes is more common in older, overweight female dogs.

Cancer is also a problem in older dogs but please remember that not all lumps are cancerous - your veterinary surgeon should be made aware of any growths you find on your dog.