

The Dog Food Project

If I have any beliefs about immortality, it is that certain dogs I have known will go to heaven, and very, very few persons. - James Thurber



Feeding Senior Dogs

Older dogs have nutritional needs that differ from those of younger ones, but then just when is a senior a senior? Many dog food companies and veterinarians will tell you that a dog is a senior once he or she turns seven years old, but it's not that simple.

First of all, dogs of different breeds and sizes have different life expectancies. A small or medium sized dog may well live 15 years or longer and will not show any signs of aging at just seven years old, where giant breed dogs like for example Great Danes at that age are well into the last third of their life span already.

But even dogs of the same (or similar) breeds and sizes will age at different rates, depending how soon and how fast the body's systems slow down and deteriorate. Annual wellness exams, preferably including blood work, will help you to determine when your dog might benefit from changes to the diet and extra nutritional support. And since blood work done at any point in a dog's life is just a "snapshot" of the current condition he is in, it would be smart to start including them now rather than a few years down the road if you truly want to benefit from the information they can offer.

Some of the special dietary needs of older dogs originate from

- decreased activity levels,
- mobility and joint issues,
- decreased digestive and metabolic efficiency,
- decreased immune and organ function,
- increased occurrence of intestinal problems,
- declining dental health.

I often see that veterinarians and food companies still promote feeding seniors foods drastically decreased in protein and fat, even though this is generally not indicated, and research has shown that especially senior dogs, as long as no other health issues require the reduction of protein for specific reasons, actually remain healthier with a higher protein level in their diet than on low-protein "Senior", "Less Active" or "Weight Management" foods.

Not only may senior dogs have a higher protein requirement because they can simply not digest and metabolize it as efficiently as younger dogs anymore and need to make up for that by increased intake, but a study also found a higher mortality rate after three years in senior dogs fed a diet lower in protein than the average adult food compared to those fed a diet higher in protein.*

Just like choosing the right food for your puppy or adult dog, it is important to take the individual dog's needs into consideration when feeding a senior. If your dog has reached his "golden years" and shows some signs of slowing down, but does not present with any special needs, there is no reason to switch from a high quality adult food to a senior food just yet, and unwanted weight gain can be addressed simply by decreasing the daily intake of calories as necessary.

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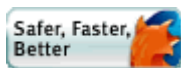
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Carbohydrates
Fiber
Vitamins
Minerals
Essential Fatty Acids
Probiotics

* Kealy Richard D., Phd; Factors influencing lean body mass in aging dogs. Proceedings of the 1998 Purina Nutrition Forum

Sabine Contreras, Canine Care and Nutrition Consultant, offers [personalized feeding plans](#) for dogs of all sizes, breeds and ages, no matter if they are companions, performance, working or show dogs.



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