

## **Help your “old” dog live better!**

We’d all like to keep our animal buddies around forever. A good diet and appropriate mental and physical exercise can help your dog elders live better and longer!

### **Our dogs have many of the same needs we do.**

To be at their best, dogs need real, fresh food, in the balance that’s best for their individual needs, just like we do. For dogs, real food in its natural balance means meat and vegetables.

**Do dogs need “senior” food?** All too frequently, we are advised to feed our dogs “Senior” food, often for dogs starting as young as 6 years old. There is no “life stage” formula food for humans: why would it be good for dogs? It’s not. It’s the result of some old “science” that’s still hanging around.

Veterinarians started recommending senior food years ago, when research seemed to show that dogs (and humans) with kidney problems would do better on a reduced protein diet. So, the reasoning went, we could avoid kidney failure by feeding a reduced protein diet as dogs aged.

This has not proved to be true for dogs or humans, and research done by big pet food companies agrees.(1-4) “Senior” foods are higher in grain than “adult” foods, which will cause increased insulin and inflammatory chemicals to be made. They are designed to be lower in fat and protein, with increased fiber. Older dogs need better protein and more protein. (5) In our opinion, “senior” and “light” diets are detrimental to the health of older dogs.

If Sparky could talk, he’d tell you it’s true. When we met Sparky, he was nine, a stout Brittany Spaniel who was not feeling very well. His family switched from “senior” dry food to a fresh frozen diet as an experiment, to see if a lower carbohydrate diet would help him lose weight. In four months, he lost about 10 pounds. He also lost these health issues: flaky coat, itchy skin, frequent bladder infections, multiple aches and pains, and most of the tartar on his teeth. He has plenty of energy these days, and no longer qualifies as an old dog.

**A species appropriate diet, based on meat and vegetables, provides the protein, fat, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants needed to keep the immune system and the brain working well. Good fats keep inflammatory chemicals in balance and hormone systems functioning properly.**

In a 14-year study that compared two groups of Labradors (one group free-fed and the other kept lean), lean dogs lived two years longer. The muscle wasting associated with old age was delayed by two years compared to the group allowed to become overweight. In addition, the lean dogs did not develop arthritis until many years after the overweight dogs, who began to show arthritic changes at 2 years of age. (6) Even if your dog has not been kept lean, you may see most of these benefits when you help

your dog shed those extra pounds with a meat and vegetable-based diet. It's never too late!

Those with achy and overweight dogs will be amazed to see the difference in how their dogs feel and act when they are fed meat and vegetable based diets. Often dogs who are quite tottery are transformed by a change of diet. Dogs with common chronic medical conditions need the supervision of a veterinarian who is skilled with fresh food diets to supervise and fine-tune a fresh food diet. Almost all chronic conditions (diabetes, arthritis, Irritable Bowel Disease and Irritable Bowel Syndrome, liver and kidney problems, dental disease) will improve on a home-prepared diet designed to support the specific issue.

### **Good food helps to keep dogs lean, but dogs also need exercise.**

If our older animals are not fit, the best diet in the world won't keep them with us. At your veterinary wellness check, find out what level of activity your veterinarian thinks is suitable for your animals to start with, and work up from there. Many conditions we have discounted as "just old age" diminish or disappear with good exercise. Digestion improves, elimination becomes more regular, animals are less achy and their brains work better. Getting more oxygen circulating builds lungs and heart, improves overall muscle tone and general health immensely. Brisk walking is a great start, but dogs need to get moving enough to get out of breath as well. For smaller dogs, this is easy to accomplish. Very out of shape dogs get winded pretty quickly, but as their fitness increases those with big dogs need to find ways to get them really moving (which will require increased fitness for the human).

### **Dogs often fade away from simple boredom.**

With an improved diet, dogs are likely to feel more like being active, but they need mental stimulation as well.

- Include your dog in family activities, and play with him.
- Small games like "catch the popcorn" and "find the treat" take very little human effort, and provide fun and mental stimulation
- Modify activities your old guy is no longer able to do so he can do them. For example, throw the ball so it lands closer to you and make sure he sees it before letting him go for it. Help him in and out of the car.
- Many dogs have self-appointed tasks: encourage them to keep at their jobs! Being needed keeps a dog happy.
- Learning something new keeps dogs happy, too. It's a mutually beneficial activity—both human and animal brains get a workout, and your connection to your dog gets even better.

### **Supplements or food?**

Supplements abound for older dogs and cats. They may prove to be of great benefit, but more to the point is good food and good exercise. Studies have shown supplements like glucosamine and chondroitin to be of use in joint issues – but the need for these supplements is minimized when an animal eats real food and gets enough exercise to make use of the food.

If you do use supplements, look for those made with whole foods. We consider a wide range of oils (fish oil, cod liver oil, salmon oil, krill oil, sardines) to be necessary in a good diet: and we consider them food, part of the diet, not an isolated ingredient.

Read *See Spot Live Longer*, available from [www.naturalpetproductions.net](http://www.naturalpetproductions.net), for more information on commercial diets and adding real food to your dog's diet. If your dog has a specific condition, we suggest that you consult with a veterinarian who is experienced with fresh food diets to fine-tune the diet to your dog's needs.

### **Let's keep them as long as we can!**

Get them moving, feed them well, engage their brains: you'll see a dog who is more interested in life, a dog who feels much better. We've spent a long time perfecting our relationships with our old dogs, we want them around for as long as they can stay.

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*See Spot Live Longer*

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