



# HOW TO KEEP LARGE & GIANT BREED SENIOR & GERIATRIC DOGS HEALTHY

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## THE ISSUE

Dogs age faster than humans. Large breed dogs (more than 55lbs) are seniors at 6 years old and geriatrics at 8. By adjusting diet and other aspects of their care as they age, owners can help their dogs stay healthier and live longer, more active and interesting lives.

## WHEN TO CONTACT YOUR VETERINARIAN

Seniors need yearly check-ups with routine blood work (some geriatrics may be well-served by checkups every 6 months). Contact your vet if there is any significant change in your dog's health, behavior, appetite or appearance. We recommend checking with your dog's vet before making any change to its diet or care. If your dog is receiving chemotherapy, please consult with a veterinary oncologist before feeding raw food.

## THE SOLUTION

We've starred (\*) the changes we think all owners of senior/geriatric dogs should consider.

### **\*1 Adjust diet to increase digestibility, moisture, & palatability. Maintain protein.**

As a large breed dog gets older, its body changes, and its nutritional requirements change too. Here are three dietary changes most senior and geriatric dogs benefit from:

- **Increase digestibility.** The digestive organs of older dogs generally don't work as well as those of younger dogs. Improving digestibility helps prevent nutritional deficiencies and also reduces the strain of eliminating waste products on seniors' livers and kidneys. If you're feeding kibble, the best way to increase digestibility is to transition all or part of your dog's diet to a more digestible form of food: raw frozen, freeze-dried, canned or pouch.
- **Increase moisture & palatability.** As dogs age their reduced sense of smell leads some to become picky. Many large breed dogs may suffer from dental disease, making chewing kibble painful or even impossible. Two of the organs at most risk for seniors and geriatrics are the liver and kidneys. Transitioning all or part of a senior/geriatric's diet to high moisture foods (raw frozen, freeze-dried, or canned) addresses all three of these senior conditions: improved palatability, easier chewing and reduced strain on processing organs.
- **Maintain protein.** Past studies done on rats led nutritionists to recommend low protein foods for senior and geriatric dogs, and many senior diets are still made this way. More recently, multiple studies done on dogs indicate that most senior and geriatric dogs live longer, healthier lives when they eat high protein diets. (The one exception: dogs in end-stage liver or kidney disease feel better on low protein diets.) Unless your dog's vet recommends a low protein diet, we recommend that diets for senior and geriatric dogs have a minimum dry matter protein of 24%. This correlates to these minimum percentages of protein in the guaranteed analysis: for raw frozen, 8%; canned & pouch, 5%; for kibble and freeze-dried foods, 22%.

### **2 Improve dental health with treats, supplements or raw chicken necks.**

There are several ways to improve your dog's dental health (and reduce his need for full dental cleanings). 1) If your dog can still chew well, give him a raw chicken neck twice a week (cut back on his food on these days). In addition to cleaner teeth, you'll be giving him mental stimulation, natural enzymes, glucosamine and chondroitin. 2) If necks won't work for your dog, give him a dental chews. 3) If he doesn't like to chew, you can still improve his teeth with a dental supplement.

### **\*3 Improve digestive health with prebiotics; improve digestion with digestive enzymes.**

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70% of a dog's immune system is in his digestive tract. The healthier his digestive tract, the stronger his immune system. Supplementing a dog's diet with prebiotics feeds the good bacteria that play a large role both in digestion and in immune function. And supplementing with digestive enzymes improves dogs' ability to fully use the food they eat and reduces the waste material that passes through the colon where good bacteria live.

#### **4. Improve mental health with antioxidants and Omega-3s.**

In a recent study, 32% of dogs over 11 and 100% of dogs over 16 suffered from Canine Cognitive Dysfunction. Signs include: increased barking, loss of housetraining, loss of hearing, "spaced out" look, disorientation, obsessive licking and separation anxiety. Supplementing with antioxidants and omega 3 fatty acids can improve these symptoms in 2 to 8 weeks. Both can be found in all mushrooms supplements. Mitochondrial co-factor L-Carnitine has also been shown to be beneficial. For dogs that are severely affected, ask your vet about other treatments.

#### **5. Address other health issues: organ support, joint health, excess weight, skin & coat.**

If your dog suffers from any of the issues below, they are likely to become worse as he ages. Look for expanded discussions of these issues in future Mud Bay Solution Sheets.

- **Skin and Coat.** Consider omega 3 fatty acid supplements; salmon oil, pollock Oil, or green lipped muscle.
- **\*Joint Health.** More than half of US dogs suffer from osteoarthritis or joint disease—and many owners are completely unaware of it. Consider a dedicated joint supplement to support allover joint health.
- **Obesity.** Obesity reduces longevity and quality of life and increases the likelihood of disease. The two simplest ways to help a dog lose weight are reducing portion size and reducing fat content. Make small, consistent changes, not dramatic ones, and look to reduce weight very gradually.
- **\*Vital Organ Support.** The heart, liver, kidney, and immune systems of senior and geriatric dogs are weakened and often overburdened with the slow build of toxins. Herbsmith Milk Thistle, Animal Essentials Detox, or Senior can help support these systems and naturally detoxify seniors' bodies.

## **RESULTS**

Updating your dog's nutrition as he ages can increase his quality of life and possibly reduce or avoid developing age related disease. Some results will become visible within weeks. Other improvements in health may remain invisible to you throughout his life.

## **STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?**

Mud Bay staffers are specifically trained to help senior dog owners. Muddies can also help you find the products that match the recommendation on this sheet, so if you need more help or information, please let us know.