Senior Dog

Feeding Senior Dogs

Aging is not a disease, although it is often associated with health problems. Nutrition can play a powerful role to help maintain health and optimal body condition, address age-related health issues before they occur, reduce the risk of weight gain or obesity, and possibly add more quality and longevity to a dog's life.

Key Messages

- Every dog ages at a different rate that varies by breed and body size, even though most dogs are considered "senior" at around 7 years of age.
  - While ultimately determined by genetics, aging can be influenced by nutrition, activity, health problems and environment.

Dog Breed Size	Age Considered Senior
Toy	9 years
Small	8 years
Medium	7 years
Large	6 years
Giant	5 years

Adapted from Nestlé Purina PetCare Communication Principles for Europe, Middle East & North Africa. (2015). p. 14.

- Age-related changes inside an aging dog's body may be occurring before external signs or behaviors are seen. These changes may include:
  - **Less efficient use of glucose for energy by the aging brain**, which can affect cognitive health (i.e., memory and learning). Mild cognitive impairment has been reported in dogs as young as 6 years old.
  - **A slower metabolism and lower activity level** that together result in lower energy (calorie) needs and increase the potential for excess weight gain unless an adjustment in the type or amount of food is made. Excess weight places additional stress on aging joints, increasing the risk of osteoarthritis.
  - **Less efficient protein metabolism**, which may result in loss of lean body mass (e.g., muscle). Less lean body mass contributes to a slower metabolism and may increase the risk for weight gain.

- A good time to discuss the benefits of senior diets is when a dog reaches about 7 years of age because targeted nutrition can proactively address some age-related changes. There are no established nutrient profiles for the senior dog life stage. However, several nutritional interventions have been shown to be beneficial:
  - Purina studies show dietary medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs) sourced from enhanced botanical oils can provide an alternative energy source for brain cells that may help support cognitive function in dogs as they age.
  - Increased levels of high-quality protein and reduced levels of fat and calories can help maintain optimal body condition and lean muscle mass.
  - Eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA), an omega-3 fatty acid found in fish oil, and glucosamine from natural sources help support joint health and mobility. Omega-3 fatty acids also may help reduce inflammation.
  - Antioxidants (e.g., vitamins C and E) and probiotics help support a healthy immune system, while probiotics and prebiotic fiber help promote healthy digestion.
- Aging dogs should be fed to maintain ideal body condition and preserve lean body mass for optimal health and longevity.

Additional Resources

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