Old dogs

Having old dogs can be a lot of work. That said, caring for an old dog is a labor of love. I adore old dogs; there is nothing like giving back to a dog who has given their all to us. As they slow down, their eyes start to fade and they can’t always make it outside fast enough anymore. This is when they need us the most.

When I see old dogs in shelters and rescues, it breaks my heart. I cannot believe as a dog enters their senior years, when they really need their human; that human lets them down in the worst possible way. We are a society of new and shiny and sadly many people don’t consider the gift of an old dog as a gift at all. Burdened with
the requirement of more patience, work, cleaning and care; some humans baulk at the idea of giving back. But we should consider this a huge gift, not a burden.

**Getting rid of an old dog because they are old? Inexcusable.**

Those people who feel like they don’t have time for an old dog will also grow old themselves one day. Owners who don’t want to clean up after their old dog; that can’t deal with the slow pace and extra needs of an old dog, are very undeserving of those wonderful youthful years their dog gave to them. Take, take, take.

Old dogs make me smile. Many people are never lucky enough to have an old
dog; their dog taken away far before it’s time. Being gifted with the senior years of a dog is very special. Our old dogs deserve patience and tenderness. I remember walking slower than a snail pace with my old girl Tilley as she recovered from Vestibular disease. The days I hovered over Luke as he hunched to poop; knowing that his legs might give out on him. He hated to be touched when he was pooping so I had to help him in his blind spot so he didn’t know that I was there helping. I did this for them, from my heart, out of the love I had for them.

I can look back now and think WOW that was a lot of work. Jessie had dementia and incontinence. Tilley suffered from the effects of Vestibular disease and was incontinent. Luke
endured epilepsy from the age of 3 years and then we had a new puppy, Elsa. It was a crazy busy time looking back but when I was in the thick of it, it was amazing. As a nurturer at heart, I was in my element and my heart was full, caring for all of my dogs.

I remember as Jessie’s dementia worsened and she went from displaying slightly strange behavior to full blown sundown syndrome. She needed more and more from her family as her mind deteriorated. Jessie was the first dog of ours that ever suffered from dementia and I hope that I never have to deal with it again. It is a very sad affliction as you lose your dog well before they pass.
Symptoms of an Aging Canine

Things Get Cloudy

Many of our dogs start to lose their sight as they age. Their eyes grow cloudy and they cannot see as well as they used to. The loss can first show itself at
night; your dog may not want to go up stairs or to an area where it is very dark. Slowly things get harder for them to see; like us when we reach our 40s and our arm is not long enough to see anymore ;) Of course not all lose their sight but most have slightly diminished vision as they get well into their senior years.

It Hurts

Many dogs suffer from arthritis which can be very painful. But even if they don’t, an old body takes more time to recover from exertion or movement. Just moving around can take time once our dogs move into their golden years. Healthy supplements can help to ease some of the pain but more often than not the patient hand and heart of a canine guardian is required.
Extra lbs Around The Middle

Old dogs need less food. Yep, even active old dogs need less caloric intake. Their heart and breathing can be strained by excessive weight; which is also a huge risk when undergoing any type of surgery or procedure requiring anesthetic. Overweight dogs are at a higher risk for injuries like ACL tears. Even a few extra pounds added to their body can have a huge impact on their joints. The more they have to carry around the harder it is for them to move.

Sadly many old dogs suffer from the vicious circle of a few extra pounds leading to less movement which leads to more pounds. Many guardians don’t notice the extra pounds going on until it is out of control. So constant body
weight checks are important as our dogs age.

Extra weight can lead to all sorts of health concerns. Keeping your old dog nice and lean is the best way to help them as they age. Don’t change their food unless there is a reason. Just cut back on the amount they eat and don’t give in to those “I’m starving” puppy dog eyes. Just as food becomes more important to us as we age; so does it with our older dogs. Stand strong for your dog’s body and don’t let them put on extra lbs. We are in charge of the food so if our dogs get fat, it is on us.

What? I Can’t Hear You!

Many older dogs also lose their hearing. There are many different levels of
hearing loss. From just a little less than perfect to all out deaf. There is no way to know how your dog’s hearing will be impacted by age. Constant checking will let you know how bad it is getting.

Falling back on hand signals is a great way to help cross the barrier of hearing loss. I have always used hand signals with my dogs so that when the time comes that they can no longer hear me, I just switch over. The transition is a smooth one if they are already use to communicating via hand signals.

There may also come a time when their hearing is so bad that you cannot allow them to be off lead any longer. An old deaf dog can be in great danger off leash; simply by the fact that they
cannot hear you or anything else around them.

Interactions between your dog and other dogs can become a dangerous situation with hearing loss. If your dog cannot hear, they may not hear a threat or warning from another dog so you must always supervise your old dog to keep them safe.

Dementia–Canine Cognitive Dysfunction

It can happen to anyone, human or canine. Canine Cognitive Dysfunction signs to watch out for are strange behaviors, actions that look like confusion or cannot be explained. It could just be one of those “that was weird” behaviors that tip you off to something not right with your dog.
Dogs can sometimes do strange things but when it keeps happening or they deteriorate with age, it could be dementia. Dementia typically gets worse with time but there are things that you can try that may help. My experience was that it got worse as the months passed and management was the only thing to do. We had to deal with each progression of dementia and figure out how to keep our little lost girl from getting injured while she was in the throws.

Talk to your vet or do your research for help with dementia in older dogs.

Checkups

Old dogs can be afflicted by all sorts of illness, disease and health concerns.
The need for yearly blood tests, scans and checkups may lead to catching something before it becomes serious. I like to start annual “senior” dog blood panels at 8 years and body ultrasounds at 10 years of age, in case. Sometimes there is nothing to do if something is found but at least you know what you are dealing with.
Needs

The Comforts of Home

Is there any better place to be than home when you aren’t feeling up to par? Our old dogs need to get out and about but they also need lots of quality at home time. Old dogs can become stressed by going out; it can be scary when you grow old and feel vulnerable. The safe and secure feeling of being at home is good for an old dog’s soul. A soft bed and safe home cannot compare to anything else.

Out And About

Like I said, old dogs need to get out. But their outings change drastically as they age. I remember buying an
amazing buggy for my old boy Luke when he really couldn’t join us on walks any longer. It was like an enclosed stroller that we pushed. This way he was able to join us until the very end while riding in his buggy. It took him a little while to get use to it but was well worth it.

If he wasn’t riding in his buggy he was out alone on a one on one walk. This meant walking at a snail pace for us as we followed him around on his sniffing journey. It was always a very short walk before turning around and heading home; but it truly was one of life’s most precious moments. So…think tortoise when you venture out with your old one and enjoy the pace.
Patience

Never was there more of a need for patience than with our aging best friends. As they slow down, we need to slow down. We need to linger in the moments. There will be accidents; they will need our help getting up and down. They will need us both emotionally and physically. The demand for our care will come; for us to be there for them, to support and offer what we can.
Dragonluck’s Red Ruby (my sister’s family’s much loved girl.)
Now gone but never forgotten.

Old dogs’ need our caring arms (metaphorically speaking) wrapped around them as they move into their golden years and beyond. When the time comes for them to leave this world of ours; they should go by our side feeling the love that they deserve and
we should let them go…knowing that we gave our all to the very last second.

**Giving the gift of your time, love, care and tenderness to an old dog is where we show our true colors.**

*This tiny booklet was written in memory of all my old dogs; and the special time when I was able to give back to them.*
If you have an old dog you may be interested in my book Moving *Through the Loss of your Canine Companion* which can be found on Amazon.

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