

## **BowWOW!**

Facts, observations and musings about Our Best Friends

### **Old Friend, Live With Me Forever**

Old dogs are our friends and protectors; the life-long love affair we have with them is priceless. They have endured our foolishness, overlooked our mistakes and have celebrated our achievements alongside us for years. They, in part, have contributed to who we are. A kind heart demands we return to them in their dotage the attention they unfailingly gave to us in their youth. We cannot indefinitely prolong our aging dog's life but we can pledge to enhance the enjoyment of the time left. Simply, they ask that we guide them into a comfortable old age.

When does a dog become an old dog? Each individual, dog or person, has his own tempo for aging. Smaller dogs age less quickly than larger breeds and mutts seem to have more longevity than purebred dogs. As dogs approach the age of seven, muzzles may whiten, the eyes may become a bit more opaque and chasing-the-ball time becomes shorter and less enthusiastic. As he becomes even older he may have trouble with stairs, his appetite may decrease, he may develop changes in appearance and he may get a bit crotchety. Sleeping becomes a major pastime. What can we do to make this transition easier?

*Old dogs like hands-on love.* Jefferson has been part of the family for the last eleven years. He's such a part of the household routine that no one really notices him anymore. But now is the time to recognize his important contribution to the family by giving him special time. Carve ten minutes from your hectic daily schedule to simply put your hands on your old dog. Listen to him breathe. Tell him he is The Best. Gently stroke him, feel for lumps, bumps, warm areas, tender spots—any signs that a veterinary check-up could improve his health and your peace of mind. Communicate to him that you appreciate his place in your life.

*Take care where your old dog sleeps.* Older joints are less well lubricated; often it is painful getting up and down. Would Jefferson be more comfortable on a thick, orthopedic foam pad? Does Jeff prefer to lean into something when he sleeps, place his head up on a bolster? Is he less restless if his bed is next to yours? When sleeping is an aged friend's major activity, a special bed may be his due.

*Obsess about his nutrition and health.* Even though Jeff's hearing has diminished and he creaks when he rises from the floor, he can still get himself to the kitchen with delighted effort when he hears his food bowl rattle. It's still the highlight of his day! Consult with a professional about geriatric foods, supplements and new ways to tempt his aging palate. Anti-oxidant supplements

such as vitamins A, C and E, omega-3 fatty acids, glucosamine and MSM are all beneficial to the older dog. Sometimes a top dressing of herbs or spices or dry grated cheese is all it takes to make mealtime even more special.

*Avoid stress.* Jeff may no longer be able to tolerate extremes in heat or cold or drastic interruptions in his routine. With the holidays bearing down upon us it is time to consider how hordes of visitors, especially rambunctious kids and puppies may affect Jeff's quiet life. It might be time to designate a special Quiet Zone retreat for Jeff, still in the area but out of the traffic pattern.

*Exercise mind and body.* Don't believe the old adage "you can't teach an old dog new tricks". Stimulate your dog's brain with new teachings, new places to see and smell and new things to do. Stimulating a dog's mind helps keep the brain in tip-top shape. Choose new destinations for the evening walk or play "search and rescue", a game all dogs love. My beagle learned how to "sit pretty" (sit up) at age 12. At 14 she takes great pride in conning for snacks.

*Nourish his spirit.* What does an old dog want? You, and your undivided attention. Love him today like there is no tomorrow.

BowWOW! Is a production of Tracie Korol and **wholeDog**.  
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