



Pawsitive Steps

Canine Rehab

Physical Therapy and Wellness

Putting the pep
back in your
pup's step

Ways to help your dog age well

Congrats on being an amazing pet parent! The perspective of pet ownership has drastically changed over the years and pets are now considered family. We love them dearly and want to do everything we can to help them live long, happy, and healthy lives. Dogs are living longer and healthier lives because of proactive pet parents like yourselves. Seeing your veterinarian for regular and yearly wellness exams, yearly labs, and dental health are all very common ways to help your dog stay healthy. But there is more that you can be doing.

As your dog starts to age, you may start to notice them slowing down or struggling to stand up, or not getting on to the couch like they used to do. Once you start noticing these things, you hope it will pass in a few days, and it typically does, or at least you may not notice the consistent struggles. This is often when you wonder, do they need help? Is this just part of aging? Did they just overdo it the day before? It could be a combination of all those things, but this is the time to start helping them! There tends to be the desire to bubble wrap them or not let them continue with activities, but as the saying goes, “if you don’t use it, you lose it”. Activities may need to be modified, but “movement is medicine”.

Promote Body Awareness

Everyone walks about socialization with pups and how important it is, and they are right. New sights, new sounds, and learning to be safe and neutral in those environments are key to a confident and well rounded pup, however this continues no matter their age. New surfaces, textures and physical activities are important for general body development. This can include walking on grass, rocks, sand and woodchips to start, as well as hilly surfaces. Then your pup can progress to different obstacles, such as curbs, walking along the curb like a balance beam, playground equipment, on/off park benches and cavaletti poles. You don’t have to buy fancy equipment, as the great outdoors and parks generally have everything you need or things around the house, such as Amazon boxes and broom sticks. Anything new helps to build body awareness, improve strength, improve core strength, and increase confidence.

General Activity Guidelines

As your pup reaches their “golden years” as a senior and geriatric dog, activities will likely need to be modified. Shorter, more frequent, and less intensive activities are warranted to help muscles strong while promoting healthy blood flow and reducing injury. Warm up and cool down sessions such as stretching or walking may be required. Fetch should be limited to 5 gentle throws with several minutes of rest in between sessions. The abrupt stopping and changing directions can cause ligament and tendon injuries. Play and exercises should be fun for you and your dogs, so if you notice hesitation or lack of interest, the dog may not be enjoying the activity or they may be in pain.

Aging Well Wellness Program

This program is designed specifically to help your dog maintain their mobility as they age. The first session is to meet you and your pup, identify key areas of concern, treat those areas, determine appropriate exercises and teach you the exercises to do at home. You will be given a Home Exercise Program within 48 hours the electronic version with videos and pictures will be sent to you via e-mail. Subsequent visits will be to re-visit the areas of concern and treat as needed, determine how exercises are going at home and modify or progress as needed. This is a less intensive and less in-depth than the canine rehabilitation program. If a more intensive program is warranted, canine rehab route will be encouraged.



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Aging Well Tips

Maintain a Healthy Weight

As your dog ages, their nutritional needs change, primarily with protein intake which need not remain high to maintain the muscles they do have. Be very mindful that being overweight, even by 5%, significantly increases the load placed on their joints and can lead to progressive degenerative changes. Talk to your veterinarian about what diet is most appropriate for your pup. Be mindful of the treats and frequency you give your pup, and consider switching them out at times for veggies, such as carrots.

Mental Enrichment

Cognitive Decline and Dysfunction happen in pets, just like humans. It is important to keep their minds sharp as they age. There are tons of puzzle toys out there to challenge a dog's mind and sniffer. Pinterest and the internet have tons of ways to help make your dog keep those mental faculties strong. Mental stimulation is often more tiring than physical activities. Consider adding "sniffaris"--slow meandering walks that allow your dog to sniff the environment without rushing them. Some say this is the dogs version of social media. Talk to your veterinarian about supplements and medications that can help with cognitive decline and function.

Hands on time

Our hands are one of our greatest assets. Giving intentional pets along sore spots or massaging their legs in the evening when they are stiff, can help to increase blood flow and ease muscle tension. Belly rubs and ear scratches also help to communicate love and affection while release endorphins which are the "happy chemicals" in the brain.

Strengthening and Stretching program

Regular exercise and activity are essential for maintaining wellness. Be intentional about your activities and introduce new surfaces and directions. Keep your dog moving. Consider joining the "**Aging Well Wellness Program**" or **Canine Rehab** to meet your dogs specific needs.

Home Modifications:

Consider adding rugs, yoga mats, or carpet to slick flooring in order to provide your pup with some stability. Orthopedic beds such as Big Barker can provide them with comfort and support during their naps and bedtime. Adding ramps or "stair stepping" modifications to your couch so they can cuddle without causing pain. Consider booties for traction as well.

Watch for:

Any abrupt changes in activities, decreased desire to participate in activities, increased panting, decreased appetite can all be signs of pain. You may notice intermittent limping, difficulty settling dog, exaggerated sway of the hips or frequent weight shifts, and change in the foot placement while standing or walking (wider or more narrow stance). Contact your veterinarian if you notice these changes.

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Physical Therapy and Wellness
Clinic at Waterloo Animal Hospital

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