



AGEING CANINE TOOLKIT

A guide on how to protect
your dog as they age



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Introduction

Many dogs live well into old age, and with this comes increased risks of certain health problems. However, research shows that owners can find it difficult to know what are “normal” age-related changes (signs of ageing) or whether signs indicate possible disease that would benefit from veterinary advice and treatment¹.

The speed of ageing and the likelihood of particular health conditions varies among breeds. Large breeds tend to age more quickly than smaller breeds, and so become “aged” relatively sooner; but for each individual dog, ageing is affected by other factors too. Though there is no fully agreed definition of what an aged dog is, a general guide is that larger dogs (22.7 kg or over) are classed as senior when 6 to 8 years of age and geriatric at 9 years of age, and smaller dogs (less than 22.7 kg) are senior when 7 to 10 years of age and geriatric when 11 years of age².

Regular discussions and check-ups with your vet and veterinary

team can help relieve and prevent suffering, identify diseases earlier and ensure your ageing dog’s quality of life remains high and that they live longer. It is recommended that senior dogs have health checks at least twice a year.

This leaflet contains copies of a checklist to help you know whether to seek advice from your veterinary practice and to help guide your discussions with them. It is based upon key findings about caring for an ageing dog from BSAVA PetSavers-funded research carried out at the University of Liverpool that questioned dog owners and veterinary professionals and reviewed medical records^{3,4}. The leaflet also contains information about the more common health problems affecting aged dogs and what to look out for.

We recommend you work through the checklist at least every six months and keep completed checklists for comparison when you repeat this.



Protect your dog
as they age

Mobility changes



Osteoarthritis



Obesity



Hormone-related conditions



Other

Older dogs are at increased risk of conditions which can affect their mobility. Some of these diseases start earlier in life and progress.

Common causes

Osteoarthritis is a very common disease. Larger breeds are more commonly affected and, although most disease is not curable, treatments are available that can effectively control pain and may slow disease progression.

Obesity is common in older dogs as activity levels decline but appetite may not (see page 12).

Some hormone-related conditions are associated with an increase in lethargy (tiredness) and decrease in a dog's willingness to move. Examples include hypothyroidism (underactive thyroid glands), diabetes (causing weakness and muscle loss, decreasing the ability to exercise) and hyperadrenocorticism (overactive adrenal glands).

Other less common disorders affecting the nervous system, muscles and/or bones.



It is important to check and monitor your dog's ease of movement daily as they walk, play, go up and down stairs and get on or off furniture.

Key signs to look out for:

- difficulty in rising from a lying or sitting position*
- increased tiredness
- moving less*
- limping/lameness or change in the way they walk or run*
- decreased willingness to go for walks*
- stiff movements*
- reduced interest or ability to carry out normal movements*
- dragging of paws and scuffing of nails
- wobbliness during walking
- reluctance to walk on slippery floors

Pain

The signs marked with an asterisk above (*) can indicate chronic (long-term) pain. Dogs suffering this type of pain may also show:

- **behavioural changes such as:**
 - altering how much they want to interact with you and others
 - sensitivity to handling and touching
 - seeming depressed and withdrawn
 - regular panting and/or licking of particular parts of their body
- **changes in their posture e.g. the position they stand, sit or lie in.**

This pain can go unrecognised if you are not aware of what to look for.

Monitor your dog's mobility using the free Dog Mobility App (DogMA) from the University of Liverpool



How can your vet help?

Most effective treatments of osteoarthritis use combined approaches, which involve pain relief measures, weight control, and physical rehabilitation such as walking exercise, hydrotherapy and/or physiotherapy. Your vet can help coordinate, review and tailor your dog's treatment plan.

The common hormonal causes of mobility issues can often be managed and the signs greatly improved with treatments, regular monitoring and veterinary support.



Dental disease

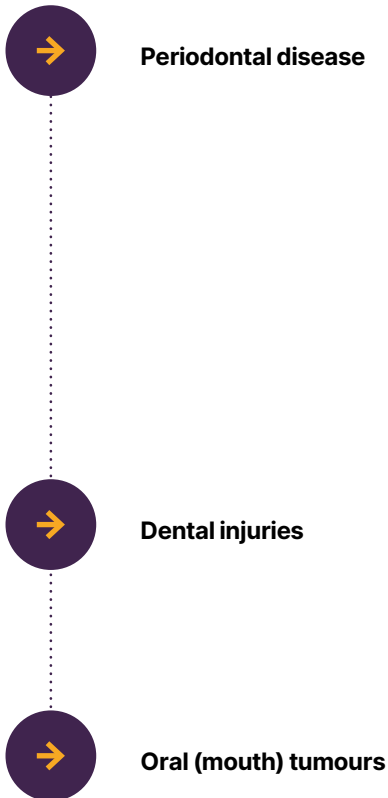
Dental disease is a broad term used to describe conditions that affect the mouth and teeth. Most dogs, particularly small breeds, are likely to experience dental disease at some point in their life (approximately 85% of dogs over 3 years of age are estimated to show signs of disease), with these signs becoming more common as your dog ages.

Common causes

Periodontal disease is inflammation of the periodontal tissues (gums and tooth sockets) caused by the gum's reaction to the presence of plaque bacteria (see image). It starts off as gingivitis (gum inflammation) seen as redness, swelling and sometimes bleeding. Unchecked, gingivitis can develop into the more severe form of dental disease called periodontitis. This can lead to bone loss around the tooth, which makes the tooth loose and then fall out.

Dental injuries such as tooth wear can be caused by abrasive materials such as a tennis ball or cage bars. Tooth fractures can result from trauma or chewing on hard chews e.g. antlers.

Oral (mouth) tumours ranging from benign to malignant (see page 18).



Impact on your dog

- Anyone who has ever had toothache will appreciate just how **painful** dental disease can be, from the discomfort of gingivitis to acute intense pain resulting from an abscess.
- The potential **spread of bacteria** from the mouth via the bloodstream to other parts of the body such as the heart and kidneys can be fatal.

Key signs to look out for:

- smelly breath (halitosis) – not to be overlooked as simply 'dog's breath'
- salivation (increased drooling)
- redness, swelling or bleeding of the gums
- fractured or missing teeth or a visible hole (cavity) in the surface of a tooth
- anything that does not look like it should be there, such as foreign bodies or lumps

How can your vet help?

Firstly, your vet will complete a visual assessment, noting the health of the teeth, gums and surrounding tissues. Once dental disease is confirmed, they will recommend further investigation if required. It is not possible to fully determine the extent of dental disease when conscious, so your vet is likely to recommend a complete assessment under general anaesthetic, which involves full probing of all teeth to check for bone loss, possible dental X-rays and making a dental chart to record all abnormalities. Once this is complete, they will carry out professional cleaning and, if necessary, tooth extractions or other procedures.

You will also be able to discuss preventative measures e.g. daily tooth brushing with special pet toothpaste. Your vet can advise on future regular dental check-ups to help monitor your dog's oral health.



It is also important to note mouth discomfort, including:

- a loss of appetite or reluctance to eat certain foods such as harder biscuits (which can lead to weight loss)
- dropping or shying away from food or play toys held in the mouth
- sneezing or snorting after eating or drinking
- face rubbing, pawing at the mouth or aggression when you touch their head or mouth

Image

Periodontal disease



Weight changes

Over half of dogs are overweight and weight gain often occurs as they age, as can weight loss. Weight changes usually reflect a change in energy balance, measured in calories.

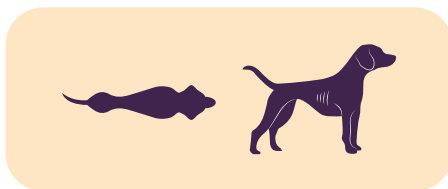
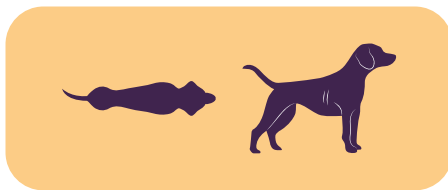
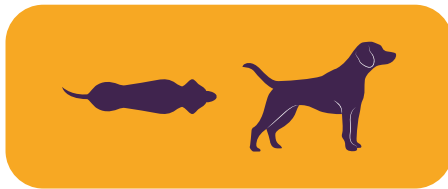
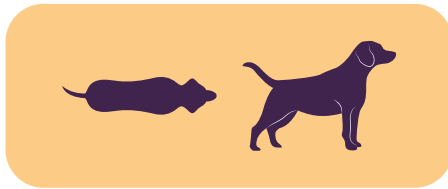
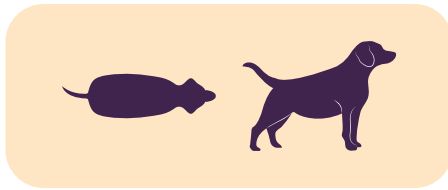
An adult dog needs energy for basic body functions and activity/exercise, so any increase in calories eaten, or reduction in activity (reducing the calories being used), will result in weight gain.

Medical conditions and recovery from surgery are reasons why the body may require more calories, so an ill dog or one recovering from illness or injury may lose weight even if they are eating normal amounts of food.

An ideal body condition (weight relative to size) is one where the ribs are easily felt, and can be easily counted by feel.

There should be a minimal fat covering. The waist should be easily seen from above and the dog's tummy should be nicely tucked up. The use of body condition scoring is recommended to more accurately assess your dog's condition (see image). Using the 9-point scale, a score of 1–3 is considered underweight, 4–5 is an ideal weight and 6–9 is overweight.

Body condition score (BCS) chart for dogs



9

8

7

6

5

4

3

2

1

Overweight (6-9)

- The ribs, spine and hips are not easily felt or counted
- There is no visible 'waistline' tucked in behind the ribcage
- The abdomen is not tucked up when viewed from the side
- There is a layer of fat under the skin

Ideal weight (4-5)

- The ribs are easily felt and seen
- The waist is easily seen from above and the tummy is nicely tucked up
- There is minimal fat covering

Underweight (1-3)

- The ribs and spine are visibly prominent giving a bony or skinny appearance
- A marked 'tucked in' waist is seen behind the ribcage
- There is no or very little body fat

Weight gain and obesity

Many dogs become less active as they age. Even if you take them for the same walk each day, they may run around far less so require fewer calories. Therefore, if they are fed the same amount as before, they can gain weight. Other influences on activity include stiffness and aching joints e.g. osteoarthritis, and diseases such as diabetes and heart disease which may make them feel less energetic. Treating these diseases may make it much easier to manage your dog's weight. Conditions like arthritis are only made worse by being overweight.

Key signs to look out for:

- BCS 6–9 (see page 11)
- a lack of enthusiasm for walks and games, and tiring easily
- more difficulty in getting up, or into the car, or managing the stairs
- any change in appetite
- increased weight (if you have access to suitable scales)



Weight loss

Loss of weight in older dogs is much less common than obesity, but can be equally important. If an older dog is losing weight for no obvious reason, it is vitally important to investigate and treat any underlying causes, as well as to ensure that an adequate, nutritionally balanced diet is being eaten.

Common causes:

- Serious medical conditions such as heart disease, chronic diseases of the gut, cancer (malignant tumours) and hormonal conditions such as diabetes and Cushing's disease (hyperadrenocorticism).
- Dental disease leading to a reluctance to eat (see page 8).
- Muscle loss due to diseases such as osteoarthritis or general ageing.

Key signs to look out for:

- Changed toileting habits
- A lack of enthusiasm for walks and games, and tiring easily
- Mobility changes
- Any change in appetite, or any difficulty in eating their food
- Other signs of ill health (see page 20)
- Reduced weight/BCS (if you have access to accurate scales)

How can your vet help?

You will see that some of these signs are the same for both underweight and overweight dogs, and can indicate underlying disease which your vet would want to investigate further with a full examination and possibly additional diagnostic tests.

Your vet may offer advice regarding nutrition. There are special diets for a range of situations e.g. ones

designed to help pets lose weight and to address specific diseases.

Finally, your vet can help you plan things like exercise or other alternatives for building muscle in underweight dogs or reducing fat in overweight dogs. Some examples include hydrotherapy and physiotherapy.

Behavioural changes and confusion

Behavioural changes may be the first signs of a health problem starting and can be subtle, but are a common cause of concern to owners. They can result from a wide variety of medical conditions causing pain, sensory decline, or any disease that affects the nervous system. Behavioural problems may also be due to age-related brain degeneration known as canine cognitive dysfunction (CCD) or cognitive dysfunction syndrome (CDS), often called 'doggy dementia'.

Common causes



Sensory loss

Sensory loss such as vision and hearing loss.



Pain

Pain caused by problems such as spine disorders, osteoarthritis, dental disease and others.



CCD

Canine cognitive dysfunction (CCD) – see below.



Brain disease

Brain diseases such as tumours. (see page 18)



Kidney disease

Kidney disease and urinary tract infections.



Hormonal disorders

Hormonal disorders such as diabetes, hypothyroidism and hyperadrenocorticism.

What is canine cognitive dysfunction (CCD)?

- CCD occurs as the brain ages, and results in noticeable behavioural changes similar to dementia in humans.
- A diagnosis of CCD is based

on the recognition of these behavioural changes and the exclusion of other medical conditions and drug side effects, which can cause similar signs.

Key signs to look out for:

There is a great overlap between signs resulting from different causes, so it is important to report any behavioural changes, however small they seem, to your vet.

disorientation

- less responsive to sights and sounds e.g. being called
- decreased recognition of familiar people, pets or places
- getting lost in familiar places
- approaching the wrong side of the door (hinge side)
- staring blankly at walls or floors
- dropping food/unable to find food
- increased reactivity (e.g. barking) at unexpected sights or sounds

changes in social interactions

- reduced greeting behaviour
- increased or decreased interest in interacting with other people or pets
- newly-shown fear, avoidance or aggression towards familiar people or pets

changes in sleep/wake cycles

- restless sleep or waking at night with confusion and disorientation
- increased daytime sleeping

changes in toileting habits

- toileting “accidents” indoors at random sites (including sleeping areas) or in view of owners
- decreased signalling to go to the toilet
- going outside, but toileting inside the house upon returning

changes in activity

- increased wandering, pacing, restlessness or vocalisation
- decreased exploration
- seeming depressed or tired (lethargic)
- staring, or fixation on or snapping at objects
- increased licking of owners or household objects
- reduced interest in walks and play

increased anxiety

- showing aggression, grumpiness or irritability
- seeming more needy and not liking to be left alone

decreased learning and memory

- forgetting previous training
- not coming to verbal commands or treats that would usually cause a reaction
- unable or slow to learn new tasks

changes in appetite and drinking (see page 16)

How can your vet help?

Early detection of behavioural problems gives the best opportunity to improve or slow the progression of disease, and early treatment is most likely to be successful.

Do not delay in contacting your vet if your dog develops any new, unusual behavioural signs. Your vet will be able to perform physical and cognitive (mental) assessments to help identify the cause of the changes, and help you access additional trained behaviourist support if needed.

Toileting and drinking

Changes in toileting habits, as with changes in drinking, can indicate the development of a major new disease. Observed signs should be discussed with a vet as they can have several possible causes in the ageing dog that need veterinary care and treatment.

Common causes (of increased drinking)



Diabetes

This is a common condition caused by a deficiency in the hormone insulin.



Chronic kidney disease

Progressive kidney disease leading to failure of the kidneys to function properly is another common problem in older dogs.



Hyperadrenocorticism

This disorder leads to increased amounts of circulating adrenal hormones in a dog's body which have a wide range of major effects.



Pyometra

This is a serious infection inside the uterus, which is generally seen in unspayed (entire), elderly female dogs.



Other causes

Some drugs can lead to increased drinking, as can some less common diseases.

Changes in urination and toileting habits:

If dogs drink more, then they usually need to urinate more too, so the above causes of increased drinking also cause increased urination.

Urinary tract infections (UTIs)

UTIs commonly occur in senior dogs when bacteria infect the lower urinary tract. With age, the normal barriers to

infection within the urinary tract can decline, leaving some dogs more open to infection.

See page 14 on behavioural changes, which discusses the signs of canine cognitive dysfunction (CCD) including around toileting.

Key signs to look out for:

behaviour around toileting:

- increased 'accidents' - urinating inside the home
- urinating more often or greater volumes
- increased urgency to go to the toilet
- straining to pass faeces
- straining to urinate without passing any urine, or only very slight amounts
- pain on urinating, shown by vocalising, tensing up or a reluctance to urinate
- signs of 'spotting' in the house; trails or puddles of urine indoors
- a change in the urine colour e.g. being much darker, cloudy or containing blood
- discharge from the vulva

drinking:

- **the most important change to take notice of is an increase in the amount of water your dog is drinking (indoors and/or outdoors)**

Note: Drinking over 100 ml per kg body weight per 24 hours is considered excessive.

To work this out:

1. Provide one source of water for your dog for a 24-hour time period.
2. Measure the amount of water you put in the bowl and the amount left at the end of the 24 hours.
3. Take away the amount of water left after 24 hours from the starting amount.
4. Divide this number by your dog's body weight (in kg) to give the total water drunk in 24 hours per kg body weight.



How can your vet help?

Your vet can discuss the possible causes of your dog's increased drinking or changed toileting habits, carry out diagnostic tests to rule out or confirm diseases and then advise you on the most appropriate treatment and disease management plan for your dog. There is much that can be done to slow progression and improve the quality of life and welfare of older dogs with some of the above problems, so it is always worth seeking veterinary advice.

e.g. for a **30 kg** Labrador given **4 L (4000 ml)** of water, of which **1800 ml** remained after 24 hours:

$$4000 - 1800 = 2200 \text{ ml} \div 30 = 73 \text{ ml per kg per day}$$

Lumps

Dogs can develop a wide variety of lumps and bumps either in or under their skin and, like people, the chance of developing a lump increases with age. Many lumps are not life-threatening or harmful, but some can be so it is **always** a good idea to get any lump checked out by your vet without delay.

Tumours

There is always an element of concern whenever you come across a lump. It raises the nagging question 'could this be cancer?' And the words cancer or tumour themselves conjure alarm, so we should be clear what we mean by these terms.

- A tumour is an abnormal growth of a tissue which can be classed as either benign or malignant. A malignant tumour is what we often refer to as cancer.
- There can be a grey area between benign and malignant but in general:

Malignant tumours

can be invasive, damaging underlying tissues and/or spread to other areas; some might regrow after they have been removed.

Benign tumours

do not invade or spread elsewhere and are unlikely to regrow once removed. However, some benign tumours can become very large and cause problems by their sheer size, or have other effects such as secreting hormones.

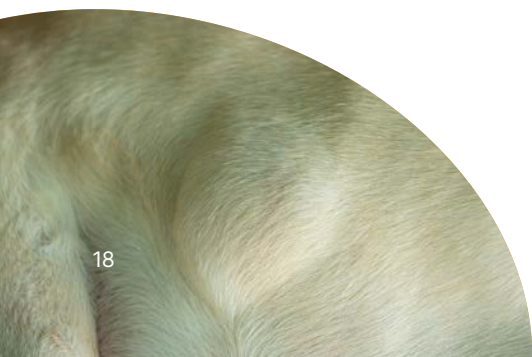


Image
Fatty lump

Common examples of tumours that can be easily felt/seen include:

- **Benign 'skin tags' or 'warty' benign epitheliomas**, which both sit proud of the skin.
- Other tumorous lumps sit within the skin, so move with the skin.
- Deeper lumps may not be attached to the skin, which can move freely over them. Older dogs often develop soft, mobile fatty lumps called lipomas (see image), especially along their sides and under their tummy. The vast majority of these are benign and won't need removing.
- Some cancerous skin tumours can look like more benign lumps, so it is always best to confirm an early diagnosis if possible. This can be achieved by a 'fine needle aspirate' which is a simple test that extracts a few cells using a syringe and needle to analyse in the laboratory (though doesn't always provide an answer).
- The size, shape, colour, speed of growth and how firmly attached to the skin or other tissues can also help determine whether a lump might be benign or malignant.

Lumps that are easily felt/seen but are not tumours include:

- **Local inflammation** can sometimes cause major swelling in and below the skin. For example, abscesses can occur from an infected bite wound, or where a foreign body such as a thorn or grass seed has penetrated the skin and caused infection. Such inflammatory swellings usually come up quickly over a few days, and often look red, hot and painful if touched. They require prompt treatment although the long-term outlook is normally good.
- **Ticks** swell as they feed on your dog's blood so can easily be mistaken for a 'growth' when first seen.
- Some non-tumorous lumps sit within the skin, for example **follicular cysts** which are blocked hair follicles.

Not all lumps need to be treated, but all lumps should be checked out by a vet and monitored for changes that occur over time.

Other signs of ill health

This leaflet and checklist cover the signs of the most common problems in ageing dogs. There are other signs to watch out for that might indicate illness, which could have a number of different causes, so it is important to always take your dog to the vets should you spot signs of poor health.





Key signs to look out for:

- vomiting
- diarrhoea
- difficulty passing faeces
- coughing or wheezing
- excessive scratching or licking
- excessive panting
- anything else you notice that is out of the ordinary for the way your dog usually looks or behaves
- swollen belly

How can your vet help?

Talk to your vet about any changes to the way your dog looks or behaves. Your vet will be able to give your dog a thorough examination, discuss the signs you have seen and identify the best method of investigation and treatment.

Ageing pets require more frequent health screening, and it is important not to dismiss signs simply as evidence of 'getting older'. Problems that are detected and investigated early have the best chance of treatment and of giving your ageing dog the best possible quality of life.

Quality of life and caring for an ageing dog

The term quality of life is used here to mean the degree to which your dog is healthy, comfortable and able to enjoy and participate in their everyday life³.

Regularly evaluating your dog's quality of life helps you identify whether things have changed in their behaviour, physical and cognitive (thinking) ability or emotional health, which might mean they need veterinary support and treatment. As this leaflet has already discussed, there are a wide range of disease conditions, more commonly seen in older dogs, which can impact their health and

quality of life. These conditions may lead to emotional as well as physical suffering for older dogs, **but much can be done**, with the support of your veterinary team, to minimise their effects. For example, vets have options to control chronic pain well, improve mobility and support dogs through their disease for long periods of time. Therefore, **seeking veterinary support early is always recommended.**



Questions to consider (adapted from^a):

- How much is your dog enjoying life?
- Consider the things your dog liked to do when it was young – are they still able to do the things they used to enjoy? These might include going for walks, playing, running and interacting with people and/or other dogs.
- How much do they do each day now?
- Has there been any change in your dog's behaviour?
 - Are they interacting less with you, the family or other animals?
 - Are they reluctant to go on walks?
- Have they started showing a new behaviour? This could include lip-smacking, sitting in a different way or staying in their bed.
- Do treatment plans/medications seem to be working and helping?

Keeping a diary or taking videos from time to time of what your dog does for a 24-hour period can be a useful way of identifying changes. Changes in behaviour can be subtle, so regularly thinking about the above questions helps you attune yourself to picking up those changes.

The impact on owners of caring

Caring for an elderly dog comes with a range of challenges and can affect you as the owner. Caring can take a lot of time and can affect your daily routines, ability to go out or away or do other things. It can have an understandable emotional impact, even if you don't mind or enjoy caring for them. There is also the financial impact of having a dog with ongoing health conditions. It may also potentially impact on your dog e.g. with increasing time needed for care, there may be less time for fun interactions.

Questions to consider

- Have your circumstances changed in any way which impacts on the care you can provide?
- How are you coping with caring for your dog?
- What challenges are you noticing?
- What help might be useful to you?

Your vet and practice team understand these challenges and they should form part of the regular discussions you have with the team, enabling you to agree on options which best suit you and your dog, and ensure an enjoyable time together.

End of life

Our Ageing Canine Checklist and this accompanying leaflet are designed to help you pick up on changes that might indicate disease in your dog. This is to help you recognise when veterinary care would be beneficial, **enabling your dog to remain healthier, happier and part of your family for longer**, though the leaflet would not be complete without us considering the end of life. Although it is upsetting and emotional to consider the end of your dog's life, it can help you and your family make the best decisions for your dog if you do this before the time has come. If you have a strong relationship with your vet, their support in this decision-making can be even more effective.

Some questions to consider to help you and your family prepare:

- Do you feel prepared for what might happen, and have you asked your vet about the process?
- Have you discussed the decision with family members and got someone to support you?
- What does each family member think and feel? Do they agree? Do they need the same things?
- Have you considered the support that other animals or children in the household may need?
- Are you aware of the options available at your veterinary practice?

Veterinary surgeons are frequently asked to advise on whether euthanasia is appropriate for a particular older dog. Whilst any individual clinical condition must be considered, it is often the dog's overall quality and enjoyment of life that needs to be assessed at this time. Your vet will discuss euthanasia with you, helping you to ensure that your dog ends their life with dignity and respect, and with your agreement that it is the right thing to do.

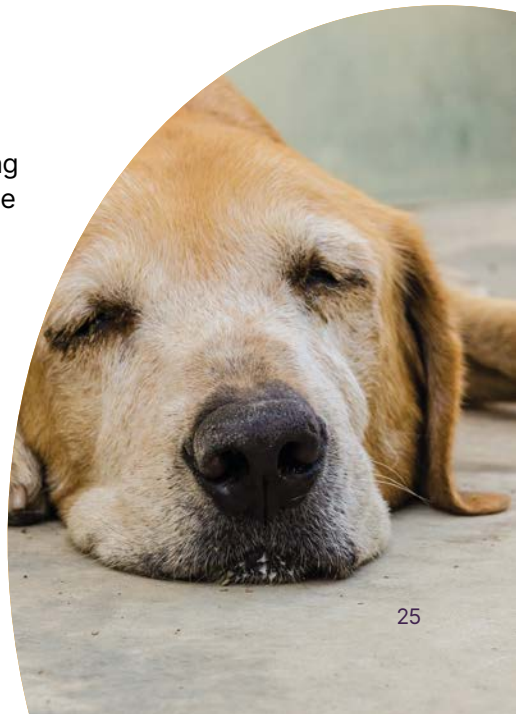
Questions to consider regularly when evaluating your dog's quality of life (adapted from⁵):

- How much is your dog enjoying life? What does your dog's day look like? Are they still able to do the things they enjoy/ed doing?
- Do they have more good days than bad?
- How are they coping with their medications and treatments?
- Are they able to independently access their food, water, favoured resting places and toilet sites when they want? Are they independently able to get away from things which cause fear or that they don't like?
- Are they able to express most normal dog behaviours?
- Are they free from fear and distress? Some illnesses such as canine cognitive dysfunction (CCD) can increase these; chronic pain can cause mental distress as well as physical pain sensations.
- Does their current life have dignity?
- Is this situation going to get any better?
 - Is treatment possible?
 - Is treatment the right thing for you and your dog?
- What is best for your dog?
- What is best for you and your family?

Planning ahead of time can control the situation and circumstances of the end of your dog's life, rather than it possibly ending up as an emergency situation, which can be more stressful⁵.

It should be remembered that an animal's quality of life may have deteriorated significantly before they stop eating and drinking.

Taking responsibility for a pain-free, peaceful death is part of being a good owner, and an extension of the respect and love you show towards your companion.



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AGEING CANINE CHECKLIST

Owner name

Dog name

Date

	Yes	Maybe	No
Mobility	Is your dog slowing down, tiring on walks or wanting to go for a walk less? Are they struggling with stairs, getting onto a sofa or bed, or stiff on rising? Are they limping, dragging or scuffing their feet, wobbly or falling over?		
Dental	Does your dog have bad breath or crusty brown deposits around their teeth (tartar)? Are they reluctant to eat hard foods or have their teeth checked? Are they chewing more on one side of their mouth?		
Weight gain	Has your dog gained weight recently? Do they have a fatter belly than they used to?		
Weight loss	Has your dog noticeably lost weight or muscle condition even though they are being fed the same amount of food?		
Behaviour	Is your dog acting depressed, lethargic, looking sad or disinterested in life? Do they spend nearly all their time sleeping? Has your dog become grumpier?		
Confusion	Does your dog have episodes of looking confused, staring into space, bumping into things or aimlessly pacing? Have they started waking during the night or become more anxious? Are they losing their sight or hearing?		

Work through the checklist answering each section.
If your dog scores red or amber for any questions in any section, please seek advice from your veterinary practice.
It can also help to take videos or pictures of anything you find to show them.

	Yes	Maybe	No
Toileting	Has your dog started having accidents or urgency to go to the toilet when they were previously housetrained?		
Drinking	Is your dog drinking more than usual or urinating more frequently?		
Lumps	Have any lumps or swellings appeared on your dog's body?		
Other symptoms	Is your dog showing any other changes (for example, coughing, panting, scratching, licking, tummy upsets, anything else)?		
Quality of life	Are you concerned about your dog's quality of life? Is it getting worse?		
Care	Is looking after your dog becoming more challenging than it used to be?		
End of life	Finally, although it is incredibly difficult to think about the end of your dog's life, there are decisions that will have to be made when the time comes. It is helpful to think about these sooner rather than later and have discussed in advance with family members. Do you feel prepared for what might happen? Would you benefit from discussing options available with your veterinary practice?		

AGEING CANINE CHECKLIST

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Dog name

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	Yes	Maybe	No
Mobility	Is your dog slowing down, tiring on walks or wanting to go for a walk less? Are they struggling with stairs, getting onto a sofa or bed, or stiff on rising? Are they limping, dragging or scuffing their feet, wobbly or falling over?		
Dental	Does your dog have bad breath or crusty brown deposits around their teeth (tartar)? Are they reluctant to eat hard foods or have their teeth checked? Are they chewing more on one side of their mouth?		
Weight gain	Has your dog gained weight recently? Do they have a fatter belly than they used to?		
Weight loss	Has your dog noticeably lost weight or muscle condition even though they are being fed the same amount of food?		
Behaviour	Is your dog acting depressed, lethargic, looking sad or disinterested in life? Do they spend nearly all their time sleeping? Has your dog become grumpier?		
Confusion	Does your dog have episodes of looking confused, staring into space, bumping into things or aimlessly pacing? Have they started waking during the night or become more anxious? Are they losing their sight or hearing?		

Work through the checklist answering each section.
If your dog scores red or amber for any questions in any section, please seek advice from your veterinary practice.
It can also help to take videos or pictures of anything you find to show them.

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Toileting	Has your dog started having accidents or urgency to go to the toilet when they were previously housetrained?		
Drinking	Is your dog drinking more than usual or urinating more frequently?		
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