



**FLORIDA VETERINARY BEHAVIOR SERVICE**  
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### **Keep your dog young!** **Five tips to keep your old dog young at heart.**

As our dogs live longer lives, we have to rethink how we care for them. Everyone knows that they need regular medical check ups and labwork, but what about their mental well-being? There are things that you can do to keep your dog's brain young too. Follow the 5 tips below to keep your dog young at heart through her golden years.



#### **Hit the road**

Many of our elderly pets suffer from arthritis, heart disease or obesity and can't walk near as far as they used to, but they can still benefit from getting out of the house. If your dog is small, you can take her in a stroller. If you are running errands and you won't be leaving the car, you can take your dog with you. You can even take your dog down the driveway to get the mail or to put out the garbage. These field trips may seem of little significance to you, but they will be very important to your dog allowing her to sniff the grass, enjoy the sun and watch the birds go by.

#### **Teach and old dog new tricks**

Yes, an old dog can learn new tricks! Make a goal to teach your dog a new trick each month. It doesn't really matter what you teach her as long as you spend quality time with her stimulating her mind. Make sure that you use only positive reinforcement training. Don't get wrapped up in whether your old girl is perfect at what she does. Instead, just focus on having a good time with her. Be sure to choose behaviors which do not aggravate underlying medical conditions. For example, if your dog has arthritis, don't ask her to roll over. Instead, teach her to pick something up with her mouth, push a toy with her nose, bark on cue or high five.

#### **Give her a puzzle**

Just as you play Sudoku to keep your brain young, your dog can play games to keep her brain young. Food toys are a great way to spice up your dog's life. Some examples of food toys are: Twist and Treat (Premier), Kong (black is for the toughest chewers), Stuff-a-ball (Kong), and Buster Cube. At first, put only  $\frac{1}{4}$  of her meals into the food toys. When she is accustomed to eating out of them, work up to giving her  $\frac{1}{2}$  of her meals from food toys. This way, she can keep busy when you are at work.



**Try a supplement**

There are lots of supplements on the market to improve or restore brain health in older dogs. They include: Novifit (Virbac), Proneurozone (Animal Health Options), Senilife (Ceva) and Neutricks (Quincy Animal Health). Before starting a supplement of any type, your dog should be examined by a veterinarian. During the appointment, be sure to ask your veterinarian about what is right for your dog.

**Stand back and watch**

Sometimes, because we see our dogs everyday, it is easy to miss subtle behavior changes which represent larger medical diseases. For example, if your dog is barking at you a lot, she may be losing her hearing. She may also be too painful or weak to stand up herself on slick tile or marble floors. If she is starting to get into the garbage, she may have a metabolic disease which is increasing her appetite. If she is staring into the corner and barking at walls, she could have Canine Cognitive Dysfunction. If you think that there is something wrong with your dog, there probably is, so bring your dog to your veterinarian to get checked out. When you catch a problem early, there are more options for treatment. Besides medical treatment, you can make changes to the environment to help old dogs cope. Deaf dogs can be trained with light or vibration. Dogs who have difficulty moving around can be fitted with booties or non skid carpet runners can be laid down in common areas.