



The St Bernard is another very big breed of dog with a shortish lifespan – about ten years or so. He can be prone to skin problems, tumours and hip dysplasia.

Their heritage is not only mixed, but sometimes not even known for certain – although many experts put the average life expectancy of a typical crossbreed at about thirteen years.

Then there is our own human perception of canine age to consider. If we have owned a dog from the time it was a boisterous and mischievous little puppy, we often still consider him to be extremely youthful, even when he has reached quite an age. Provided he is still active, enjoys playing, looks trim and still does the endearing



The little Chihuahua, like several small breeds of dog, can live for sixteen years or more. Chihuahuas are active dogs that will need regular daily exercise to keep them fit and healthy throughout their life.

things that give each dog his individual character, nothing much will appear to have changed. Eventually, however, the signs of ageing will begin to manifest themselves, even in the fittest, leanest and most youthful-looking of dogs. There will be noticeable physical changes, such as a greying of the fur, especially around the head, and a hazy coating over the eyes, as well as certain behavioural changes, such as the propensity for your dog to want to sleep longer, run around less, and perhaps to drink more water.



As long as she is healthy, an older dog, such as this Vizsla, will still enjoy playing a game with her owner, even when well advanced in years.

A new beginning

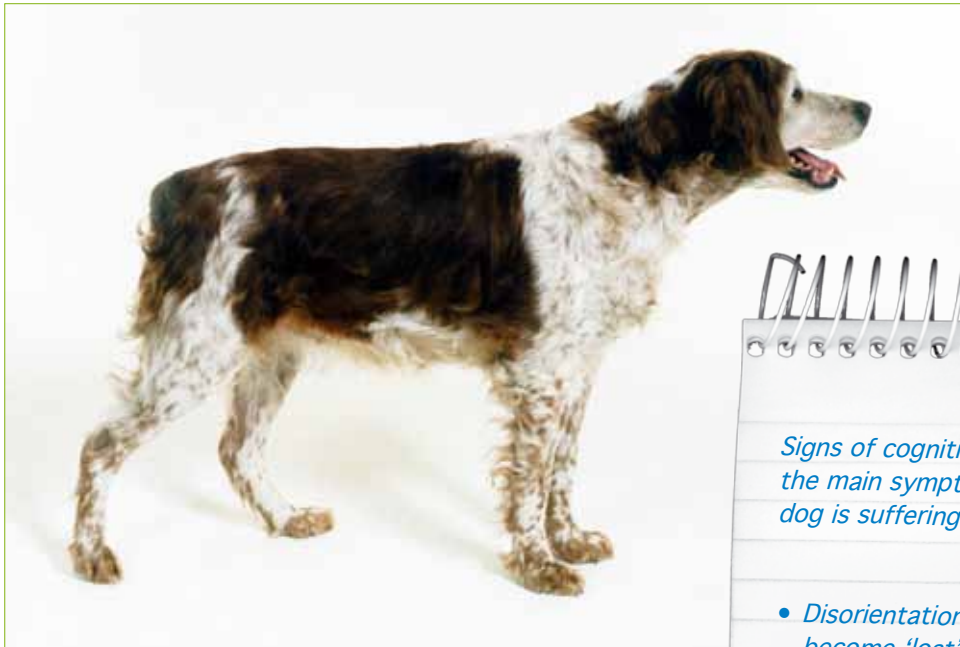
However, these are rarely signs that we need to worry about unduly. After all, if a dog lives until, say, thirteen or fourteen years of age or more, then when 'older dog' status kicks in at around seven years or so, he's only about halfway through his lifespan! Instead, we should come to regard this canine 'coming of age' as a cause for celebration and simply another phase in his life; we can think

of our companion as a wise and trusted friend, instead of an unruly teenager, and look forward to our golden years together. If anything, the bond between dog and human becomes stronger at this time, giving us a chance to re-evaluate and appreciate the contribution that our dog brings to our lives. Your faithful friend will gradually make his own adjustments as he gets older, and we should be prepared to do the same. By understanding

Noise phobia

Fireworks, the rumble of thunderstorms, high traffic volume, and other loud sounds can make your senior dog extremely anxious and fretful. There are several reasons why this might be so: she may have less mobility, making it harder to remove herself from what she perceives to be the source of the noise; she may be less able to manage stress than when she was younger; and she may be suffering from cognitive dysfunction syndrome (see later). There are various therapies available to treat noise phobias, including medication that can calm her. Another method is counterconditioning. With this treatment, the same sound that causes the phobia is played to the dog initially at a low level, and the sound then gradually increased over several days or weeks. A reward is given each time the dog displays no fear of the noise. Even without using such measures, there may be practical things you can do to alleviate the problem. Closing all windows and drawing curtains will help to reduce the level of noise. Talk gently to your dog to calm and reassure her, or try offering a distraction, such as playing her favourite game. If possible, do not show any anxiety yourself – even if you are afraid of thunderstorms as well! If you do so, you will simply transmit your fear to your dog and reinforce the idea that she should be afraid.

Panting and staring into space could be signs connected with cognitive dysfunction syndrome.



A condition that can afflict some older dogs is cognitive dysfunction syndrome. When your dog ages, the brain will age, too, which can result in a form of dementia or senility similar to the condition Alzheimer's disease that is seen in humans. It is calculated that more than half of all dogs over the age of ten years will experience at least some of the symptoms of cognitive dysfunction syndrome.

Because some of these signs may also indicate other diseases, your vet will need to carry out a series of diagnostic tests to try and ascertain whether or not your dog is suffering from cognitive dysfunction syndrome. Unfortunately, as in humans with Alzheimer's disease, there is no cure for this condition. Your vet may recommend treatment with a drug such as Anipryl, though, to help offset some of the symptoms. Even though cognitive dysfunction syndrome is not preventable, there are plenty of games and other stimulating pastimes that you can undertake to try to keep your dog mentally active as she enters her senior years (see page 51 of chapter entitled *General care*).

Signs of cognitive dysfunction syndrome: the main symptoms that could indicate your dog is suffering from this condition:

- *Disorientation – for example, appearing to become 'lost' in familiar surroundings such as the garden, or being 'trapped' behind furniture*
- *Failure to recognise familiar people, or to respond to familiar commands or cues*
- *Showing anxiety for no apparent reason*
- *Showing no interest in familiar activities such as playing or being stroked*
- *Showing confusion or staring into space*
- *Unusual behaviour, such as barking or whining without reason, circling or shaking, or wandering about at night*
- *Appearing aggressive for no apparent reason*
- *Accidents in the house that cannot be attributed to any known health problems*



An experienced practitioner performing acupuncture on a Staffordshire Bull Terrier. The technique involves inserting needles in parts of the body and manipulating them in order to relieve pain.

Mobility issues and therapy

Hip dysplasia may be less common than it was once, thanks to techniques such as screening breeding dogs for the condition and using 'hip scoring' based on X-ray images. However, arthritic changes affecting the hip joints especially are not uncommon in older dogs. There is little that can be done by way of direct treatment, but ensuring that your dog is not overweight – which will increase the burden on the joints – is significant. Painkillers used in accordance with your vet's advice may be required on occasion, and acupuncture may also be beneficial, particularly for a relatively calm dog. (See also *My dog has hip dysplasia ... but lives life to the full!* published by Hubble and Hattie.)

A range of dietary supplements can be given to ease joint pain, and these are available as liquids,

powders and capsules. They contain various constituents such as chondroitin, glucosamine, MSM (a sulphur-based compound), and hyaluronic acid, and help to improve the amount of synovial fluid, which lubricates the joints and encourages the development of protective cartilage within the joints, making them less painful. Always select a brand developed for dogs, rather than for humans, since they are more likely to be palatable and are easier to administer via food, for example. Various herbal products are also available for decreasing inflammation, and these may contain plants such as yucca, comfrey, and devil's claw. If you grow plants such as comfrey, you may even find that your dog will browse on them in the garden, apparently recognising the beneficial effects.



This deaf Springer has learned to respond to visual signals instead of voice commands.

Declining senses

You may notice as your dog becomes older that his hearing will decline, which can lead to disorientation, especially when out for a walk. You are likely to find that he begins to appear unresponsive around the home, too, not always hearing when you are calling. There is really very little that can be done under these circumstances other than to try to accommodate your dog's changing behaviour (but see *My dog is deaf ... but lives life to the full!*, published by Hubble and Hattie).

Older dogs tend to stray less than when they were younger, but even so, encourage your dog to stay closer to you when you are out for a walk. It is not just you that an elderly dog may not hear – approaching vehicles can also represent a greater danger. Therefore, always keep your dog on the side farthest from the road when walking along a pavement, so he cannot step out into the traffic.

Blindness is another handicap that can afflict older dogs, and again, there is little that can be done. Dogs, generally, are less reliant on sight than we are, and will prove far more adaptable under