

Monitoring Your Senior Dog for Signs of Disease

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As your dog ages, the likelihood he will develop various changes in the function of his body systems increases. Some of these will be normal changes due to the aging process, others may be indicative of disease. To be more easily alerted to possible signs of disease early in the disease process:



- Monitor food consumption: how much is being eaten?, what type of food is being eaten (e.g.; does your dog leave the hard kibble and only eat the canned)?, any difficulty eating or swallowing?, any vomiting?
- Monitor water consumption: drinking more or less than usual?
- Monitor urination and defecation: color, amount, consistency and frequency of stool; color and amount of urine; any signs of pain while urinating or defecating?, any urinating or defecating in the house?
- Measure weight every 2 months: for small dogs use an infant or mail scale, or use the scale in your veterinarian's office; for medium-size dogs, weigh yourself holding the dog, then weigh yourself and subtract to find the difference; for larger dogs, you may need to use your veterinarian's scale.
- Groom, check and clip nails, look for any lumps, bumps, or non-healing sores; any abnormal odors?, any change in size of abdomen?, increased hair loss?
- Monitor behavior: sleep patterns, obeying commands, tendency to be around people; any house soiling?, easily startled?, anxious when left alone?
- Monitor activity and mobility: difficulty with stairs?, inability to exercise without tiring quickly?, bumping into things?, sudden collapses?, seizures?, any loss of balance?, any lameness or change in *gait*?
- Look for any changes in respiration: coughing?, panting?, sneezing?
- Provide home dental care: [brush your dog's teeth](#), regularly examine the inside of his mouth; any excessive drooling?, any sores?, bad breath?, are the gums swollen, yellow, light pink, or purplish?
- Monitor environmental temperature and the temperature at which your dog seems most comfortable.
- Schedule regular appointments with your veterinarian.



Some of the more common signs indicative of diseases are shown in the table below. Remember, just because your dog has a sign of a disease does not necessarily mean he has the disease. What it does mean, is that your dog should be examined by your veterinarian so a proper diagnosis can be made.

Signs and Symptoms of Common Diseases in Older Dogs	Associated Diseases
Behavior Changes	Pain associated with arthritis Loss of sight or hearing Cognitive dysfunction Hypothyroidism Liver disease Kidney disease
Weakness or exercise intolerance	Mitral insufficiency /Heart disease Anemia Obesity Diabetes mellitus Cancer Hypothyroidism
Change in activity level	Hypothyroidism Arthritis Pain Obesity Anemia Mitral Insufficiency /Heart disease Kidney disease Cancer
Weight gain	Hypothyroidism Cushing's disease Obesity Arthritis
Weight loss	Cancer Kidney disease Liver disease Gastrointestinal disease Decreased food consumption Oral or dental disease Mitral Insufficiency /Heart disease Diabetes mellitus Inflammatory bowel disease
Abnormally colored mucous membranes (gums)	Anemia Mitral Insufficiency /Heart disease Liver disease
Coughing	Mitral Insufficiency /Heart disease <i>Respiratory</i> disease Heartworm disease Cancer
Increased thirst and urination	Cushing's disease Pyometra (uterine infection) Diabetes mellitus Liver disease Kidney disease

Vomiting	Kidney disease Liver disease Gastrointestinal disease Inflammatory bowel disease Cancer Diabetes mellitus
Diarrhea	Gastrointestinal disease Sudden changes in diet Inflammatory bowel disease Kidney disease Liver disease
Seizures	Epilepsy Cancer Kidney disease Liver disease Mitral Insufficiency /Heart disease
Haircoat changes	Hypothyroidism Cushing's disease Obesity
Bad breath	Dental disease Oral cancer Kidney disease
Lameness, difficulty rising	Arthritis Nervous system disease Obesity
Urinary incontinence	Kidney disease Pain from arthritis Hormone responsive incontinence Bladder stones Cancer Prostate disease
Lumps, bumps	Cancer Benign tumors
Appetite changes	Diabetes mellitus Cancer Liver disease Kidney disease Gastrointestinal disease Stress Pain Reaction to medication(s) Oral or dental disease Cushing's disease
Cloudy eye	Nuclear sclerosis Cataract Glaucoma

References and Further Reading

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