

Keeping the Geriatric Canine Mobilizing!



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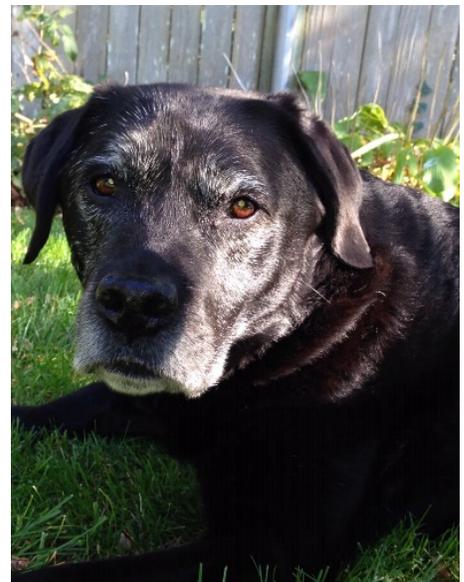
Just like humans, the canine body changes with age. Both species get a little grayer and often experience hearing loss and eyesight impairment. And, just like us, geriatric dogs typically experience a decrease of muscular strength and endurance and often encounter a slower metabolism.

There is much benefit to keeping an older dog moving safely. Dogs are typically social creatures, and it is extremely important to assist them in maintaining their socialization for best quality of life. In addition to keeping a dog mentally engaged, safe exercise encourages weight management, musculoskeletal maintenance, and proper joint function, as well as cardiovascular and respiratory conditioning.

More and more, at Angell-West Physical Rehabilitation, we are being asked to design strength and conditioning programs for senior dogs. In most cases, these dogs have either encountered a physical injury, illness, or recent surgery that resulted in a degradation of their physical mobility and/or stamina. In addition to an acute injury, these older patients often present with comorbidities, including an underlying element of chronic osteoarthritis.

Because one size does NOT fit all when developing a physical rehabilitation program for these patients, we implement an individualized multimodal plan of care that encompasses:

- Pain evaluation and management
- Lifestyle considerations
- Nutritional requirements
- Proper rehabilitation techniques



Elder patients are often referred to our services with an established, adequate pain management protocol already in place. In cases where a dog either needs increased or decreased pain management, we

encourage patient owners to discuss further options with their primary care veterinarian. In these cases, we do our best to contact the primary care veterinarian to offer assistance where helpful.

We review each patient's lifestyle with their owner to make sure that we address all considerations:

- harness and shoe requirements
- secure floor surfaces
- safety around access to furniture and stair navigation
- interaction with other animals and children
- assistance into and out of car, as well as car riding
- sleeping arrangements
- access to food and water

Proper nutrition is critical for overall well-being, healing assistance, and weight management. We discuss diet including appropriate form, balance of nutrients, specialized ingredients, and food frequency and volume offered. We also discuss the use of supplemental anti-inflammatory agents (Omega 3s, CBD) and gastrointestinal support (fibers, probiotics) where appropriate.

It is imperative to obtain a thorough knowledge of all comorbidities inherent in the patient. As a result, when assigning rehabilitation techniques, it is extremely important to keep the following in mind:

- Preparation of environment (flooring, equipment, additional human resources, temperature)
- Appropriate warm-up & cool-down requirements
- Proper pace and intensity level of each movement
- Required rest post-exercise

We use all of the same rehabilitation equipment with our geriatric clientele as we do with our younger patients.

- Land therapeutic exercise
- Manual therapies: passive range of motion (PROM), massage, stretching
- Supplemental therapies: low-level laser, acupuncture, chiropractic care
- Hydrotherapy: water treadmill, therapeutic pool swimming

It is wonderful to witness the joy in finding the appropriate level of safe exercise for an elder dog who wants to be active! In addition to gold standard pain management methodology as well as proven strength, conditioning and weight-management protocols...creativity is the backbone of designing a proper physical rehabilitation program for each elder dog we work with!

Dogs are honest creatures. They typically work hard and rise to the occasion when gently challenged to find fun ways to enhance or maintain their physical well-being. Let's collectively offer our elder dogs their best quality of life!

