

Caring for Geriatric Pets

Objective: Review the special accommodations/considerations in caring for geriatric dogs, including minimizing stress.

Content: Being away from home and loved ones can cause stress for many pets, but especially seniors. Extended periods of stress can weaken the immune system making this population even more vulnerable to illness. Relieving and minimizing stress in your silver-haired guests can help keep them happy and healthy. Utilize this activity to teach the team to provide that extra TLC that it takes to care for furry friends in their golden years.

Prior to Lunch & Learn Session:

- In preparation for leading the group discussion, the leader should review the supporting document section to determine what information will be presented.
- Add or remove information that you feel is critical to proper care of seniors at your pet care center.
- Choose a dog (preferably a senior) that can join your team for the Lunch & Learn to utilize for the Pre-Entry Exam demonstration.
- Have a white board or other way to document notes.

During Lunch & Learn Session:

- Open with your thoughts on why this topic is so important.
- Review the tips on seniors.
- Ask the team to try and identify some special accommodations that need to be considered when lodging seniors (a list of examples is below to help you get started).
    - Write their ideas on your white board.
- Discuss the importance of Pre-Entry Exams and demonstrate how one can be completed efficiently and effectively on the demo dog.

Supporting Education Articles/Tools: The information below provides additional guidance on the topic and should be reviewed prior to and during the meeting:

Geriatric Dog Info

At what age is a dog considered a senior? The actual age varies depending on breed (with larger breeds aging more quickly than smaller breeds), but generally any dog over the age of 7 – 9 years will be considered a senior.

Stress and Geriatrics.
Not all stress is bad! Stress can motivate dogs to prepare or perform. Stress can even be life-saving in some situations. In response to danger, their body prepares to face a threat or flee to safety. In these situations, their pulse quickens, they breathe faster, and muscles tense. In addition, the brain uses more oxygen and increases activity—all functions aimed at survival.

Copyright 2019 Robin Bennett and Susan Briggs

Stress helps animals cope with a situation, however, prolonged stress does not allow the body to have a chance to rest and cleanse itself of excessive hormones. Older dogs will typically have more pre-existing medical conditions than other pets, including heart conditions, diabetes, kidney and liver disfunction, low thyroid, arthritis and joint problems. Some of these conditions may be underlying (not yet diagnosed). The stress due to change in environment and schedule during a lodging stay reduces immunity and may cause the body to react. Pets may then show symptoms of illness that were not visible prior to the lodging stay. *This is an important concept to understand so that it can be explained to pet parents in the event their senior pet becomes ill while under your care.

Special Accommodations/Considerations for Lodging Senior Pets

- Take a thorough case history of all senior pets and review it each time they stay with you as conditions may change frequently.
- Perform a Pre-Entry Exam on each senior (instructions below)
- This population is much more likely to require medications. A proper tracking system is critical to safe administration of these medications.
- Many seniors will have special diets. Try to mimic their typical dietary routine as much as possible to reduce upset bellies.
- 24 hour access to water - and monitoring consumption.
- Non-skid surface in play areas and enclosure so they can get traction to stand up and feel confident walking around.
- Provide extra bedding and cushions to ease pressure on joints.
- A quiet place to rest and sleep is important to keeping the body healthy.
- Seniors may have a more difficult time regulating body temperature. Ensure they have extra bedding if your lodging area is chilly. Limit outside time in heat and cold.
- Bladder control is more difficult as dogs age. More frequent potty breaks will make for a more comfortable stay. Check bedding daily as their bladders may leak a little while they sleep. Change bedding daily for these guests.
- It is important to provide adequate exercise and movement, but these senior pups will require an adjusted exercise schedule as compared to younger guests.
- Attendants should check on these dogs frequently throughout the day, not just during potty break time. Schedule plenty of observation times.
- Provide extra TLC! Cuddles and love can help relieve stress too! You may even consider letting them hang out in staff offices or at the front desk (as long as it is safe/secure).
- Aromatherapy, soft music can relax many pups.
- Be empathetic- Senior pets are dealing with joint pain, incontinence, loss of sight or hearing. They may move slower and need extra direction. It is important to not get frustrated and have patience and compassion for each animal.

Copyright 2019 Robin Bennett and Susan Briggs

Pre-Entry Exam

A Pre-Entry Exam is performed to make sure that all pets entering the facility are healthy and free from contagious diseases, cuts, scrapes, injuries, and ear and eye infections. The Pre-Entry Exam also protects the center from liability in case of a customer complaint or dispute. This is particularly important for senior dogs, as they are more subject to illness and injury. In a Pre-Entry Exam, the dog is carefully examined, and scrapes or bumps pointed out to the owner prior to the dog entering the facility. This way, the owner is made aware of any potential issues with the dog.

The pre-entry exam takes about a minute and MUST be performed on every dog entering the facility. Fill out a Pre-Entry Exam worksheet for every dog.

To perform a pre-entry exam:

1. **GREETING**: Approach the dog and let the dog become familiar with you. Have the owner hold the dog by the leash while you perform the exam. Ask the owner if there are any places on the dog that are sensitive (this may help protect you from a dog bite).

2. **EYES**: Once you are familiar with the dog, check the dog's eyes. Look for excess discharge or redness. Some breeds may have "weepy" eyes (Maltese, Poodle, etc.) and they will often have reddish stains from their eyes. This is usually normal.

3. **EARS**: Check the dog's ears for signs of infection. Dirty, foul-smelling discharge, excess redness, inflammation, or matted hair inside the ear canal should all be noticed.

4. **FEET**: Check each of the dog's paws for long toenails, cracked toenails, cuts, or sores on the pads of the paws.

5. **FUR**: Run your fingers through the dog's fur and note if the fur is dry or flaky or has mats. Check behind the elbows and ears for mats on long-coated dogs, as these are the most common spots. Pull the fur back and carefully look for any signs of fleas – fleas themselves or white or black "flea dirt" (eggs and feces, respectively). Check for hot spots, cuts, or sores all over the coat.

6. **GAIT**: Have the dog walk around and make sure he or she is not limping. A nervous dog will sometimes crouch down low and examination of the gait will be impossible.

7. **GENERAL HEALTH**: Take a general overview of the dog, including whether the dog appears healthy. If the dog is coughing, breathing heavily note it here (and get the Manager before allowing the dog in the facility). Tumors and chronic conditions should also be noted here.

Once you have finished the **Pre-Entry Exam**, review the findings with the owner.

Copyright 2019 Robin Bennett and Susan Briggs