

A close-up, warm-toned photograph of a golden retriever's face, focusing on its eye and fur. The dog's fur is a rich golden color, and its eye is dark and expressive. The background is softly blurred, emphasizing the dog's features.

TOP 4 nutrition tips for SENIOR dogs

By Deva Khalsa, VMD

Help your older buddy stay healthy and live long by feeding him right and keeping his weight down.

When I first saw

Casey, a 12-year-old cocker spaniel, she wasn't a pretty picture. She was grossly overweight with no energy and a smelly, greasy coat. She'd even stopped wanting to go for walks. "Everyone says she's just getting old," said her "mom", Sally. "But I thought I'd try holistic treatments to see if they could help her."

The first thing I did was change Casey's diet. I also added a quality general supplement along with some antioxidants. When she returned just three weeks later, she was a different dog. She looked great, had lost weight, loved going for walks and after many years had started playing with her old toys again. She was aging, but her problems did not arise from getting old. She was just getting unhealthy.

Your older dog's diet is the single most important factor affecting his health and longevity. The great thing is that you're the one controlling his diet so you can do a lot to keep him well and happy. Here are some tips for keeping your older dog healthy and young at heart during his golden years.

1 Don't tip the scales

It's important to keep your canine senior citizen at a healthy weight. There are many reasons he can become overweight, the most common of which are improper diet and lack of sufficient exercise. Weight gain may also be due to a hypothyroid condition, so if you've been reducing your dog's caloric intake over time and notice no weight loss, it's important you take him to the veterinarian and get his thyroid function checked. Once any medical reasons for obesity are ruled out, the other reasons for weight gain need to be addressed.

As dogs age, we love them more and more and may tend to give them lots of treats. While our unconditionally-loving canine companions deserve the best, over-treating generates weight gain. This doesn't mean your dog can't enjoy treats; simply change what he eats to healthier fare. One large wheat-based biscuit contains 500 calories – over a meal's worth of calories for a small dog. It's easy to create treats from foods that are both healthy and delicious. Many dogs love broccoli stems or slices of apple, pear or watermelon. Freeze-dried chicken breast makes a welcome and low calorie treat. Vegetables such as asparagus, carrots, string beans, broccoli, yams and sweet potatoes can be very lightly dribbled with olive oil and baked at a low heat until they are golden brown and then cooled. There are so many options that even finicky seniors will have their favorites.

2 Keep up the quality

In addition to healthier treats, it's important to learn how to decipher quality ingredients by reading labels. Many commercial pet food manufacturers use corn and corn gluten as a cheap



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alternative protein source. Corn is not a natural food source for dogs and contains eight grams of carbohydrates to every gram of protein. Avoid foods with corn, meat by-products and animal digest. I don't recommend special weight loss diets since they typically include substantial quantities of low quality fiber such as soy mill run, peanut hulls and wheat middling. It's better to look for foods with quality fiber sources such as pumpkin seed, flaxseed and fresh vegetables. Healthy carbohydrates to look for include oats, barley, sweet potato and brown rice.

3 Watch the protein

Traditional recommendations are to reduce the protein content in an older dog's meals. The best way to do this is by making up the difference by adding vegetables to his diet. Adding more fruits and vegetables along with sweet potatoes to his food will give him the special phytonutrients (compounds in foods that both prevent disease and improve health) his cells need to eliminate toxins and stay in top form. Most dogs love steamed veggies with a bit of olive oil or butter on them. If your dog shies away from this, try adding a small amount of Parmesan cheese to the mix.

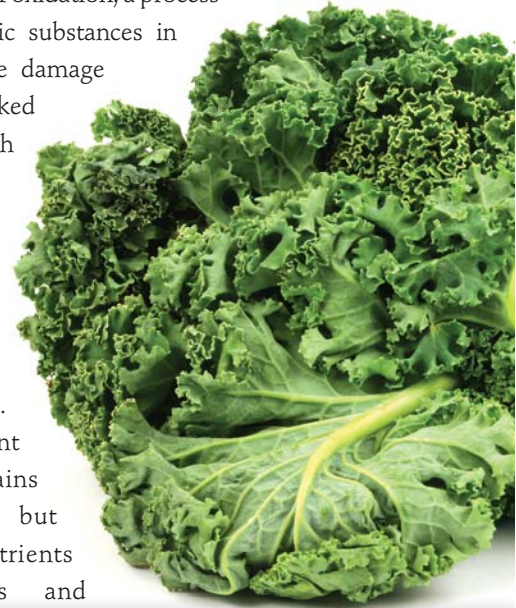
Home cooking for dogs is becoming more popular. With home cooking, you can easily adjust protein levels in your dog's diet and add lots of healthy produce to his meals. If

you're used to feeding a high quality packaged food and are concerned about the home cooking commitment, know that you don't have to cook every day and can alternate with the packaged food if you wish.

4 Up the antioxidants

Antioxidants are extraordinarily important for retarding the aging process and maintaining good health. They deter aging by helping your dog's cells and organs resist damage. They inhibit the destructive effects of oxidation, a process that begins when toxic substances in the environment cause damage to cells. Freshly cooked vegetables are filled with healthy antioxidants.

The antioxidant vitamin E occurs naturally in grains, nut oils and dark leafy green vegetables. Kale is an excellent vegetable for it contains not only vitamin E but also special phytonutrients that dump toxins and



Good ol' home cooking

Treat your senior to these tantalizing recipes.

Full-figured fare

A morning meal of:

- ¼ to 1 cup oatmeal
- 1 teaspoon uncooked coconut oil
- ½ to 1½ cups cooked vegetables, or as much as you need to satisfy your dog

An evening meal of:

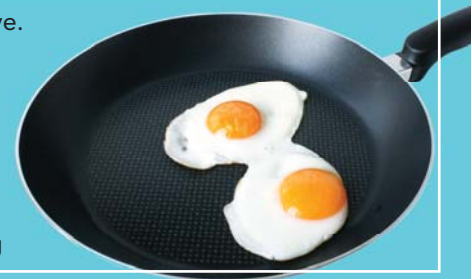
- ¼ to ½ cup low-fat cottage cheese, ricotta cheese or farmers cheese OR ½ to 2 eggs OR ¼ to ¾ cup lean meat or poultry
- ¼ to 1½ cups high fiber bran breakfast cereal
- cooked vegetables, as many as your dog wants
- 1 teaspoon uncooked coconut oil

Adjust according to the size of your dog, and include a high quality multivitamin/multimineral supplement.

Get those vegetables in omelette

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 cup finely chopped broccoli
- ½ cup finely chopped kale
- 1 clove diced or crushed garlic
- 1 tablespoon parsley
- 4 eggs, beaten

Add the oil to a 10" to 12" frying pan. When warm, add garlic and lightly sauté for a few seconds. Add broccoli, kale and parsley and sauté lightly for one minute. Pour beaten eggs into the pan and over the vegetables. Cover and cook over low heat for 4 to 6 minutes until done. Cool and serve.



carcinogens out of cells ten times faster. Vitamin E is even more effective with vitamin C (another antioxidant); they create a powerful one-two pre-emptive punch against cancer and other chronic diseases.

Antioxidants are *extraordinarily* important for retarding the aging process and *maintaining* good health.

Fat-soluble vitamin A is found in animal fats, egg yolks and cod liver oil. Carotenes are the water-soluble form of vitamin A. Beta-carotene is found in orange and yellow fruits and vegetables. Brightly colored fruits and vegetables have been found to decrease cancer risk in humans by 30% and it's no different for dogs. Variety is the key and good old home cooking provides the opportunity for plenty of variety.

Feeding your dog healthy organic vegetables and fruits, free range eggs, and lots of variety will give him anti-aging antioxidants every day.

In many ways, feeding senior dogs is similar to feeding younger ones. But the older your canine gets, the more important it becomes to watch his diet and weight, and make sure he's

getting quality balanced nutrition. It's one of the simplest – and most important – ways to ensure he'll be by your side for many more years to come. 🐾



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