

# GUIDELINES FOR CARE OF THE HEALTHY SENIOR DOG • AGE 6+



All dogs can develop new illnesses or diseases over their lifetimes. We believe that **COMPREHENSIVE PREVENTATIVE CARE and INTERVENTION** are the best approach to provide your companion with a long, happy, healthful life.

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A HEALTHY SENIOR DOG

The "senior years" bring their own challenges for most individuals. Most of us can expect to experience decreased flexibility, varying degrees of joint pain and arthritic changes, and difficulty with weight management. Other changes can be more serious and can have profound effects on our quality of life. Below are some general recommendations for keeping your senior dog healthy and comfortable.

### EVERY 6 MONTHS:

- In an effort to provide the best progressive care we recommend twice yearly **comprehensive physical exams including a dental evaluation**

### YEARLY:

- **Annual complete physical exam including dental evaluation**
- Scan microchip – ensure function and placement
- Heartworm blood test
- Leptospirosis Vaccine
- Fecal exam for intestinal parasites
- Bordetella Vaccine depending on lifestyle – for grooming, boarding, dog parks
- Canine Influenza Vaccine depending on lifestyle – for grooming, boarding, dog parks
- Year round monthly heartworm preventative also acts as intestinal parasite preventative
- Flea/tick preventative
- Bloodwork and urinalysis to evaluate organ and overall physical health
- Dental Cleaning and Polish with full mouth X-rays – frequency determined by current dental health
  - Necessary treatment for dental disease found during the oral exam and X-ray evaluation

### EVERY 3 YEARS:

- Rabies Vaccination (required by Colorado State Law)
- Distemper/Adenovirus/Parainfluenza/Parvovirus – (Distemper/Parvo Vaccine)

### AS NEEDED:

- Nail trim – advise monthly - at home, by hospital staff or groomer
- Anal gland expression – by hospital staff only
  - If anal glands do not express normally during defecation (pooping) then they will become overly full and painful. If left unexpressed they could become infected and even rupture
  - Signs indicating full anal glands include: scooting on rear end, biting at back end, limping, and having difficulty defecating
- Microchip

**Common illnesses in senior dogs include** dental disease, decreased kidney function, under-productive thyroid function, diabetes mellitus, abnormal liver function, and cancer.

It is important to understand that many of these health problems can be managed successfully when detected and treated appropriately.

Signs at home that may indicate a change in your dog's health include vomiting, diarrhea, drinking more water and urinating more, decreased socializing, decreased appetite and decreased activity.

**Laboratory tests are vital in our assessment of your dog's health and treating underlying disease conditions.** Early detection and intervention often allow for successful medical management of serious diseases. When disease is severe or has progressed it is more difficult and more expensive to manage. Cancer is more likely to occur as an individual ages. Many cancers can be detected by routine lab work and physical exams. We will also be evaluating vital organ function and monitoring for chronic diseases such as diabetes. The earlier we intervene, the better the outcome and the more options we will be able to recommend.

In a matter of 30 minutes we can perform a Complete Blood Count (CBC) and Chemistry panel (evaluates blood sugar for diabetes, kidney function, liver status, electrolytes and many other health indicators).

Often a urinalysis is indicated to look for infection and evaluate kidney function. Other more specialized tests can provide specific understanding of disease processes and help determine treatment and prognosis.

When indicated we will recommend lab work and/or other diagnostics such as X-rays and ultrasound with most illnesses. Northgate Animal Hospital strives to recommend diagnostics and treatment based on the best interest of the patient. **We will base our recommendations on our evaluation and consideration of each patient, and family, on an individual basis.** Animals age more rapidly than humans and lab values should be reviewed yearly even if they are apparently healthy.

## DENTAL HEALTH

**Healthy dog teeth are vital to maintain a healthy dog.** Dogs, like humans, build up plaque (soft and gooey) which turns into tartar (cement like) in 24 hours if not brushed away. Bacteria in the mouth and tartar on the teeth, combine together to cause gingivitis (gum inflammation). Tartar and gingivitis result in periodontal disease (infection of tooth root structures) which often requires extraction or root canal of the diseased teeth. Chewing is an excellent way to clean teeth but hard objects such as bones, antlers and Nyla bones are too hard and will break teeth. Broken teeth are painful and susceptible to root infection as well. **NGAH is highly motivated to help you maintain your furry friend's dental health** and can recommend many at home dental care options including teeth brushing and CET dental health products. The rule for chew toys: If you hit your knee cap with it and it hurts, then it is too hard for your dog's teeth and will break them!

YES!

ORAVET<sup>®</sup>  
DENTAL HYGIENE CHEWS  
Serious Oral Care Made Simple<sup>®</sup>

KONG<sup>®</sup>



NO!



NYLA BONES



REAL BONES



ANTLERS

**Nyla bones, real bones, and antlers are great at cleaning teeth, however they are guaranteed to break teeth. Broken teeth are painful and lead to infection.**

Fractured teeth must have a bonded sealant, root canal, or be extracted.

## DISCOMFORT/PAIN

At NGAH our doctors and staff are highly trained and attuned to non-verbal/non-vocal communication from your companions. **A large part of our efforts are to perceive/interpret/diagnose and treat pain in our furry friends.** Guardians often misinterpret silence and average behavior as comfort. Although animals will often cry out with sudden pain, animals often do not vocalize chronic pain. Consequently many guardians do not perceive more subtle cues as indicators of pain. We often are told by guardians that their limping dog is not in pain, however a limp indicates pain in an animal just as a human who limps is in pain. Many dogs will show pain by an abnormal sit posture, chewing food on one side, dropping food, and decreased activity.

## GROOMING

The level of grooming will vary greatly by the breed of your furry friend. We are happy to discuss grooming needs for each of your companions based on breed and family lifestyle. Nails should be trimmed as needed every 2-4 weeks. We are happy to teach you how to trim nails at home.

## BEHAVIOR

Many senior dogs are happy and well-adjusted. However we can help with emerging and/or chronic behavior issues as the need arises. Dogs finish physical growth at 1-2 years of age depending on the breed, large dogs mature more slowly. Behavioral growth and changes continue to around 4 years of age. We see puppies grow out of some behaviors such as chewing and hyperactivity. However, as dogs mature some behaviors become more prominent such as separation anxiety and aggression. Please let us know if you have questions and would like help with behavior issues as we have many management options including handling and training techniques, and medical considerations as well.

## COMPANION HEALTH INSURANCE

**We strongly recommend companion health insurance for every furry companion.** Health insurance will ease the stress of financial consideration when making decisions for your dog's routine and sick health care. Northgate Animal Hospital has no direct relationship with any insurance company. Clients file claims directly with their chosen insurance company.

## FOLLOWING ARE SOME COMPANION HEALTH INSURANCE COMPANIES TO CONSIDER:

**trupanion™**  
Medical insurance for your pet.

[www.truppanion.com](http://www.truppanion.com)

**EMBRACE**  
PET INSURANCE

[www.embracepetinsurance.com](http://www.embracepetinsurance.com)

**Petplan®**  
pet insurance

[www.gopetplan.com](http://www.gopetplan.com)

**ASPCA®**  
Pet Health Insurance

[www.aspcapetinsurance.com](http://www.aspcapetinsurance.com)

**Veterinary  
Pet Insurance™**  
a Nationwide Insurance® company

[www.petinsurance.com](http://www.petinsurance.com)

## RELIABLE WEBSITES:

**WebMD**  
Healthy  
Pets

[pets.webmd.com](http://pets.webmd.com)

**VeterinaryPartner.com**

[www.veterinarypartner.com](http://www.veterinarypartner.com)

**FelineDocs**

[www.felinedocs.com](http://www.felinedocs.com)

## NUTRITION FOR THE HEALTHY SENIOR DOG

**Companion nutrition is a very confusing topic with all of the choices we have for food and diet recommendations from many different and conflicting sources.** The companion food industry has become a multi-billion dollar industry in the last several years. While it is wonderful that our furry friends are such an important part of our families, this extreme and rapid growth is leading to many niche diets that are based on fads and media exposure of many human issues that may or may not be relevant or even appropriate for canine nutrition. We often see gastrointestinal distress directly caused by the well-intentioned but misguided attempts of companion guardians trying to provide what they have been told by the sales representatives of many commercial diets.

## GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING A DIET FOR YOUR HEALTHY DOG:

**A common misconception among pet owners is that dogs are obligate carnivores and require food that consists mostly of meat. This is not true. Dogs, like people, are omnivores and do best when they eat a balance of protein, carbohydrates, and fat. Excessive protein consumption is unnecessary for dogs and can actually be harmful.**

### CANINE NUTRITION AS RECOMMENDED BY COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY:

	Protein	Fats	Carbohydrates
Puppy	22-30%	8-12%	40-60%
Adult & Senior	18-30%	5-10%	40-60%

Plentiful, clean, daily fresh water is vital to your furry friend's health. While some animals can free feed (food left out at all times) we recommend meal feeding at least every 12 hours (twice daily) a measured amount so that you can more easily manage your companion's weight, and know if there is a decrease in appetite.

- Dogs are omnivores, not strict carnivores. This means dogs need meat protein, carbohydrates and fat.
  - Carbohydrates may be provided by grain sources and/or non-grain sources. Dogs are not inherently grain sensitive. Some dogs may be grain sensitive but many are not.
  - Dogs are fat sensitive. This means that high fat foods even "just a bite" or even if "she has eaten this all of her life" can cause a spectrum from mild to severe, gastrointestinal upset and even pancreatitis. GI upset/pancreatitis can cause vomiting, diarrhea, refusal to eat and pain. Severe cases require hospitalization on IV fluids and supportive care.
  - Bones/antlers are very dangerous for dogs. They can cause mild to severe GI upset, pancreatitis, obstruction of the intestines and perforation of the intestines. All of these conditions can be very painful, expensive and even life-threatening. Although bones are great for cleaning teeth, unfortunately they are also really great for breaking teeth. Broken teeth are painful, require surgical extraction, can cause additional disease affecting other teeth and other vital organs of the body.
  - Raw meat is an incomplete diet source, may cause GI upset, and even be the source of life-threatening infection of Salmonella and E. coli. Please read the included AVMA policy on raw food diets.
- 6) Meat by-products (heart, liver, spleen, empty/clean intestines, blood, kidneys) are actually highly nutritional and do not include hide, hair, hooves, and teeth.

NGAH recommends companion animal nutrition providers who have been developing and researching appropriate canine nutritional diets for decades. These companies spend millions in research dollars to determine the best sources and ingredients for balanced canine nutrition.

## NGAH RECOMMENDS:



[www.hillspet.com](http://www.hillspet.com)



[www.iams.com](http://www.iams.com)



[www.eukanuba.com](http://www.eukanuba.com)



[www.royalcanin.us](http://www.royalcanin.us)



[www.purinaone.com](http://www.purinaone.com)



[www.proplan.com](http://www.proplan.com)

## WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

**Obesity is a common problem in our senior furry friends.** At NGAH we are very proactive in assessing a healthy body condition score and weight for every patient. **Obesity leads to joint problems, pain, increased work load on the heart, breathing complications, inability to go for walks, and even diabetes mellitus. Obesity significantly reduces life span by several years.** We are very happy to help you develop and maintain a healthy diet, feeding and exercise program for your furry friend.

## DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS

Dogs on a high quality balanced diet do not need vitamin supplements, however Essential Fatty Acids (fish oils) are very beneficial for healthy skin in our very dry Colorado climate.

**We hope these guidelines have addressed many of your questions. Please call us at Northgate Animal Hospital if we can be of any further assistance. Our goal is to enable you to provide the best care available for your furry companion!**

**Thank you!**

**Dr. Laura J. Scott and the Northgate Animal Hospital Healthcare Team!**

