

Your handy guide to your dog's health

As your dog gets older, subtle health changes can creep up. Here's what you should keep an eye out for, and the steps you can take:



Changes in appetite

If your dog suddenly seems to be constantly hungry, diabetes or Cushing's disease (a condition where a dog's body produces too much of the hormone cortisol) could be to blame. On the other hand, loss of appetite can be due to a change in your dog's environment that's made him stressed and less likely to eat, or because of infection or pain (especially from dental issues). Your vet can help to pinpoint the reason.



Weight loss

As pets get older, they may gradually lose a few pounds due to declining muscle mass. But if you notice any sudden or significant weight changes, and your dog's appetite is good or has even increased, it can be a sign of diabetes. Other causes of weight loss include heart, liver or kidney disease – so it's best to book a check-up as soon as you can.



Lethargy

Losing interest in playing, sleeping more in the daytime but less at night, and confusion may indicate that an older pet has cognitive dysfunction syndrome (CDS). Around 50% of dogs over 11 will develop at least one symptom of CDS, such as lethargy. However, lethargy in older pets doesn't automatically mean CDS. If your pet is inactive and not reacting as usual, another condition, such as arthritis could be to blame.



A bad smell

If your pet starts to pong a bit, it's worth checking out the cause. For example, smelly breath in dogs may point to gum disease. As well as being painful, this can lead to tooth loss and, at its worst, the bacteria can also enter the bloodstream, affecting your pet's other organs.



Increased thirst

An insatiable thirst can again be a sign of Cushing's disease and, if left untreated, can lead to health issues such as your pet being more prone to infections. Other common causes include liver and kidney disease. Your vet will be able to confirm a diagnosis, and help you to manage such conditions.



Lumps and bumps

While lumps and bumps aren't uncommon, especially on dogs, their causes can be varied and it's always worth getting an unexplained swelling checked out. While it could be a cyst or harmless fatty tumour, it could also be something more serious, such as a mast cell tumour (a common skin cancer in dogs). Early detection is vital, so make sure to stick to regular check-ups.



Reluctance to jump or walk upstairs

If you notice your dog is avoiding physical activity that he used to do with ease, it could be a sign that he is in pain. A problem such as arthritis or a spinal condition might be to blame. If you notice this symptom in your pet, book a check-up just to be safe, as other issues, such as heart disease, might be the cause.



Have you noticed any of the symptoms on this list?

Don't hesitate to book an appointment with your vet and, to keep your pet as healthy as possible, schedule regular six-monthly check-ups, too.