

The End of Life for Dogs

By *Brenda Howard*

Older dogs are in many ways a joy to be with. They do not require the entertainment and vigilance that puppies and young adult dogs need. If you are fortunate enough to own an older dog, you know that they are “easy keepers” in most ways. Barring major disease like diabetes, most old dogs simply require a good diet, a little exercise and a soft place to sleep.

Aging dogs can have deteriorating eye sight, hearing and muscle mass –like aging people. Continue yearly visits to your veterinarian as a good way to provide ongoing preventative medicine. Any health issues caught early will be better managed. For example, while there is not much that can be done for your dog’s hearing loss, your awareness of it will help you understand that “Jake” isn’t being stubborn when he is slow to return to your call – he simply doesn’t hear well. Your veterinarian can prescribe medications that may help elderly dogs with a variety of age related issues such as arthritis, incontinence, heart disease, and diabetes. There are a number of over-the-counter preparations your vet may recommend that will not be costly but can help you dog in his golden years. If you have decided to add an herbal remedy to your dog’s daily routine share this information with your veterinarian.

Too soon the day may come when you begin to worry about the quality of life of your companion. No one, not even your veterinarian, can make decisions for you regarding the options. Veterinary medicine has made vast leaps forward and research has brought us many new treatments for disease and illness that would have been unavailable just a few years ago. For example radiation and chemotherapy are now options for treating some canine cancers. The cost of various treatments is squarely on your shoulders as is follow-up and daily care for very ill dogs. The quality of the dog’s daily life, and the possible gain or loss of time spent with the dog, are key concerns for most owners.

Many years ago when the prospect of losing my first beloved dog was imminent, I asked my veterinarian what he thought I should do. His answer worried me terribly. He said I would know what to do when the time was right. I feared I wouldn’t possess this wisdom. I know now he was telling me that each of us is different and each of us comes to a peaceful, if painful decision at a time that is appropriate in our hearts.

The euthanization of any dog is done with respect for the life that dog once had and the joy it brought to its’ life and those who loved it. I have learned that for me, it is better to be present, to be with the dog if possible at the end. It is comforting to me to know that the dog is not alone as it leaves this world. My husband once made the decision to allow the death of his beloved dog to happen naturally. The dog was in no pain, he was unconscious, and his slow passing gave my husband a sense of being part of a greater plan, a natural death. He provided care for this elderly dying dog in the way hospice provides care for our loved ones.

The process of grieving for a dog can be as painful as grieving for a

person. They are members of our families and their absence is deeply felt. Take your time in grieving. Remember the sweetness, silliness, and the companionship that you shared.

The option to bury your dog at home, or use the services of a caring, professional pet cemetery is yours. You may choose cremation so that later you can place the ashes in a favorite spot, or keep them with you.

With time the sharp pain of the loss will ease. Some day the love of another dog may be possible for you. I have found that my heart has room for many dogs. I always have an older dog, and a younger dog. A year from now the older dog may have died, but hopefully the younger one will still be with me. That younger dog will be joined by another – a puppy – in another year or so - the circle begins again. In this way, when one of my 4-legged friends leaves me behind I still have the company of another who needs me to provide for him.

Dogs don’t live long enough – it’s their major fault. No matter how well we care for our dogs, they must leave us far too soon.

“If there are no dogs in Heaven, then when I die I want to go where they went.”

Will Rogers, 1897-1935

Once a dog has entwined himself round your heart
he is not only yours for life, but you are his.

When he is gone, his place is forever sacred.

Other dogs are just as precious
but they all have their allotted spot in your
affections kept for them or their memory.

A heaven without one’s dogs
would not be the heaven we hoped for.

A dog is always man’s best friend.

Written By: anonymous

Brenda Howard has been training dogs for over 20 years and is a member of The Association of Pet Dog Trainers, The American Bloodhound Club, The Basset Hound Club of America and The Pet Care Services Association (formerly the ABKA).

The information presented here is not intended to substitute for the advice and care of a veterinarian. Consult with your veterinarian regarding issues relating to your dog’s health.

