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Signs of the Aging Westie

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The aging process in dogs can be accelerated, if proper health measures are not taken as a Westie gets older. In general, the senior years start at age seven, but for Westies the age level varies with the line and the signs of aging as well. Generally speaking however, the aging process begins some where between the ages of seven and ten. Older dogs should have an annual physical so that the vet is able to evaluate all systems in the dog. This exam might include, but may not be limited to, a baseline blood work panel, urinalysis and fecal check.

Primary concern is often found with an older Westie's vision and hearing. Westies may develop a grayish haze in the eyes. This is due to the aging of the lens and may be an early sign of cataracts. Even if opaque senile cataracts do occur, a considerable amount of useful vision can be obtained. Today, many cataracts are removed surgically. There is no real treatment for gradual hearing loss. Begin early accompanying your verbal commands with hand signals so that your Westie will be able to understand you, even when there is a hearing loss. Ear canals should be routinely checked by the owner and the vet to make sure they are clean and clear.

All dogs, but especially seniors, should have good dental hygiene. Tooth and gum disease can develop if the teeth are not cleaned regularly. Dry biscuits can help to remove tartar, but loose teeth should be removed on the recommendation of a vet during a dental cleaning.

In the area of nutrition, older dogs require fewer calories because they are less active. Too many calories or too much weight gain can put additional a strain on the aging organs. High quality diets are important. Too much protein can be detrimental to dogs with kidney or liver disease. Discuss special diets for dogs with heart, kidney or liver disease with the attending vet. Low salt diets may be needed for dogs with heart conditions. Make sure any diet change is done slowly. Small amounts of cooked lean chopped meat or cottage cheese can be added to a senior kibble diet, if your dog appears to be losing weight. If many teeth are missing, soaking the kibble in water to soften or using canned food may be of help.

Urinary tract difficulties are common in the older dog. Often the kidneys lose the ability to concentrate waste. The dog may drink larger quantities of water. If a sudden increase in water intake is seen, discuss this issue with the vet as it could be a sign of diabetes and lab tests are needed. A dog with failing kidneys may be unable to control wetting. Take him out more frequently, but always leave water available.

Osteoarthritis or stiffness in the joints often occurs in the older dog. This can be aggravated by drafts or a cold damp area. Treat your Westie to a soft warm bed away from drafts. Moderate exercise can be beneficial in addition to baby aspirin to relieve the pain. Consult your vet for additional treatments and dosages. Some vets are now prescribing glucosamine, which is also found in some senior dog foods. Always check with your vet before giving any medications to your dog.

As the dog ages, small benign tumors or cysts often appear on the skin. These are usually of no concern, but should be called to the attention of the vet, especially if size increase is noticed.

Older dogs often adjust poorly to emotional changes or stress. They may not take readily to changes in the environment. When traveling, it may be advisable to have someone care for your senior at home rather than kenneling him. Often introducing a younger dog into the household can give new life to an older dog. Seek advice from the breeder of the younger dog, before considering a new companion for the older Westie.

With the proper exercise, diet and medical care, your Westie could live a good comfortable life during the teen years. Always err on the side of caution and seek professional advice for you senior Westie.

*****Disclaimer*****

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