



DOG Watch

Expert information on medicine, behavior and health from a world leader in veterinary medicine

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IN THE NEWS ...

Research Suggests Dogs Have Measurable IQs

A study from the London School of Economics and Political Science and the University of Edinburgh proposes dogs have measurable intelligence. Researchers assessed 68 working Border Collies in navigating, timing how quickly they found hidden food, differentiating between quantities of food and following a human pointing to an object.

When human IQ is tested, individuals perform well across different tasks. Dogs who did well on one of their tests tended to be better on others. Those who completed tests quickly were likely to do them more accurately.

The significance: Studying a species that doesn't smoke, drink, use recreational drugs or have differences in education and income may help us understand the link between intelligence and health, researchers say in the journal *Intelligence*, adding that bright people live longer.

Their subjects — Border Collies — are ranked as the smartest dogs among 110 breeds, followed by Poodles and German Shepherd Dogs, according to 200 obedience judges ♦

Is it Dementia or Normal Aging?

Medical signs such as decreased mobility can be visible, while cognitive changes like disorientation are more subtle

It's no longer unusual for large dogs to reach the age of 15 — the equivalent of a 93-year-old person — and even beyond. But while advances in veterinary medicine have added years to dogs' lives, they can come at a price. Some aging dogs can develop canine cognitive dysfunction (CCD), similar to Alzheimer's in people.

Studies indicate more than 40 percent of dogs display at least one symptom



Medical and nutritional help is available for dementia.

related to CCD by reaching 15 years of age, with nearly 70 percent of geriatric dogs showing mental dysfunction.

Early Recognition.

We are trying to recognize cognitive dysfunction earlier and more often rather than accepting changes as "just being old," says Brian Glenn Collins, DVM, section chief of the Community Practice Service at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.

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A Healing Art Heads Mainstream

Veterinary schools teach acupuncture as the ancient therapy grows in popularity to treat a variety of conditions

Nick, a 12-year-old mixed breed, is a regular patient at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine. Every one week to two weeks, his owners take him to receive electroacupuncture treatments for his aches and mobility problems related to chronic arthritis.

"He develops a spring in his step after each treatment," says Joseph Wakshlag, DVM, Ph.D., chief of the Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation Service at the University Hospital for Animals. He and Curtis Dewey, DVM, are board-certified in acupuncture and provide the therapy for dogs.

Sophie, an 8-year-old Labrador Retriever, had a lifetime history of urinary incon-

tinence and developed an adverse reaction to medication. Three years ago, her owners took her for regular acupuncture treatments offered by Polly Fleckenstein, DVM, at the Veterinary Medical Center of Central New York in East Syracuse.

Marked Improvement. "Within two months of weekly treatments, there was a significant decrease in Sophie's leaking," says Dr. Fleckenstein, a Cornell graduate certified in veterinary acupuncture and veterinary spinal manipulation therapy. "In the past 18 months, she has leaked only three times and now needs to come in

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SHORT TAKES

Study Debunks Myth of Black Dog Syndrome

It's conventional wisdom among shelter workers: Black dogs wait longer to be adopted than dogs of other colors. But a recent study published in the journal *Animal Welfare* suggests that it's a myth — or at least that it's no longer true. Christy L. Hoffman, Ph.D., assistant professor at Canisius College in Buffalo, N. Y., examined four years of adoption records for nearly 16,700 dogs at two animal shelters in the Pacific Northwest. She focused on dogs between 1 and 13 years old. Puppies and young dogs, known to be adopted faster, were excluded.

The surprising result: Black dogs have shorter shelter stays compared to dogs of different colors. "In the first shelter, the average length of time a dog was available for adoptions was seven days, while black dogs were out in six-and-a-half days," Dr. Hoffman says. "At a second shelter, the average length of stay for a dog was 10½ days, while black dogs were out in nine."

The study also concluded that age and breed group were more important than coat color for adoptability. For example, so-called bully breeds, which can include American pit bull terriers, American Staffordshire Terriers and Staffordshire Bull Terriers, face disproportionately longer stays in shelters.

Dr. Hoffman told the website Companion Animal Psychology that while finding no evidence of Black Dog Syndrome, "We did find that shelter outcomes tended to be worse for brindle [brown] dogs and, not surprisingly, bully breeds. A relatively recent paper by Brown, et al (2013) also concluded that black dogs do not have worse than average shelter outcomes."

Dr. Hoffman allows that Black Dog Syndrome might have once been a more universal problem that has improved because of education and marketing. She hopes shelters and rescue groups will examine their data to make sure education and marketing efforts are being directed appropriately. "If a shelter invests efforts in promoting black dogs when, in fact, black dogs might have the same



Black dogs have shorter shelter stays before adoption, according to a survey of 16,700 records.

success if they were not promoted, then these resources could be better spent promoting other animals in the organization that are overlooked," Dr. Hoffman says.

Bad Year for Parasites

The Companion Animal Parasite Council gazed into its crystal ball and didn't like what it sees. Lyme disease and other tick-related illnesses? Worse in places. The risk of heartworm infection? Above average nationwide. The organization's computer models for the rest of 2016 predict growing threats to dogs and cats from a number of vector-borne diseases.

"We use our annual forecast to help veterinarians and pet owners understand parasites are a true risk to both pets and people," said CAPC President Susan Little, DVM, Ph.D.

CAPC tracks and maps cases of tick-borne disease, intestinal parasites and heartworm using test results collected by Idexx Laboratories Inc. and Antech Diagnostics. Results are continually updated at www.capcvet.org. Lyme disease has been confirmed this year in 1 in 16 U.S. dogs, or nearly 35,000 pets out of more than a half-million tested. With heartworm, just over 1 percent of the 1.6 million dogs tested were positive.

For the year, CAPC predicts growing risk of Lyme disease in Illinois, Iowa, Indiana and Kentucky as ticks expand their range. The New England states — traditionally ground zero for Lyme — should see below average infection rates. ♦

The Parasite Lurking in Water

Romping in rivers, lakes, ponds and moist soil can expose dogs to a giardia infection

Every time you let your dog splash through a puddle in the woods or park or swim in a pond, you run the risk he will pick up an uninvited guest: the parasite called giardia. It survives throughout the U.S. in wet or damp areas and thrives inside its hosts.

"Infection rates will vary depending on geographic location, but one study has shown the rates to be about 15 percent in dogs," says Brian Glenn Collins, DVM, section chief of the Community Practice Service at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.

Likely Candidates. Swimming and walking dogs off leash at dog parks are more likely than other activities to lead to giardia infection, say researchers from the University of Calgary, Alberta, who surveyed 1,293 dog owners and reported their findings in *Epidemiology and Infection*.

Giardia live for weeks anywhere there is enough moisture to support them — lakes, rivers and puddles. Where it's dry, they die. The good news is that giardia infection — giardiasis — is treatable. The risk of dogs infecting humans appears to be very low, and good hygiene helps with prevention.

Giardia is a one-celled parasite that's visible under a microscope as a flat droplet shape with flagella, whip-like structures that help it move. Many types of giardia exist, each type suited to a particular species of host. Once in the host, giardia attaches to the small intestine, absorbing nutrients and splitting into more giardia. Dogs shed some giardia in their infectious stage called cysts in their feces.

The parasite infects dogs who swallow it. Scenarios include their playing in soil contaminated by feces, licking a contaminated surface and swallowing water from a contaminated lake, pond, creek or other water source.

Puppies have a greater risk than adult dogs. "In general, puppies are more susceptible to disease because they may not have any, or sufficient, immunity from the mother to parasites," Dr. Collins says. "Many animals found to have giardia in their stool do not develop clinical disease."

"If an animal has been found to have giardia, we advise pet owners to be on the lookout for clinical signs," Dr. Collins says.

That's the tricky part: There may be no signs. But when they emerge, they can



Once in the host, giardia attaches inside the small intestine. Infection can be serious but treatable.

include persistent or intermittent diarrhea that may contain mucus, vomiting and weight loss. Any of these signs warrants a trip to the veterinarian for tests.

The most common test is an examination of a fecal sample under a microscope to look for either trophozoite, the growth stage of giardia in the intestine, or cysts, the encapsulated infectious stage, Dr. Collins says. "In many cases, multiple fecal exams are necessary to find giardia, as it won't be present in the feces at all times." An in-office serum test is available for use in these troublesome cases.

Generally, dogs should be checked twice annually for gastrointestinal parasites.

Although no medications are officially approved to treat giardia in dogs, veterinarians prescribe febantel, fenbendazole and metronidazole in powder, tablet and liquid forms. "The medications are not expensive and can be given at home by the client," Dr. Collins says.

In addition, it's important to give the patient adequate water and food during treatment. "Water to avoid dehydration and food to provide important nutrients and calories, especially in puppies," Dr. Collins says. "Bathing the dog after treatment helps to reduce the possibility of re-infection."

"Significant damage to the small intestine can occur from giardia infections, but fortunately the changes are reversible," Dr. Collins says. ♦

THE BEST PREVENTION: GOOD HYGIENE

Good home hygiene and cleaning can help prevent giardia infection and its reinfection. Brian Glenn Collins, DVM, at Cornell advises carefully removing dogs' feces from the home or yard as soon as possible and disposing of them in trash headed for the landfill. In the home, follow up with steam cleaning and drying.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also recommends:

- ◆ Wearing gloves when handling feces and contaminated soil.
- ◆ Using soap to clean and scrub hard surfaces, such as floors and dog crates.
- ◆ Keeping other dogs away from infected dogs and their toys, beds and sitting areas.
- ◆ Washing your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water.

AGING... (continued from cover)

How can you tell if your dog is slowing down because of normal aging or suffering from senility? The only way to diagnose CCD is a post-mortem examination to find the presence of a protein called beta-amyloid that destroys brain cells.

"Signs of cognitive decline are often subtle in the early stages," says Pamela Perry, DVM, Ph.D., a resident in animal behavior at Cornell. "Sensory decline occurs with aging, as does memory loss and reduced learning. However, these signs should not necessarily be dismissed by attributing them to normal aging. Any change in a pet's behavior should prompt a veterinary examination to address the behavior and treat any underlying medical causes."

"One problem distinguishing aging from CCD is that many signs attributed to CCD overlap with other medical conditions," says Leni Kaplan, DVM, a lecturer in the Community Practice Service. "For example, some dogs forget their house training with cognitive

(continued on page 5)

KEEPING THEM LEAN AND STIMULATED

All three experts used the same word — *blessed* — to describe being able to share their homes with their geriatric pets.

Dr. Collins does his best to keep his senior pets active and lean, adding, "I feed them high-quality diets, and I think it is very important to keep them stimulated mentally and physically."

Dr. Perry is mindful that a senior pet's hearing can diminish with age and does her best not to startle her seniors while they're sleeping.

Dr. Kaplan enjoys accommodating the needs of her senior pets, adding, "We have carpet runners in every room, including the kitchen, so the dogs do not slip while eating their meals."

COMMON PROBLEMS AND SMART SOLUTIONS

No matter the reason for your aging dog's altered behavior, you can make his life easier with simple adjustments in the home. Here are common problems senior dogs face and solutions the experts recommend:

◆ No longer able to jump on the sofa or your bed.

Solution: Position a pet ramp at the sofa or the end of your bed. Ramps or small stepping stools will help dogs be able to socialize/interact with their family and environment as they did before arthritis or other physical ailments developed.

◆ Bumping into furniture or becoming lost in a room, especially at night.

Solution: Install nightlights to provide illumination to find the kitchen and your bedroom.

◆ Unable to navigate wooden or tile floors without slipping.

Solution: Provide traction in high-traffic areas your dog frequents by placing carpet runners or even yoga mats. "This keeps dogs more active and stimulated rather than having them sit in one area for fear of falling or injuring themselves or feeling unsteady," Dr. Kaplan says.

◆ Not spending as much time trying to interact with you.

Solution: Spend 10 to 15 minutes interacting with your dog the same time every day. Treat him to a head-to-tail therapeutic massage or take him on a gentle walk in a new place for him to explore.

◆ Forgetting basic obedience commands or perfected tricks.

Solution: Retrain certain behaviors with positive reinforcement (praise and treats) to gently remind your senior dog how to shake, stay and other cues. Provide mental stimulation by feeding a meal once a week in a food puzzle or rotating toys from time to time or introducing a new toy, Dr. Collins says.

◆ Vocalizing and not sleeping soundly.

Solution: Provide comfortable places to sleep in different rooms. Consider providing pet-safe warming discs or blankets for older dogs to help them stay warm. "I do not recommend medication for sleep per se," Dr. Kaplan says. "I recommend that the pet is examined by a veterinarian to rule out medical causes of poor sleeping such as pain or discomfort. If an older dog is having anxiety or CDS and is not sleeping well, we could try an anti-anxiety medication that will help them relax and hopefully sleep restfully."

◆ Decreased luster of the coat.

Solution: Comb and brush your dog daily to keep his coat shiny and mat-free.

It's also vital to try to maintain a regular household routine for your senior. "It is not ideal to change things in the home too much," says Dr. Collins. "Try to keep furniture remaining in familiar places."

Aging dogs tend to feel less stressed when they can count on meals served at specific times. If you can't be home at breakfast or dinner, a pet food dispenser can dole out meals at specific times.



Large breeds are considered geriatric at 6 years, while small dogs are geriatric by 7.

(continued from page 4)

dysfunction, but dogs who have developed urinary incontinence or a urinary tract infection will also appear to have lost their house training manners.”

A consensus among key veterinary associations, including the American Veterinary Medical Association, has emerged around a collection of clinical signs that describe senility's impact. It's known as DISHA and it stands for:

- ◆ **D is for Disorientation.** Your dog appears to be lost in the corner of the living room or stares blankly at the floor. He may walk in circles and wander without purpose.
- ◆ **I is for altered Interactions with other animals and/or people.** Your dog no longer rushes to meet guests or tries to “help” the repairman. He may not recognize favorite relatives when they come to visit.
- ◆ **S is for Sleep-wake cycle changes.** Your dog who used to sleep peacefully all night on your bed now gets up several times, pacing, barking or pawing you to wake up.
- ◆ **H is for House soiling.** Your dog who was 100 percent proficient in dashing outside now defecates or urinates indoors.
- ◆ **A is for Activity changes.** He no longer displays puppy-like energy or interest in chasing and retrieving his favorite tennis ball or engaging in a friendly game of tug-of-war.



Telltale signs of dementia are increased wandering, irritability, aggression and vocalization.

Other telltale signs are increased vocalization, wandering, irritability,

aggression and diminished appetite. Normal signs of aging generally include more easily recognizable physical signs, such as diminished hearing or vision, pain and decreased mobility due to osteoarthritis, loss of muscle mass, decreased coat quality, constipation and urinary or fecal incontinence. You may notice a clouding of the lens, known as nuclear sclerosis.

Fortunately, medical and nutritional help is available for dogs with CCD. Leading the list is Anipryl (selegiline HCL or L-deprenyl). It was originally developed to treat Parkinson's disease in humans and approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 1999 to treat CCD. Several dog food companies offer diets specifically formulated to address brain aging. Supplements that may also improve CCD include SAMe (adenosylmethionine), Senilife (Ceva), B vitamins, coconut oil, resveratrol, which is a plant substance thought to have antioxidant properties, and ginkgo biloba, a herbal remedy shown to help Alzheimer's patients. While anecdotal evidence is growing about supplements' efficacy, few clinical studies have been done.

HUMAN AGE EQUIVALENTS FOR OLDER PETS

DOG YEARS	DOG SIZE*	HUMAN YEARS
7	Small – Medium:	44-47
	Large – Very large:	50-56
10	Small – Medium:	56-60
	Large – Very large:	66-78
15	Small – Medium:	76-83
	Large – Very large:	93-115
20	Small – Medium:	96-105
	Large:	120

*Small, Up to 20 lbs.; Medium, 21-50 lbs.; Large, 51-90 lbs; Very large, 90 lbs.-plus

CREDIT: AVMA'S “PETS AGE FASTER THAN HUMANS” CHART

Drugs to Avoid. Some drugs should be avoided, such as certain pain medications, anesthetic drugs and perhaps even supplements containing iron, which can cause constipation, Dr. Collins says.

He points out that caregivers are interested in making their time together with their pets longer and of higher quality. “We are focusing more on primary care and preventive medicine, with a larger amount of this effort being dedicated to our older pets.”

Owners can do their part by booking twice-yearly rather than annual wellness exams for their dogs when they transition from adult to senior dog status.

“A year is a large percentage of a dog's lifespan, and a lot can change from one year to the next,” Dr. Collins says. “Earlier detection of disease and early intervention can result in a better prognosis and a longer lifespan for an aging pet.” ♦

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The American Veterinary Medical Association lists frequently asked questions and answers about senior pet care at www.avma.org/public/PetCare/Pages/Caring-for-an-Older-Pet-FAQs.aspx.

The American Animal Hospital Association provides senior pet care guidelines at www.aaha.org/public_documents/professional/guidelines/seniorcareguidelines.pdf.

ACUPUNCTURE ... (continued from cover)

only every six weeks for acupuncture treatments."

Acupuncture is a 3,000-year-old Chinese healing art fast becoming a popular therapy for use on 21st-century cats, dogs, horses, even birds. Its goal is to promote the body to heal itself. It has been shown to boost blood circulation and spur the release of pain-controlling endorphins and anti-inflammatory hormones.

Dr. Fleckenstein has incorporated acupuncture in her practice for two decades. She believes that pet owners are seeing the benefits of integrative medicine for themselves and want the same type of care for their pets. "More owners are willing to do more for their pets in terms of medicine, pain management and nutrition," she says. "They are looking for that extra little bit that may improve the quality of life for their pets and acupuncture is a viable option."

The most recognized type of acupuncture involves tiny needles inserted strategically at acupuncture points located throughout the body on meridians. Meridians, or channels, are a network of pathways through the energy known as Qi is believed to flow in traditional Chinese medicine.

No Side Effects. On average, 20 to 30 needles are placed, depending on the health needs of the specific dog. Many patients relax and fall asleep during treatment that ranges from a few minutes to a half hour. The therapy is generally safe and has no side effects. The biggest risk is to make sure a dog does not lick and swallow an acupuncture needle. "I've inserted over 100,000 needles and only one dog has swallowed one needle. Fortunately, the needle passed harmlessly, though there is, of course, a risk and sometimes removal is required," says Dr. Fleckenstein.

Dr. Wakshlag is among those who believe acupuncture should be mainstreamed. "Using the word complementary is now a bit of a misconception. I have no stats on the number of



Owners see the benefits of integrative medicine for themselves and want the same care for their pet, says Cornell graduate Polly Fleckenstein, DVM, center.



On average, 20 to 30 needles are placed, depending on the patient's health needs.

veterinarians who are certified in acupuncture, but if Ithaca (N.Y.) is a measure, we have seven in our area now."

The American Academy of Veterinary Acupuncture, which has seen an increase in enrollment in training programs since the mid-1990s, was recently admitted to the American Veterinary Medical Association's House of Delegates. At least a half dozen veterinary schools teach acupuncture. But while the therapy represents a growing practice among veterinarians, and thousands of studies have shown its effectiveness in certain human cases, only several hundred studies have been done on dogs and cats.

Although many of acupuncture's physiological effects have been studied, many more are still unknown,

says the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society. "Further research must be conducted to discover all of acupuncture's effects and its proper uses in veterinary medicine."

Meanwhile, personal reports about the use of acupuncture therapy in animals continue to grow about its benefits for dogs with:

- ◆ Arthritis
- ◆ Sore muscles and joints
- ◆ Muscle spasms
- ◆ Degenerative joint disease
- ◆ Paralysis
- ◆ Digestive issues, including constipation, diarrhea and vomiting
- ◆ Cushing's disease
- ◆ Hypothyroidism
- ◆ Diabetes
- ◆ Heart, kidney and liver disease
- ◆ Ruptured discs
- ◆ Cancer. Acupuncture provides supportive care, Dr. Fleckenstein says,

citing pain control, helping the white blood cell count, the immune system, chemotherapy induced-nausea, anorexia and loss of appetite.

- ◆ Dermatologic conditions, including allergic dermatitis and lick granulomas
- ◆ Asthma and other respiratory problems
- ◆ Epilepsy and seizures
- ◆ Weakened immune system

In addition, acupuncture is used to maintain the health of dogs active in sports such as hunting, agility and fly ball.

To maximize the benefit of an acupuncture session, dogs under Dr. Fleckenstein's care enter a quiet room with dimmed lighting with their owner present. Dogs lie on blankets or comfortable bedding during the treatment. "Owners need to relax as much as possible because their dogs read their energies," says Dr. Fleckenstein. "I've had some owners fall asleep next to their dogs who also fall asleep."

Weekly Sessions. The number of acupuncture treatments depends on the dog, but on average, treatments are weekly with the goal of extending to maintenance visits every month or six weeks or as needed. Some owners may note their

pet does better with more frequent treatments and come in more often.

"People see that they are investing in the quality of the health of their pets with these acupuncture treatments," says Dr. Fleckenstein. "After an acupuncture treatment, we advise that the dog take it easy — no big, long walks."

Treatment sessions, on average, range from \$70 to \$150. Acupuncture may qualify for pet insurance but coverage varies. A check of five pet insurance companies found one company covers acupuncture if it's performed by a licensed veterinarian for a covered accident or illness, but it excludes acupuncture as preventive or routine care. Another company requires owners to purchase an additional coverage for acupuncture reimbursement, and still another allows it as a wellness benefit.

Many dogs display an eagerness for acupuncture treatments. "Sophie is quite happy to get the first needle inserted and



Acupuncture is used to maintain the health of dogs active in sports such as hunting, agility and fly ball.

seems to quickly relax into her happy place," Dr. Fleckenstein says. "Once the all the needles are in, she falls asleep." ◆

TO FIND A VETERINARY ACUPUNCTURIST

If you're considering acupuncture for your dog, seek a veterinarian certified in the field from these sources:

- ◆ International Veterinary Acupuncture Society, www.ivas.org.
- ◆ American Academy of Veterinary Acupuncture, www.aava.org.
- ◆ Chi Institute of Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine, www.tcvm.com.

"The veterinarian should have received training which usually involves over 150 hours of class work, 30 to 40 hours of internship with a certified veterinary acupuncturist, an in-depth examination and often a written case report of publishable quality," says Polly Fleckenstein, DVM. "Go to the practice and make sure you feel comfortable there. Ask the clinic how much they use acupuncture — look for one that isn't just dabbling in this field."

AMONG THE THERAPY'S OTHER USES

Acupuncture therapy has expanded to these applications:

- ◆ **Electroacupuncture** involves electrodes hooked to the needles to deliver a mild electric current to stimulate nerves damaged by injury or trauma.
- ◆ **The use of laser** to provide needle-less treatments, an advantage for pets who don't tolerate needles or move around, which could cause the needles to fall out.
- ◆ **Aqua acupuncture (aquapuncture)** involves the injection of a liquid such as a water-soluble vitamins, saline or medicinal herbs.
- ◆ **Moxabustion** applies warmth from the burning of a Chinese herbal compound to the needles to provide added heat to treat joint stiffness and muscle soreness.

Acupressure is sometimes taught to owners to use on their own to supplement treatments between sessions.



Katherine A. Houpt, VMD, Ph.D., here with her West Highland White Terrier, Yuki, provided the answer on this page. Dr. Houpt is a diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists and emeritus professor at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.

Please Share Your Questions

We welcome questions of general interest on health, medicine and behavior. We regret however, that we cannot comment on specific products and prior diagnoses. Please send correspondence to:

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COMING UP ...

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Maddie's Response When Gracie Wakes up Cranky

Q I am puzzled by the actions of my two dogs, Gracie and Maddie. Gracie is an 11-year-old Schnauzer-Terrier mix and Maddie is a 9-year-old Bichon-Cocker Spaniel mix. They are close friends and have been together since we adopted Maddie about eight years ago. They eat next to one another in the kitchen without any conflict.

As Gracie gets older, she seems to get cranky. Sometimes, when I'm sitting on the sofa with both dogs and watching television, Maddie will get too close to Gracie or disturb her while she's napping on the sofa. Gracie immediately growls and lunges, but never actually bites Maddie. In response, Maddie quickly starts licking the inside of Gracie's ears. It's weird, but this action seems to settle down Gracie. A minute later, the two are snuggled together on the sofa.

Why does Maddie respond this way to the snappy Gracie? Is there anything I should do to try to intervene or prevent this growl-ear licking situation? Much thanks for any insight you can provide.

A Maddie and Gracie are certainly cute little dogs. I am glad they get along so well 90 percent of the time. The behavior Gracie is exhibiting is an all too common problem, especially in older dogs. Many dogs growl or snap when disturbed. That is probably the basis of the saying "Let sleeping dogs lie."

There is the possibility that she is dreaming. She may be fighting in her dream and then keeps fighting when she awakens suddenly. If she had been dreaming, you would have seen her eyes dart from side to side beneath her closed lids. That is why dreaming is called Rapid Eye Movement Sleep.

There is another possible explanation. Have your veterinarian give her a thorough going over to see if there might be a problem that causes her pain when she is awakened suddenly. Also, because of her age, make sure she isn't cranky because her old bones hurt when she wakes up. As a cranky old lady myself,



Maddie may be licking Gracie's ears as a gesture of appeasement.

I know that those initial movements can be painful. You can avoid the situation by separating the dogs on the couch with a pillow or some other barricade.

You were mainly interested in why Maddie was licking Gracie's ears after the latter had snapped at her. Licking is one of many appeasing gestures that dogs perform. Appeasing gestures function to lower the probability that the lick will be attacked. Ears are particularly attractive to dogs because of their enticing odor. Dogs probably use the smell of ear wax, cerumen, to identify one another. Of course, there are plenty of other odor-producing parts of the dog, such as anal sacs, urine and feces, but dogs often sniff and lick one another's ears when they first meet head on. While Gracie is having her bones evaluated, please ask the veterinarian to look in her ears because ear infections often have an odor and that odor could be attracting Maddie.

Now that we know why Maddie is licking Gracie's ears, we should address how to stop the aggressive behavior that starts the whole sequence. Maddie is the victim now, but Gracie might progress to growling and snapping at you when you disturb her. For that reason, our goal is to make being startled a sign that good things will happen. Begin by calling Gracie's name when she is sleeping and immediately give her a tiny treat. Repeat this 10 times a day for three days.

Next touch her very gently just after you call her name and give her a treat. Repeat 10 times a day for three days. If at any point she does growl or snap, you have moved too quickly and have to go back a step. Gracie should learn that waking up means good things are going to happen. ♦

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