

Cornell DogWatch



Expert information from the Cornell Margaret and Richard Riney Canine Health Center

January 2023 – Vol. 27, No. 1

THIS JUST IN

AKC Entries Are Up More people are doing events with their dogs

The American Kennel Club (AKC) reports that its Sports and Events division had a banner year in 2022 in the number of dog entries and overall participation. Over 25,000 AKC events were held in 2022, which is up over 2,200 events from the previous high in 2019. Total dog entries topped 3.4 million, also exceeding the previous high set in 2019.

Scent Work and Fast CAT (a speed competition coursing ability test) are experiencing significant growth, reports the AKC, while Conformation (or “Breed,” the traditional dog show), Rally (an obedience test that is less rigorous than traditional obedience), and many of the traditional field events are also experiencing notable growth. Other AKC events include obedience, agility, herding, tracking, farm dog certification, lure coursing, coursing ability tests, earthdog tests, Coonhound events, and the AKC Temperament Test. Dogs do not have to be AKC purebreds to enter. You can register a rescue or mix with the AKC as an “All American Dog” and participate in the sporting events.

These numbers are a positive indicator for the future, and entries in the Beginner Puppy conformation class are up 30% from 2019. All of this to say, collectively, there are more unique dogs engaged in AKC Sports and Events than ever before. You can learn more at AKC.org or by watching AKC TV, which is available on Roku, Apple TV, Google Play, and more. ■

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Click Chemistry for Dogs with Bone Cancer.....	2
First-Aid for Poisonings.....	3
Spinal Cord Degeneration.....	4
Enrich Your Senior Dog's Life.....	6
Why Does My Dog Need an Exam For a Refill?.....	7
Pebbles as a Therapy Dog.....	8

Should I Feed a Raw Diet?

Probably not: It's not necessary and brings some risks

If you want to start a fight, bring up religion, politics, or dog food in a group of people. If you look past the marketing and hype of diet trends, you will see that canine nutrition is a complex and developing science. Raw diets are one of these topics.

“I do not recommend raw diets,” says Joseph J. Wakshlag, DVM, PhD, board-certified veterinary nutritionist and chief of nutrition at Cornell University’s College of Veterinary Medicine.

The Reasons

Raw diets are touted to be a more “natural” way to feed our dogs and to have increased health benefits over other options. But there’s no proof of these claims beyond anecdotal reports.

“The bottom line, based on existing evidence, is there are no proven health benefits to these diets and several well-documented risks, including infectious disease and nutritional inadequacy,” writes Brennen McKenzie, VMD, in the March 1, 2022, edition of *Veterinary Practice News*.

The studies that we have so far that appear to support the benefits of raw diets often have several problems when you start reading the details, including:

- ▶ Dramatic differences between the diets fed (to test raw-vs-processed, the two diets should ideally have the exact same ingredients)
- ▶ Strong researcher biases, which may not be properly addressed in the food analysis
- ▶ Poorly defined diets or high variation even within test groups
- ▶ Sample size
- ▶ Sample population in the case of survey-based studies

At this point in time, there just isn't evidence that feeding a raw food diet is universally better for dogs than feeding dry, home-cooked, or canned foods.

All this is also a reminder that “natural” does not mean

The Dangers of Raw Diets

- ▶ Pathogen exposure, which can be deadly to your dog and you.
- ▶ Requires handling with absolute attention to detail.
- ▶ May not be up to AAFCO standards, especially if homemade.
- ▶ Inconsistent levels of nutrients, even from the same source.
- ▶ No proven advantages over traditional foods.

healthy or safe. After all, arsenic and death cap mushrooms are both natural. A dog living in a house and sleeping on an orthopedic bed, on the other hand, are not natural.

There Are Real Risks

What has been proven is the risks that feeding a raw diet brings. “I do not recommend raw diets due to pathogen exposure, and I let clients know the risks and then leave it up to them as long as I have documented the risks in my records,” says Dr. Wakshlag. “As long as they are aware of the risks, it is their dog to feed.”

Raw meat has been proven to have a much higher risk of causing food-borne illnesses than cooked or commercial diets. *Salmonella* and *E. coli* are two of the most common villains and can make

(continues on page 2)



There's little doubt that your dog will like a raw food. The question is whether it is the safest, best nutritional choice.

Thomas Kelly/istock

Click Chemistry for Dogs with Bone Cancer

Researchers shows its efficiency delivering drugs

In September, researchers from California and Denmark were awarded a Nobel Prize in Chemistry for their development of click chemistry, a process in which molecules snap together like Lego, making them a potentially more efficient transportation device in delivering pharmaceuticals to cancer tumors.

Now a researcher at the University of Missouri (MU) has successfully shown how click chemistry can be used to more efficiently deliver drugs to treat tumors in large dogs with bone cancer, a process that had previously only been successful in small mice. The goal with click chemistry is to maximize the delivery of therapeutic drugs specifically to the cancer tumor to increase effectiveness while minimizing the circulation of those drugs throughout the bloodstream and causing dangerous side effects.

For years, many chemists assumed that while click chemistry has been successful in mice, the strategy would not work in large dogs or people because the size of the body might be too big for the two sides of therapy-delivering molecules to find each other and snap, or “click,” together. Using click chemistry, doses of radiopharmaceuticals were delivered specifically to the tumors in five dogs that weighed more than 100 pounds and had bone cancer.

“Osteosarcoma, a common form of bone cancer, impacts both dogs and people, and it causes severe pain, limping, swelling in the limbs. Treating the bone tumors with various radiation therapy and immune therapy approaches to take away the pain is something I am passionate about here at MU,” says Dr. Jeffrey Bryan, author of the study. “Everything we learn about treating these dogs can be translated to help humans down the road.”

Maitz, CA, et al. “Pretargeted PET of Osteodestructive Lesions in Dogs.” *Molecular Pharmaceutics*, 2022; 19 (9): 3153 DOI: 10.1021/acs.molpharmaceut.2c00220

(raw, continued from page 1)

dogs extremely ill or even cause death. Yes, commercial diets can be contaminated too. But food-borne illness is a higher risk with raw diets than with commercial ones.

Proper food handling and hygiene can decrease the risk of contaminating raw meats but does not eliminate it. Good kitchen hygiene practices also require attention to detail, which is not appealing or practical for many dog owners. The significance of pathogen contamination is most important for dogs—and humans—who are immunocompromised.

“Gastrointestinal (GI) disease is a place where I am adamant that they cook, since many dogs are on immunosuppressants and the last thing they need is a GI pathogen from uncooked meat,” says Dr. Wakshlag. Raw diets just are not worth the risk for these pets. Other dogs who are more vulnerable to food-borne infections are puppies, seniors, pregnant bitches, and dogs with chronic health conditions.

Another problem with raw diets is that they are often made at home by owners. Homemade diets frequently are not nutritionally complete and balanced. Nutrient deficiencies or excesses can harm your dog over time. Diets that have been formulated according to American Association of Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) standards have been tested to include everything your dog needs, and a good manufacturer will have regular quality control procedures.

Consider Cooking

If you really don't want to feed your dog a commercial diet, whatever your reasons, consider a home-cooked diet instead. “I often talk about the fact that cooking the food does not decrease nutritional value significantly and encourage owners to do so,” says Dr. Wakshlag. Homecooked diets still run the risk of being nutritionally inadequate, so be sure to use a recipe formulated by a veterinary nutritionist or to do a consult with a nutritionist to get a recipe custom-made for your dog.

Bottom Line

Raw diets have not been proven to be better for dogs than other formulations and come with several risks. Food-borne illness, in particular, is a risk for both you and your dog if you feed a raw diet. Feed your dog what you feel comfortable with, but if you do choose to feed raw, know the risks and practice good food handling techniques.

Cornell DogWatch

EDITOR IN CHIEF

William H. Miller, VMD, DACVD,
Emeritus, Professor, Clinical Sciences

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Cynthia Foley

TECHNICAL EDITOR

Debra M. Eldredge, DVM

ADVISORY BOARD

James A. Flanders, DVM, DACVS, Emeritus,
Associate Professor, Clinical Sciences

Katherine A. Houpt, VMD, PhD, DACVB,
Emeritus, Professor of Behavior Medicine

Joseph Wakshlag, MS, DVM, PhD, DACVN,
Associate Professor, Clinical Nutrition

Kelly R. Hume, DVM, DACVIM
Associate Professor, Clinical Sciences,
Oncology

Meredith L. Miller, DVM, DACVIM
Associate Clinical Professor, Small Animal Medicine

Leni K. Kaplan, MS, DVM
Senior Lecturer, Community Practice Service

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Eileen Fatcheric, DVM
Katherine Basedow, LVT

DogWatch is an independent newsletter
produced in collaboration with Cornell
University College of Veterinary Medicine



College of
Veterinary Medicine

Cornell

Margaret and Richard Riney
Canine Health Center

For information on pet health, visit the Cornell
University College of Veterinary Medicine,
website at vet.cornell.edu

Send questions and letters to the editor:

DogWatch
535 Connecticut Ave.
Norwalk, CT 06854-1713
dogwatcheditor@cornell.edu

Subscriptions: \$39 per year (U.S.) - \$49 per
year (Canada). For subscription and customer
service information, visit

www.dogwatchnewsletter.com/cs
or write to: DogWatch, P.O. Box 8535,
Big Sandy, TX 75755-8535. 800-829-5574



Belvoir

DogWatch* (ISSN: 1098-2639) is
published monthly for \$39 per
year by Belvoir Media Group, LLC,
535 Connecticut Ave., Norwalk,
CT 06854-1713. Robert Englander,
Chairman and CEO; Timothy H.
Cole, Chief Content Officer; Philip L.
Penny, Chief Operating Officer; Greg King, Chief
Marketing Officer; Ron Goldberg, Chief Financial
Officer; Tom Canfield, Chief Circulation Officer.
©2023 Belvoir Media Group, LLC.

Postmaster: Send address corrections to DogWatch,
P.O. Box 8535, Big Sandy, TX 75755-8535.

Express written permission is required to
reproduce, in any manner, the contents of this
issue, either in full or in part. For more information:
Permissions, DogWatch, 535 Connecticut Ave.,
Norwalk, Connecticut 06854-1713.

First-Aid for Poisonings

Finding an emergency veterinarian is not always possible, so you need to know what to do

One of the worst feelings for a dog owner is knowing your dog has accidentally ingested something poisonous. Maybe you came home and saw the evidence, like shredded dark chocolate wrappers. Or you saw him gulp mouthfuls of rat poison and you couldn't get there fast enough to stop it.

Sometimes, you notice your otherwise healthy dog suddenly starts acting strange and keeps getting worse. You suspect he ate something toxic, but you have no idea what. You know time is of the essence, but that's about it. Call your veterinarian or local veterinary emergency center immediately. If you know what your dog may have eaten, give information like brand name, ingredient list, how much he ate, when he ate it, and approximately how much he weighs.

With this information, your veterinarian should be able to tell you if there is cause for concern or not, how critical it is, and whether it's OK for you to try to induce vomiting at home.

If you're not sure if he ate anything or what he may have eaten, but he is acutely ill and rapidly deteriorating, you need to get him to a veterinarian right away.



Do you know what your dog is eating?

If for some reason you cannot reach a veterinary professional, or you call and they say, "Sorry, we are at capacity and can't help you," **call the ASPCA 24/7 Poison Control Hotline at 888-426-4435 or the Pet Poison Helpline at 855-764-7661.** There are fees for the services, but it's well worth it.

Some poisons are more dangerous than others. Some are only toxic when ingested in huge amounts, some are deadly with just a tiny bit. The information you get from Poison Control could save your dog's life, or it could save you lots of money avoiding an unnecessary trip to the veterinarian.

For example, if your dog eats five months of the heartworm preventative Interceptor, it's really just a very expensive snack! Not toxic at that dose. But if he got into his glucosamine/chondroitin joint supplement and ate a whole bottle, if it contains manganese, an overdose could be deadly.

In the instance where you can't find local veterinary help right away, Poison Control will offer first-aid tips. They can tell you if it's recommended and/or safe to induce vomiting at home, and they can

relay to you how critical it is to get your dog to a veterinary clinic right away.

For instance, if a toxic dose of bromethalin rat poison was ingested, it's imperative your dog receive life-saving hospitalized care as soon as humanly possible. This poison is deadly, and there is no antidote.

By calling Poison Control you will know if you can wait, or if you should start calling hospitals farther and farther away until you find one able to see you. Since the national crisis in veterinary medicine hit, pet owners are sometimes forced to travel hundreds of miles to find emergency assistance. Next month, we will bring you the article, "Not All Poisons Are Created Equal," which explains typically ingested "bad stuff" and what you should know about it. ■

Common Canine Toxins*

- ▶ Albuterol inhalers
- ▶ Antifreeze
- ▶ Batteries
- ▶ Cannabis
- ▶ Chocolate
- ▶ Disposable hand warmers
- ▶ Electronic cigarettes (vapes)
- ▶ FireStarter logs
- ▶ Food oxidizer packs
- ▶ Grapes/raisins
- ▶ Household cleaners
- ▶ Human medications
- ▶ Insect bait stations
- ▶ Liquid fuels
- ▶ Macadamia nuts
- ▶ Mushrooms
- ▶ Onions/garlic
- ▶ Pennies
- ▶ Rat poison
- ▶ Silica gel packs
- ▶ Snakes
- ▶ Toads
- ▶ Xylitol

*This list is not all inclusive.

What You Can Do

Have 3% hydrogen peroxide on hand. This is what most over-the-counter products in the first-aid section of your drug store are. However, always check with your veterinarian or Poison Control before you induce vomiting. Sometimes, it's not the right choice. The dose for dogs is 1 milliliter per pound (ml/lb) of bodyweight, but not more than 45 ml. So, 1 teaspoon equals 5 ml, and 1 tablespoon equals 15 ml, which means a 15-pound dog would get 15 ml or 3 teaspoons of 3% hydrogen peroxide. A 100-pound dog would get no more than 45 ml (3 tablespoons). It's easiest to administer with a dosing syringe or a turkey baster.

If your dog does not vomit within 10 minutes, you may repeat the dose. Once. If the second try is not the charm, get to the veterinarian immediately.

What Your Vet Can Do

- ▶ Induce vomiting with drugs if hydrogen peroxide failed.
- ▶ Administer activated charcoal with or without an added cathartic like sorbitol, if needed, to minimize absorption of the toxin.
- ▶ Give the dog intravenous lipid emulsion therapy for severe cases of lipid-soluble toxins, like bromethalin rodenticide.

Signs of Poisoning

- ▶ **Lethargy**
- ▶ **Loss of appetite**
- ▶ **Vomiting**
- ▶ **Jaundice**
- ▶ **Blood in stools and/or vomit**

Spinal Cord Degeneration

It looks like worsening arthritis, but you also notice hindlimb muscle weakness

Degenerative myelopathy (DM) is an extremely frustrating disease for owners, dogs, and their veterinarians. Myelopathy means “disease of the spinal cord,” so DM is a degeneration of the spinal cord.

The usually slow progression of DM can fool you. Most often affecting dogs 8 years of age and older, the degeneration starts in the rear and progresses forward.

At first, owners may think their older dog’s arthritis is worsening, making it difficult to move around. And there’s good reason for that guess. Signs of DM are similar to arthritis and disc disease.

With DM, however, muscle wasting and weakness, starting with the hindlimbs, are usually evident. Your dog may wobble when he walks, exhibiting incoordination (ataxia). He may stop and stand with his paw flipped over, so the top of his paw is on the ground, not the pads. Affected dogs have trouble getting up and down.

Fortunately, this is usually not a painful disease. The nerves that conduct pain impulses are degenerating with the muscle and movement nerves. It is similar to the human Lou Gehrig’s disease, also called ALS (amyotrophic

lateral sclerosis).

From some unsteadiness in the rear legs, the disease progresses along the spinal cord with the dog’s rear becoming paralyzed. While bladder and bowel control do not seem to be directly affected, if the dog can’t get up, he may urinate or defecate where he is lying. Many owners report that their dogs are highly stressed when this occurs.

As more muscles and nerves are affected, the dog becomes weak and uncoordinated in his front legs, too. Breathing becomes difficult as those muscles weaken and fail to work normally. Dogs will have difficulty swallowing and may develop aspiration pneumonia. Most dogs are euthanized before reaching serious respiratory difficulty.

DM is eventually fatal. The time from diagnosis to euthanasia averages 11 months. Lifespans are shorter for large breed dogs due to the difficulties of supportive care for a big dog versus a small dog.

Any dog can get DM, but a higher percentage of German Shepherd Dogs, Boxers, Pembroke Welsh Corgis, Chesapeake Bay Retrievers, Rhodesian

Ridgebacks, Siberian Huskies, Labrador Retrievers, and Bernese Mountain Dogs are affected.

Diagnosis

As with ALS, there is no one definitive test for DM, making the diagnosis difficult. Since DM mainly affects older dogs, the dogs have concurrent arthritis, so the veterinarian needs to differentiate how much of the problem is due to arthritis and if DM is involved.

If you notice suggestive clinical signs in your dog, contact your veterinarian. A thorough physical exam, including a neurologic exam, is the ideal starting point. Your veterinarian will look for weakness, abnormal movements like standing with the paw flipped, and pain.

Bloodwork will be done to check for diseases that might cause weakness. Radiographs will evaluate your dog’s spine and joints, especially hips and stifles, to rule out arthritis. An MRI to check for cancer may be recommended. A DNA test for DM may be done to help with the diagnosis.

“The genetic testing can increase or decrease suspicion for DM, so we tend to run DM tests when we are suspicious of DM among other diagnoses. Other factors that influence suspicion include the age, breed, history, and neurological exam findings,” says Christopher Frye, DVM, assistant clinical professor, sports medicine and rehabilitation at the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine. “Regardless, the most important thing to remember is that genetic testing alone is not confirmatory that the patient has DM.”

Philippa J. Johnson, BVSc, assistant professor, diagnostic imaging, at Cornell has been working on using specific MRI imaging to help further elucidate this disease from a diagnostic perspective.

“Otherwise, it is sadly a disease confirmed post-mortem,” says Dr. Frye. “It should be remembered that many patients that have clinical signs that align with DM and may have a different disease process. Some patient diagnoses are further confounded by having multiple diseases with different times of onset and progression resulting in similar clinical signs and symptoms. Therefore, to gain the clearest picture of your dog’s condition and prognosis, we recommend an examination and workup by a board-certified veterinary specialist in neurology, surgery, or sports medicine,” says Dr. Frye.



Most dogs easily adjust to a cart so they can be mobile, but they still require additional care.



Neil Venev / iStock

Home care includes ensuring dry, clean bedding and assistance when your dog needs to move.

Treatment and Home Care

No known medication can stop DM's progress. Largely anecdotally, some medications and supplements seem to help slow progression, including epsilon-aminocaproic acid, N-acetylcysteine, prednisone, L-carnitine, and vitamins B, C, and E. However, physical rehabilitation is considered the most proven, useful treatment.

"In general, DM tends to be relatively readily progressive, mainly affecting the hindlimbs initially," says Dr. Frye. "Currently, the best support for slowing progression in the scientific literature is physical therapy. Larger dogs are often more cumbersome as nursing care becomes more intense. Ensuring staged physiotherapy and carting when necessary, under the advisement of a veterinary rehabilitation specialist, can improve quality of life and independent mobility as the disease progresses. We incorporate underwater treadmill to decrease the stress of weight bearing on weakened hind-limb function while promoting gait patterning, spatial awareness, strengthening, and cardiovascular endurance."

Laser may be used to help maintain healthy tissues and encourage blood flow. The goal is to try to maintain muscle mass and the dog's physical capability as much as possible, keeping the dog up and mobile.

Home nursing care is equally important, especially as the disease progresses. "Appropriate nursing care is key to optimize patient health and can include deep, dry, clean bedding, assistive devices like carts, protective foot boots or nail covers if patients are scuffing, monitoring skin for infection and abrasion, and monitoring and managing any issues with urination or defecation, among others," says Dr. Frye.

Dogs with DM need to be carefully

watched for problems with bed sores if they are laying and resting much of the time. Helping them roll over is important. You also need to keep them clean and dry, which may mean the use of doggy diapers with frequent changes.

At home, owners can assist with physical rehab themselves. PROM (passive range of motion) exercises help to keep muscles and nerves working for as long as possible. Massage techniques can be great as a bonding time between the dog and human family as well as being good for the muscles.

Many devices and home adaptations can help a dog with DM. For a dog who is still fairly mobile, building non-slip ramps to circumvent stairs can help and will also be useful when the dog progresses to a cart. Placing carpet runners over bare floors helps dogs who are a bit wobbly. The Help 'Em Up

harness is useful for getting a dog up on its feet and assisting him to move.

Numerous carts are on the market that allow dogs some mobility, with sizes to fit all dogs. Small dogs enjoy outings in backpacks and strollers, while bigger dogs can do a family walk in a wagon. Going out in a stroller or wagon can brighten your dog's day.

Mental stimulation is important. DM dogs can become frustrated that they can't move or that they soil themselves. Providing food puzzles and doing simple tricks and games like scent puzzles, even food hidden in your hands, can keep them mentally happy.

The reality is that, at some point, you will need to make a euthanasia decision for your dog with DM based on quality of life. Until then, intensive home care can keep your dog relatively happy and comfortable. ■

DNA Tests for DM

The more dogs who get genetic testing, the more we can learn about specific gene mutations and try to avoid them or at least prepare for them

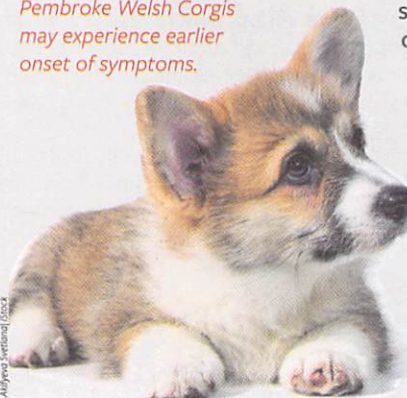
A genetic mutation, called SOD-1, is a major risk factor for DM. This gene was identified in 2009 showing a mutation in the gene superoxide dismutase 1. This mutation is only a risk factor, not a guarantee that the individual dog will eventually suffer from this disease.

In general, dogs need two copies of the mutant gene to have an increased risk of developing DM. With one copy, the risk is quite low, and the progression of the disease may be slower. Unfortunately for Pembroke Welsh Corgis, there is a genetic modifier to the mutation that can result in an earlier onset of the problem. Bernese Mountain Dogs have a second mutation (SOD1B) that can increase risk for DM in that breed. These dogs should be tested for both variants when doing genetic screening.

A study from Japan looked at 541 German Shepherd Dogs, checking their status for SOD1. About 34% of the dogs had one copy of the gene variant, while 5% of the dogs had two copies. All the dogs with two copies who were over 10 years of age were clinically affected with DM.

Testing can serve two purposes. If you own an at-risk breed and know your dog's status, you can be super aware of any movement changes. Astute observations can help you pinpoint the start of DM. While there is no cure, starting intensive care early can double your dog's good quality of life.

Pembroke Welsh Corgis may experience earlier onset of symptoms.



Allyson Swanson / iStock

For anyone breeding at-risk breeds, knowing the status of the dog's mate can help you to avoid doubling up on the variant gene. Use carriers judiciously and make extensive use of dogs clear for this gene mutation. Test puppies early so you know their status before placing them.

For more information on genetic testing, see "The Benefits of DNA Testing" in our December 2022 issue.

Enrich Your Senior Dog's Life

Most older dogs still want to go places and do stuff

Some senior dogs with a laidback temperament or health problems simply want to lay in a sunny spot and watch the world go by. They are happy with two or three meals a day and some quiet time with you, just sitting together. And that's OK.

Other seniors aren't ready to settle down. Their personality is more like the residents at senior centers who sign up for every class, take daily hikes, and run the whole gamut of available activities. Fortunately, just as for active human seniors, options abound that fit your senior canine's desires and physical abilities.

At your dog's annual wellness checkup (you do that, right?), be sure to include a discussion with your veterinarian about safe activities for your older dog. And plan to reassess your dog's physical capabilities often. A dog who wants to please you may push his body beyond ideal limits, so you have to be the adult here. On the other hand, he may only need a dose of pain medication on the day of extra activity to take part, much like you taking a precautionary dose of your favorite anti-inflammatory on the day of a big softball game.

Walking and Hikes

Most dogs love to go on a walk or hike with you. The smells on a beach or in a new park bring great enjoyment to your dog. Keep to cool times of day for your outings. Carry water and nutritious snacks. Choose easy paths. This is not the time to start climbing mountains! Adjust the distance and difficulty to your dog's current capabilities.

Think of your walks as "sniffathons." Let your dog stroll, snuffle, and check everything out. Don't consider your walks together to be serious exercise walks for you.

Throw in some wading if you have a safe place. Avoid any water with a strong current and leave short swims for warm weather. Ideally, you should attach a long line to your dog in case he needs help getting back to shore or gets turned around and starts paddling out to sea. Some senior dogs are happy to become paddleboard dogs or happily ride in a canoe or on a kayak while you do the work, just enjoying being with you.



This senior Papillon joyfully moved from agility to Barn Hunt, increasing his active years.

Indoor Activities

Senior centers for people offer crosswords and jigsaw puzzles. You can

offer food puzzles for your senior. Make sure your dog can handle them, but they do stretch his mind and his nose.

Forget the saying that "an old dog can't learn new tricks." Yes, they can! Stick to simple tricks (always consider your dog's current physical status). Modify some of your dog's favorite activities, such as rolling the ball instead of throwing it. Choose one of the balls that glow and make noise to help compensate for vision and hearing loss. Basic scent games can be done indoors, ensuring good weather and safe footing.

You can also join classes or a club that involves dog sports. Most offer divisions for older dogs, and most seniors are happy to learn something new (see sidebar).

Most senior dogs still enjoy doing things with you—they want to do things with you! Choose an activity that appeals to your dog, then adjust it as needed to fit his physical condition. You will both enjoy your time together! ■

Modified Sports for Seniors

Agility. Dogs who love agility, truly LOVE agility. These dogs don't want to stop even when their bodies can't handle jumping anymore, and there are places for seniors to keep playing. Some clubs hold a "Run for Glory" at the end of the day or a weekend. For that course, jumps are lowered way down or bars are removed altogether. The course can even be set for dogs running in carts. Some agility venues offer classes that are great for the senior canine who still wants to compete. The Grounders class in the North American Dog Agility Council (NADAC) has no jumps. They just have hoops to pass through, barrels to circle, and occasionally a tunnel to run through. Their Tunnelers course is pure tunnels, with no jumping required.

Obedience and Rally. In obedience, you can choose preferred options for the upper classes with very low jumps. Rally has low jump heights to begin with. If your dog chooses to go around even low jumps, take that as an important hint that he is no longer comfortable jumping. In rally, take the point deficit and continue. You can also simply train in these sports and do matches (fun runs) with modified rules. Some clubs even organize Golden Oldie Days for the senior dogs and let them participate as they wish with a cheering crowd on hand.

Scent Sports. Even 16- and 17-year-old dogs compete in scent competitions. No running or jumping. He just uses his marvelous nose. Nose and scent work trials (similar to drug detection) generally have both indoor and outdoor components so choose for your senior based on the weather. Scent work is easy to train and practice at home. There are excellent online courses. Scent sports can be mentally, as well as physically, exhausting and your dog—even younger dogs—will often nap after these workouts.

Tracking. Somewhat like scent sports, but a little more active. In this sport, the dog follows a human scent and finds "lost" articles. Many older dogs compete successfully in tracking competitions. If these competition level tracks are too rigorous for your dog, modify it! Lay a short track for your dog. Make things easy so he will be successful.

Barn Hunt. This sport's popularity is exploding. Rats are safely hidden in tubes among straw bales, and your dog just needs to find them and let you know. You can also do Happy Ratters, which has the rodents hidden in simulated trash piles. You will need to be your dog's advocate here if the course requires climbing too high or tricky tunnels.

Why Does My Dog Need an Exam For a Refill?

The reasons for requiring periodic exams when on medications all protect your dog's health

Your dog is close to running out of his prescription medications. You check your bottle: No more refills. You call the veterinary clinic, hoping to get the medications. You're told that your dog will need to have an exam first, but if you are out of medicine, they will dispense a few pills to hold you over until the appointment. Why all the fuss?

Many reasons! First and foremost, your veterinarian must monitor your dog's health. While you may not have noticed, his health may have changed. He may have gained or lost weight, making the previous dosage amount and schedule inappropriate. He may be exhibiting signs that the medication is not performing as expected and needs to be changed. And, of course, his health problem may have improved or deteriorated, requiring a medication adjustment.

Antibiotic resistance. Overusing antibiotics or improperly using them can lead to resistant bacteria that can harm people and pets. Your veterinarian may need to examine your dog to see if more



That "refill" exam is important to your dog's overall health.

antibiotics are truly needed or if your dog might need a change in antibiotics if the previously prescribed one isn't working. If your dog does not improve on the initial drug, a culture and sensitivity lab test may be recommended along with a change in medication. The same holds true for antifungal medications.

Heartworm worries. If your dog is on a monthly heartworm medication, he must be tested annually for the rare cases when a heartworm "broke through" the medication and set up shop. If indeed the medication somehow failed, and your dog now has heartworms, giving him the preventative drugs could harm him. Early cases of heartworm can be caught and usually cured.

Monitoring chronic health conditions. Dogs with chronic conditions need monitoring. If a dog is on medication for a chronic issue, like Addison's disease, an appointment is important for multiple reasons. Your veterinarian will need to assess your dog physically to see if the dosage seems to be working. Bloodwork may need to be done to see if the lab values match the clinical picture. If your dog is on a seizure medication, blood tests can confirm that your dog has the correct

levels in his bloodstream to help prevent seizures and minimize side effects. An exam and bloodwork ensure your dog isn't experiencing any undesirable side effects from his medications.

Bringing your seemingly well dog back to the veterinarian for an exam to check his progress and refill the same medications seems like an annoyance, but when you realize that it's all for the dog's wellbeing and health—not the clinic's bottom line!—you realize that it's well worth the trip. ■

What You Should Know

Know the refill times. If your dog is on a long-term medication, most refills are done without an exam, but only up to a point. If your veterinarian needs to see the dog back in six months, you will not be given refills for any longer than that. The label on the medication will say how many refills you can get, but keep in mind that some states regulate how many refills can be given as well. Plan for when you will need refills and make an appointment for that time frame now. Veterinary appointments can be difficult to get.

Pharmacies. An increasing number of pharmacies can fill pet prescriptions and may save you money—both locally and online—but it's wise to get those first pills from your own veterinarian so you can begin treating your dog immediately. Your veterinarian will write a prescription for you for the remaining refills. If you get the medication elsewhere, always check to be sure it's the correct dosage and drug for your dog. And, of course, online pharmacies must follow the same guidelines on refilling prescriptions as your veterinarian's in-house pharmacy. If your dog runs out of his medication refills, the pharmacy will need a new prescription from your veterinarian to give you the medication.

Moving. If you're moving and will need to change veterinary clinics, ask your current veterinarian for enough medication to hold you over until you get established at the new clinic. At the new clinic, expect an examination and possibly bloodwork, but bring copies of your dog's veterinary records from your current veterinarian, as some things may be accepted.

Patient-Client Relationship

A prescribing veterinarian must have a patient-client relationship with you and your dog, otherwise it's both illegal in many states and against the American Veterinary Medical Association Code of Ethical Practices. So, if you move or change clinics, expect a veterinary visit before asking a new clinic to refill your medications, even if you technically had refills remaining from the previous veterinarian.

An annual exam is the basis for a true patient-client relationship, although with senior dogs or pets with chronic illness, an exam every six months is standard. Consider that your own physician will not refill your medications without seeing you at least annually, and one year is even longer (relatively) in the life of your dog.

Pebbles as a Therapy Dog

It starts with stopping barking at other dogs

Q I subscribe to the *Cornell DogWatch* newsletter. For many years, I have trained my dogs with the basic obedience commands. They have all done well. However, my most recent dog, a Papillon-Spaniel mix, has been a challenge.

I adopted Pebbles when she was 5 years old. I had lost my Yorkie mix at the age of 16 due to heart disease during the pandemic, and I missed having a dog. I was lucky to find Pebbles through a local rescue group.

Pebbles is not a yappy dog, does not chew up anything, and loves to go for walks. She also loves her treats and zooms around the backyard, taunting us to chase her. However, I've noticed that when we are walking around the neighborhood, she gets very defensive and starts growling and barking at other dogs who may be on the opposite sidewalk, not even giving an indication that they are coming over or want to be aggressive toward her. I've never had a dog do this, especially if she isn't being attacked or even bothered.

About this time, the *Cornell DogWatch* Newsletter April 2022 issue arrived with the article, "Reactivity Is Hard on a Dog." I read the article, again, and identified a possible aggression trigger: another dog (even though it is not attacking her).

I chatted with a young man who trains military dogs, and he checked her out with a calm dog of his, and then he brought out his more aggressive hound (a little Dachshund). He asked me to walk with her both times with the basic commands and said that the only thing I needed to work on was to correct her when she started getting defensive or barking at another dog.

I've tried this for several months, it is getting better, but I was wondering, do you have any suggestions you can give me to help her get over this behavior problem? Is this problem fixable?



A Therapy Dog visits people in hospitals and assisted-living facilities, bringing joy to those who live there.

Pebbles came to me with a Service Dog vest, but we can't figure out what type of service dog she is, or what her purpose was (the rescue had little information about her). She walks closely to the shopping cart when I take her into a grocery store and is well behaved. If I stop to talk to someone, she waits calmly and quietly until I am ready to continue shopping. She loves to meet people and especially children. She sits quietly while they pet her and she doesn't move, growl, or show any bad behavior tendencies. So, I don't understand the issue of barking and growling at other dogs, especially if they are a distance away.

I want to get this behavior corrected because I want to retrain her as a Service Dog, get her certification, and then train her as a Therapy Dog, get her certification, and take her to the children's hospitals and assisted living places for older folks.

My question is, can you help me with the barking? Can you give me some advice on what I should do? This little girl is a joy to have at home. She has learned to be our "helper" when we go to the mailbox. She heels off-leash and either carries an envelope to the mailbox

or carries one back to me and is so happy to bring me the envelope, you can almost see her smiling. She trots to me with her prize in her mouth and does a happy dance when I thank her for the envelope.

A Pebbles sounds like a great dog! Is she a Service Dog? Anyone can buy a vest, such as she has, that has Service Dog written on it, so who knows? That means nothing because there are no legal standards except for guide dogs. In general, a service dog is supposed to do things for the owner like bring them a telephone or pull a wheel chair. I think what you want is a Therapy Dog, which is a dog who comforts people in the hospital. She might be fine for that, unless there are other dogs present.

The Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine has a program called Cornell Companions that tests dogs for that purpose. The dog has to be willing to be pet, to ignore food—my beloved Cairn, Nini, could not pass that portion of the test because she had never seen a hot dog that she did not want to eat—and be friendly with other dogs. That may be a problem for Pebbles, unless she can be calm with those particular dogs.

I think you diagnosed her barking at other dogs correctly. She is defensive because she is afraid. Your advisor who recommended correction for barking at other dogs is betraying his military background. You don't want her to learn that the approach of another dog means a pain in the neck because you have been using a leash correction.

What you want her to learn is that she does not have to confront the other dog. You will lead her away from the approaching danger. Try to walk her in places and at times when you are unlikely to encounter other dogs. I like to have owners give the dog a treat the minute another dog is perceived and then turn their dog away from the other dog so that the danger recedes. She will quickly learn that the approach of the other dog means "treat," rather than fear, and will likely give up on the barking. ■



Do You Have a Behavior Concern?

Send your behavior questions to Cornell's renowned behavior expert Katherine Houpt, VMD, Ph.D., shown here with Yuki, her West Highland White Terrier. Email to dogwatcheditor@cornell.edu or send by regular mail to DogWatch, 535 Connecticut Ave., Norwalk, CT 06854-1713.



Cornell
Margaret and Richard Riney
Canine Health Center

Coming Up ...

- ▶ Bacterial Skin Infections
- ▶ Microchips, GPS tracking devices, collar IDs—what to choose?
- ▶ Guide to Gastroenteritis
- ▶ Fungal Infections in the Feet and Nails
- ▶ More on Handling Accidental Poisoning