

Reasons to Open Your Heart to a Senior Pet

(Excerpts from <http://healthypets.mercola.com/sites/healthypets/archive/2014/10/02/pet-retirement-home.aspx>): At the top of the list of animals languishing in shelters across the U.S. are older animals. It is terribly sad to know these poor animals are frightened, disoriented, and waiting anxiously in their kennels for their families to come back and collect them. And it's sadder still to know many of these pets will never leave the shelter... unless more adoptive families are willing to give them a second look.

Reasons Why Senior Pets Are Awesome

Older pets have manners. Unlike babies, many grown-up pets have spent years living with a family and being socialized to life with humans. They may have received obedience training and respond to commands. Many are house-trained and it takes a matter of hours or a day or two to help them learn the potty rules in their new home. Most older adoptive pets are well past the search-and-destroy phase.

What you see is what you get. A senior pet holds no surprises as to how big he might get, what color his adult coat will be, or whether his hips will be healthy. A senior pet comes to you with his own history, which makes his future much more predictable than that of an 8-week old pet.

You can teach an old pet new tricks. Adult pets can focus on the task at hand (unlike many of their much younger counterparts). Older pets are more attentive and more eager to please their humans.

Senior pets are great company for senior citizens. Many elderly people find the calm presence of an older pet very comforting. They appreciate having a companion who is also 'getting up there' in age, doesn't mind hearing the same stories again and again, and is content to move through life at a slower speed.

Older pets are relaxing to hang out with. Senior pets have all the basics down and aren't full of wild energy to burn.

Adopted senior pets are grateful for your kindness. Somehow, older pets seem to know you gave them a home when no one else would. Many new owners form a close bond very quickly with their senior pet, because the pet shows them a level of attention and devotion that is unique to older adopted animals.

You can be a hero to a deserving pet. Almost without exception, people who adopt older animals feel a special sense of pride and purpose in opening their heart to a hard-to-place pet. Doing a good thing really does make you feel good!

Special Considerations for Older Pets

Caring for a senior pet can require more attention and changes to your regular routine. Fortunately, these changes don't happen overnight; you can adjust to them gradually, as can your pet.

Increased Veterinary Visits

Older pets should see their veterinarian twice a year, and may require dental care or additional blood work. Age-related health issues to watch for are very similar to those that occur in humans.

Differing Dietary Needs & Exercise

You may need to tweak your pet's diet as he gets older and watch that your pet does not become overweight or obese. Your pet's aging body will lose muscle tone, balance, and fluid movement without regular exercise. Older pets can benefit tremendously from anti-aging activities, including: Exercises specifically designed to maintain strength, flexibility, and balance; and massage to relieve sore muscles and joints, and other aches and pains.

Mental Stimulation

Pets can show signs of senility just like humans. Mental stimulation can help to keep your pet's brain in proper working order. There are many ways to mentally stimulate your pet, such as going for a walk (especially on a new route), taking a ride in the car, or playtime in the backyard. Or, according to Robert T. Goldston, DVM, author of the veterinary textbook, *Geriatrics and Gerontology of Dogs and Cats*: "By far the best activity for mentally stimulating senior and geriatric pets is the near constant attention they get from a younger pet."

Environmental Changes

If your pet develops trouble with hearing, vision, housetraining, or mobility, you'll need to make some adjustments to his environment. If your pet isn't sleeping well, increasing his daytime activity level can help. Let your pet sleep in your bedroom. Sleeping near his human pack leader should help ease any anxiety that is contributing to his nighttime restlessness. There are many natural treatments and supplements that can help older pets feel comfortable and stay mobile. Some of these include chiropractic adjustments, stretching, water exercises, acupuncture, and massage.