

Senior Dog Health Warning Signs

by Marcia King

These seven health warning signs would be applicable to our Shelties, too:

Age hasn't slowed "Ginger" down very much. Fourteen years young, this Chow Chow mix loves taking long walks and playing with tennis balls. But recently "Ginger" became reluctant to play with the balls, her breath started to smell and her appetite decreased.

"We thought she might have a problem with her teeth," says owner Michael Ruslander of New York. "We looked in her mouth and found a raised red mass about the size of a walnut on the top of her tongue." The lump turned out to be a cancerous tumor.

Signs such as lumps and bumps, and reduced interest in play, are common in older dogs. Oftentimes they're harmless and don't mean much. But, as in "Ginger's" case, sometimes these changes indicate a serious problem. There are other common signs, too, that crop up in aging dogs, suggesting something could be amiss. Changes that warrant investigation include:

1. **Limping or lameness.** The most common cause of lameness is arthritis, also called DJD or degenerative joint disease, says Linda Workman, DVM, veterinary advisor for the American Animal Hospital Association. Besides limping, dogs with DJD may be stiff or reluctant to exercise, and have trouble rising or handling stairs. Treatment includes anti-inflammatory pain medication, joint and nutritional supplements, exercise therapy, and, most important, weight control: "Excess weight interferes with joint motion and stresses joints," Workman explains. Other causes of lameness include injury, various diseases and cancer.

2. **Change in appetite or weight.** An increased or decreased appetite, or unexplained weight gain or weight loss can be linked to many different conditions, Workman notes. These include internal organ disease (kidney, liver, or heart), diabetes, oral problems (periodontitis, abscessed teeth, mouth tumors), hormonal imbalances, abdominal tumors and parasitic disease. An accurate diagnosis is critical for effective treatment.

3. **Abnormal chewing.** Dropping food from the mouth, difficulty chewing, chewing on one side, face rubbing, or bad breath suggest a dental disorder, sinus disease or mouth tumor. Sometimes lack of appetite, weight loss, sneezing or nasal discharge accompanies these signs. "Teeth cleaning, removal of diseased teeth, and antibiotic therapy may or even cures are possible."

("Senior Dog Health Warning Signs" cont.)

7. **Lumps and bumps.** Small, benign fatty tumors are common in older dogs, Workman says. "After being diagnosed, they are often left in place unless they become larger, interfere with movement or there is a change in appearance and firmness." However, other more aggressive tumors should be treated. "Surgical excision is the cornerstone of treatment for most skin tumors," says Ruslander, but radiation therapy or chemotherapy may be advised.

Seek treatment. "If you notice any of the signs discussed above," Workman advises, "don't wait until your next scheduled appointment to take your dog to your veterinarian." The sooner your vet can evaluate your dog, the more likely she will be able to recover fully, she says.

Such was the case for "Ginger." After discovering "Ginger's" mass, Michael Ruslander had her examined the next day. Although malignant, the cancer had not spread. "Surgery removed most of the tumor," he says. Follow-up radiation therapy and chemotherapy came next to prevent cancer re-growth and spread. "Ginger's appetite has slowly improved, and currently she seems to be doing well." □

If you ordered a "Trade Secrets" book, would you be so kind as to let me know if your mailing address has changed (since you placed your order) by sending an e-mail to s.pacesetter@sheltie.com. I am working on having this new "Trade Secrets" out in early summer.

Gear Up for Spring Biking with Your Dog

When you think about the activities that you can do with your dog, your list might look like this: walk, run, play fetch. With such a short list, you probably cycle through these pretty quickly. Why not shake things up a bit and introduce your dog to something new? Spring is a wonderful time to ride your bike and the best part is that your dog can come with you. It's the perfect way to bond and reconnect with your dog and enjoy that fresh spring air together.

Can Any Dog Bike?

It makes sense that a healthy dog that's used to walking, running, or hiking is a great candidate for a bike mate. But what if your dog is small and doesn't need much exercise? Don't worry! There are a few different ways that will allow your dog to join you so you don't have to leave that wagging tail and adorable little face behind.

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(*Biking With Your Dog* cont.)

• **Bike leash** — for an active, healthy dog, a bike leash is your answer. Bike leashes hook on the side of a bike and attach to your dog's padded harness so your dog is running right along side of you. It's designed to control your dog in case he or she pulls in a different direction and ensures the safety of both dog and rider.

NEVER bring your dog on a regular leash that will leave you with just one hand on the handle bars and the other holding your dog's leash. This can be extremely dangerous. Bike leashes were designed to free your hands so you can drive the bike properly.

* **Riders and baskets** — for your small dog that doesn't really need much exercise, you can still bond with them on a bicycling trip by using a pet rider or a basket. Baskets attached to the front handle and have a harness or a strap that keeps your furry passenger hooked safely and secured. Riders also work the same way, although these can be attached to the front or back of a bike and also include a safety harness.

Start Small

Once you've determined the best way to bring your dog along, it's time to get him or her acclimated to being with the bike. Show your dog how you are attaching the leash to your bicycle or set your dog in the rider or basket to get him or her used to it. For the initial few outings, just walk your bike. When your dog starts to become comfortable, hop on the bike and go slowly at first. Plan on just going around the block the first time, followed by one or two more blocks as your dog adjusts to this new activity. This is also a good time to make sure that your dog is properly secured to the bike so there aren't any mishaps.

If the biking is going well and your dog isn't afraid or stressed out, you can then begin lengthening your bike trips and moving along at a more appropriate pace.

Safety First

There are some things to keep in mind when you have your dog with you on the bike so that you both have a safe and enjoyable experience.

1. Whenever possible, use bike trails or roads that are less busy. If this isn't a nearby option, use a bike rack and drive the two of you to a nearby park or trail.
2. Avoid extraordinary heat. In the warm summer months, reserve biking outings for early mornings or early evenings before it is getting dark.
3. Bring a small pack of necessary items, including water, treats, a cell phone and your vet's number just in case of an emergency. Make sure that your dog has all of his tags and other identification.

Just you and your dog on the open road with the wind at your backs and the sunshine on your faces is a healthy and fun way to bond with your dog. Dogs are always overjoyed to be going anywhere with their humans, so finding new ways to spend time together (like biking) is bound to bring the two of you even closer together. Show your best friend just how much you love your dog and hop on that bike! ☐

Does Your Spring Outing with "Rover" Include a Hike?

— Top Five Tips for Hiking with Your Dog —

Spring is here, so why not turn that daily walk into an interesting and fun hike? It's no secret that exercise is a necessity for both you and your dog. We often forget that our dogs are pack animals and their origins are rooted in hunting, playing, and roaming all day long with their pack family. If you are already in the habit of walking your four-legged friend, you know that it's a special time for the two of you to bond as well as establish yourself as the leader of your domestic pack. Why not shake up your routine a bit and kick your workout into high gear by taking your best friend for a hike?

Follow these five tips and your hikes will surely be a wonderful experience that you'll both enjoy together.

1. Know your limits (yours and your dog's) —

Does your current exercise endeavor consist of walking around the block a couple times? Then you may want to rethink that 10 mile hike you're mapping out. Not only do you need to be able to hike without difficulty, so does your furry companion. Start intensifying your walks by making them longer and include hills if possible so the two of you can build up your stamina. It's also advisable to take your dog to the vet just to ensure that he will be able to accompany you comfortably when you're ready to hike. Dogs are people pleasers and they never want to let on that they are injured or in pain, so they will endure it for as long as they can.

2. Be prepared —

Once you've determined to go on that hike, whether it's a long or a short trip, make sure you have the following items:

Collar and leash — Bring these just as you would when you're going for your regular walks.

Proper ID tags — The tags MUST be legible and specify your dog's name and your current contact information. It's also a good idea to have a current photo with you just in case you get separated.

First Aid Kit — Human first aid kits can come in handy in the event of a cut or scrape (for either of you). Throw some tweezers in it for easy tick removal.

Vet's Phone Number — In the event that something unexpected happens, keep your vet's phone number with you so you can quickly find out how to best take care of your dog. You can never be too careful.

Sunscreen — You both need sunscreen and they make sunscreen specifically for dogs. Light-colored noses are very susceptible to sunburns and dogs can get skin cancer just like you.

Orange Vests — Know whether or not you are taking your hike during a hunting season. Orange vests for you and your dog will make sure you both stand out.

Appropriate Dress — When hiking during cooler weather, bring along an extra layer of clothes if your dog tolerates them.

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("Top Five Tips For Hiking With Your Dog" cont.)

For summer hikes, keep a cool, moist scarf or bandana that he can pass it on to you, so it's best to keep them away from anything suspicious.

5. Mind your manners —

The same rules you follow on your routine walks apply to your hikes. Have a carry in, carry out mentality, which includes cleaning up after your dog on the trail. Using a leash will ensure that other hikers, other dogs, as well as the flora and fauna around you will remain undisturbed. If you're both on a more leisurely hike, let others moving at a faster pace pass you easily.

Hiking with your dog is a wonderful way to spend quality time together and enjoy the outdoors all while getting a great workout. You're guaranteed to have a fun and safe hike just by taking a bit of extra time to plan and prepare. Happy hiking!

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