



Lack of MOBILITY

may mean *less time with your pet*

Here are five ways to improve your senior pet's health—and maybe even his life expectancy—by helping him get back to the things he used to do.

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

Take your pet to the veterinarian for a physical exam and find out if he has any medical conditions that might affect a workout routine, such as arthritis, a heart condition or respiratory issues.

Lose the weight. If your pet is overweight, work with your veterinarian to form a diet plan that is palatable, keeps your pet satiated and still allows for occasional treats. Weight loss reduces excess strain on joints and weakened muscles, which may reduce pain.

FIRST STEPS

Slow and steady wins this race. Start your senior pet with five minutes of walking, adding an additional five minutes each day for five days until a daily 30-minute walk is manageable and routine.

Relieve any pain. If your pet is limping, lagging, panting excessively or refuses to continue, stop the activity and check with your veterinarian. Some pets may require pain medication to get moving or to complete an exercise.

STEP IT UP

Once you and your pet have achieved a daily exercise routine, you can increase duration, speed, even incorporate hills or different surfaces like sand to add more challenge. Walks will become easier as your pet becomes stronger.

Strengthen hind limbs. If your pet can't jump onto the couch or climb the stairs well these days, it's likely because, like many older dogs, he has lost strength in his hind legs. Focus on building back those muscles with exercises recommended by your veterinarian.

EXERCISE THE MIND

Senior pets need to exercise their minds as well as their bodies. Obstacle courses can be a fun way to stimulate your pet's mind and improve neurologic and muscle control.

Get creative. If you use simple household objects, you can stimulate your pet's mind with physical games. For example, coax your pet to step over a garden hose fashioned in a serpent pattern in the backyard—broom handles or pool noodles also work well. For pets already at a good fitness level, try rally events, agility classes, tracking or field events.

DON'T GIVE UP

Discomfort and a lack of strength and flexibility may make achieving mobility seem like an insurmountable task. But don't give up! Exercise can be tailored to fit the needs of any pet and will not only improve your pet's health, but strengthen the bond you share with your pet as well.

Rehab for results. If physical injuries prevent your pet from exercising, ask your veterinarian about rehabilitation. Rehab specialists can use methods such as joint mobilization, massage, stretching, laser therapy and acupuncture to help get your pet up and moving again.

Exercises for the four-legged work out

Maintaining an active lifestyle through daily physical exercise may be the No. 1 thing you can do to promote muscle strength, joint flexibility and overall health in senior pets. Try these exercises to keep your pets moving.

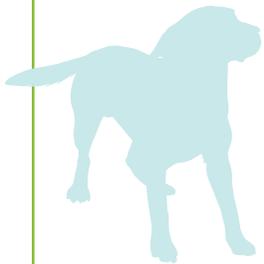


> Step-ups.

Encourage your pet to put both front feet up on one step. Doing so will shift his weight to the hind legs. Hold this position for up to 60 seconds. As your pet becomes stronger and more comfortable with this exercise—and if his size allows it—see if he can reach the next step up to increase the level of difficulty.

> Three-legged stands.

With your pet in a standing position, gently pick up one limb and hold it for 10 seconds, eventually working up to 20 seconds. This forces your pet to shift his weight onto the remaining three limbs, improving strength and balance. Do this with each limb, working your way around to all four limbs.



> Sit to stands.

Ask your dog to sit, and then have him stand up, and repeat. Build up to 10 to 15 repetitions twice a day, and reward your pet every few reps to help keep him engaged.

If your pet is a cat, exercises may need to look a little different. Try these exercises for cats:



> **Play time.** Use cat toys to get them moving.

> **Hide and seek.** Hide food in small bowls around the house and push them by placing food on elevated platforms.

> **Dine and dash.** Toss food kibble by kibble across the floor to encourage your cat to get up and walk for his meal.