

Five ways to help your dog live a longer, healthier life

August 27 2021, by Jacqueline Boyd



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

As anyone who has ever lived with a dog will know, it often feels like we don't get enough time with our furry friends. Most dogs only live around ten to 14 years on average—though some may [naturally live longer](#), while others may be [predisposed to](#) certain diseases that can limit their lifespan.

But what many people don't know is that humans and [dogs](#) share many genetic similarities—including a predisposition to [age-related cancer](#). This means that many of the things humans can do to be healthier and longer lived may also work for dogs.

Here are just a few ways that you might help your dog live a longer, healthier life.

1. Watch their waistline

One factor that's repeatedly linked with longevity across a [range of species](#) is maintaining a healthy bodyweight. That means ensuring dogs aren't carrying excess weight, and managing their calorie intake carefully. Not only will a lean, healthy bodyweight be better for your dog in the long term, it can also help to limit the impact of certain health conditions, [such as osteoarthritis](#).

Carefully monitor and manage your dog's bodyweight through regular weighing or [body condition scoring](#)—where you look at your dog's physical shape and "score" them on a scale to check whether they're overweight, or at a healthy weight. Using both of these [methods together](#) will allow you to identify weight changes and alter their diet as needed.

Use feeding guidelines as a starting point for how much to feed your dog, but you might need to change food type or the amount you feed to maintain a healthy weight as your dog gets older, or depending on how much activity they get. Knowing exactly how much you are feeding your dog is also a crucial weight-management tool—so weigh their food rather than [scooping it in](#) by eye.

More generally, [good nutrition](#) can be linked to a healthy aging process, suggesting that what you feed can be as important as how much you feed. "Good" nutrition will vary for each dog, but be sure to look for

foods that are safe, tasty and provide all the nutrients your dog needs.

2. Plenty of walks

Exercise has many physiological and psychological benefits, both for our dogs ([and us](#)). Physical activity can help to manage a [dog's bodyweight](#), and is also associated with [anti-aging effects](#) in other genetically similar species.

While exercise alone won't increase your dog's lifespan, it might help protect you both from carrying excess bodyweight. And indeed, research suggests that "happy" dog walks lead to both [happy dogs and people](#).



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

3. Teach them new tricks

Aging isn't just physical. Keeping your dog's mind active is also helpful. Contrary to the popular adage, you can teach old dogs new tricks—and you might just keep their brain and body [younger as a result](#).

Even when [physical activity might be limited](#), explore alternative low-impact games and pursuits, [such as scentwork](#) that you and your dog can do together. Using their nose is an inherently rewarding and fun thing for dogs to do, so training dogs to find items by scent will exercise them both [mentally and physically](#).

Other exercise such as [hydrotherapy](#)—a type of [swimming exercise](#)—might be a good option—especially for dogs who have conditions which affect their [ability to exercise](#) as normal.

4. Bonding

Like many companion animals, dogs develop a [clear attachment](#) to their caregivers. The human-dog bond likely [provides companionship](#)—and often, dog lovers describe them as a [family member](#).

A stable caregiver-dog bond can help maintain a happy and mutually [beneficial partnership](#) between you and your dog. It can also help you recognize subtle changes in your dog's behavior or movement that might signal potential concerns.

Where there is [compatibility between](#) caregiver and dog, this leads to a better relationship—and even benefits for owners, too, including [stress relief](#) and [exercise](#). Sharing positive, fun experiences with your dog, including [playing with them](#), are great for cementing your bond.

5. Don't skip vet visits

Modern veterinary medicine has seen substantial improvements in preventing and managing health concerns in dogs. Successful vaccination and parasite management programs have effectively [reduced the incidence](#) of disease in both dogs and humans—including [toxocariasis](#), which can be transmitted from dog feces to humans, and [rabies](#), which can be transmitted dog-to-dog or dog-to-human.

Having a good relationship with your vet will allow you to tailor treatments and discuss your dog's needs. Regular health checks can also be useful in identifying any potential problems [at a treatable stage](#)—such as [dental issues](#) or [osteoarthritis](#)—which can cause pain and negatively impact the dog's wellbeing.

At the end of the day, it's a combination of our dog's genetics and the environment they live in that impacts their longevity. So while we can't change their genetics, there are many things we can do to [improve their health](#) that may just help them live a longer, healthier life.

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