

'Just old age' or is your dog experiencing a serious clinical issue?

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A study from veterinary researchers at the University of Liverpool has shown that dog owners need clearer guidance on which behavioral and physical signs are a normal part of the aging process and which could be

indicative of a serious condition.

The "Just Old Age" research paper, published in the *Journal of Small Animal Practice*, also identified significant gaps in veterinary professional and dog owner communication.

These are the first research findings from the Old Age Pets research project.

To inform what is the first qualitative description of senior dog healthcare from the point of view of both dog owners and veterinary professionals in the U.K., the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with [dog owners](#) and veterinary professionals and collected open-text responses from owners using an [online survey](#).

They investigated expectations, experiences, and attitudes to aging in dogs, including preventative healthcare/treatment, and general understanding of normal and abnormal changes during aging.

The University of Liverpool's Dr. Lisa Wallis said, "The results of our study have revealed that age-related changes observed by owners were mostly perceived as 'just old age,' and opportunities to educate owners on what behavioral and physical signs represent normal or 'healthy' aging, and what is pathological are being missed, due to lack of time, education, and in some cases motivation."

The University of Liverpool's Professor Carri Westgarth added, "As most owners did not feel prepared for their dogs' aging, the possibility of reduced welfare in aged dogs is increased. Significant gaps in veterinary professional and dog owner communication were identified requiring urgent intervention. The development of a new guidance tool could address these gaps, to guide on best practice discussions in consultations with senior [dogs](#) and encourage more [owners](#) to seek veterinary advice."

The researchers and BSAVA also recently announced the [BSAVA PetSavers Aging Canine Toolkit \(ACT\)](#), which will help to address these concerns.

More information: L. J. Wallis et al, "Just old age"—a qualitative investigation of owner and veterinary professional experiences of and attitudes to ageing in dogs in the UK, *Journal of Small Animal Practice* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/jsap.13610](https://doi.org/10.1111/jsap.13610)

Provided by University of Liverpool

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