



# THE HAPPY HEELER

AUGUST 2021



**DEADLINE FOR SEPTEMBER 2021 NEWSLETTER IS AUGUST 28, 2021**

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Congratulations to the following club members and their dogs who passed the CGC test on July 20th, 2021:

Maureen & John Fieberg with Bogart (Bouvier)

Luki Gubach with Ko, (German Shepherd)

Austin Inscho with Kona (German Shepherd)

Selah Marting with Drew (Lab-Golden)

Sarah Reynolds with Emma (Cairn Terrier)

Susan Strommen with Bella (Mini Aussie)

Thank you to our evaluators, Jane Glickman and Shelley Bakalis and to our volunteer helpers Ron Asbury, Luki Gubach, Kris Eitland and Christina Hewes.

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Teams who earned their CGC in May

Jessica Gomez-Oliver - Lab

Debra Landes- Jasper - ACD mix

Stephanie Leif-Miri - Std Poodle

Aimee Liwanag - Howard - Golden Retriever

Erika McCulloch - Brady - Golden Lab mix

Julianna Planeta - Archie - Rottweiler

Shawna Uskokov- Huck - ACD

Sandrine Barbanel - Akina - Chinook

Teams who earned their CGC in July

Carmen Nasarre - Yira - Doberman

Kathy Beverly - Poppy - Border Collie

Jenna Curry - Marilyn - Dachshund

Rob Lester - Hopper - Pit Mix

Emma Schopler - Major - Poodle

Bill Stevenson - George - Kooikerhondje

Bobbie Xuereb - Talulah - Dachshund

Heidi Newell - Otis - GSD mix

Jenna Hopper - Blue - All American

Laurie Hikel- Ninja - Sheltie

Thank you to our evaluators Debbie Vachal, Shelley Bakalis and Kay Hawthorne and to our volunteer helpers Kris Eitland, Tom Bedford, Mary Berube, Viki Brown and Venus Zaya.

# HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR SENIOR DOG'S QUALITY OF LIFE

By Gemma Johnstone

As our dogs' muzzles start to gray and we begin to see signs of them slowing down, it's tough not to worry about how you are both going to cope with their older years.

It's important not to bury your head in the sand, though, and remember that senior dogs can still have a wonderful quality of life for many years to come. There are also lots of ways owners can promote movement, health, cognitive function, and comfort.

## **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SENIOR AND A GERIATRIC DOG**

The senior label varies depending on the size of the dog. So a tiny Chihuahua, for example, won't hit their senior years until considerably later than, say, a Great Dane. On average, though, a dog is usually considered a senior between the ages of seven and nine.

However, it doesn't necessarily mean they suddenly won't enjoy the same adventures and activities they used to.

Dr. Mary Gardner is a veterinarian and co-founder of Lap of Love, which focuses on providing veterinary hospice, in-home euthanasia, and consultations for terminally ill or elderly pets. She loves a gray muzzle and is a passionate advocate for raising awareness of the importance of appropriate end-of-life care in pets.

She is keen to emphasize the differences between active senior dogs and those classified as fragile geriatrics.

Dr. Gardner uses the example of a nine-year-old Labrador technically classed as a senior. "They could be running around, eating well, maybe have some mild arthritis, but nothing severe where it stresses the caregiver or we are concerned about their end of life coming up," she says.

"However, at 12 that same Lab comes back in, and it could be a totally different picture. The mobility issue is much bigger, they might have some cognitive dysfunction, they can't jump into the car anymore, they've maybe got some kidney problems, they are urinating in the house, maybe their vision or hearing is going, and they're in pain," Dr. Gardner continues.

What some senior dogs need to maintain a good quality of life may not vary hugely from their younger years. Geriatrics, on the other hand, may need various adjustments to help them stay relaxed, comfortable, and pain-free.

## **NUTRITION FOR AGING DOGS**

There are diets specially formulated for seniors, but many aging dogs do well on their existing adult foods. The primary considerations when it comes to nutrition for senior dogs are obesity and inappetence.

A 2018 study carried out by the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention estimated that 56% of dogs in the United States were overweight or obese.

Excess weight can lead to a host of related health problems, especially for elderly dogs. "The number one way to help a dog manage arthritis-related mobility issues is to keep them on the

skinny side. But that is really shocking for a lot of people because it is so common to see, especially here in America, overweight dogs,” says Dr. Gardner.

Conversely, some geriatric dogs may begin to have less interest in food. “When a pet is nearing the end of its life, their caloric requirements will decrease, and they are not expending as much energy. That startles some people, but it is a normal process,” explains Dr. Gardner.

Sometimes, age-related diseases, like cancers or organ failure, can also cause inappetence. Introducing extra palatable foods, appetite increasing medication, or prescription diets when a dog has certain diseases are all options. However, as Dr. Gardner explains, “there comes a time, where, no matter what we try, I always say the body is not going to eat or drink for a future it knows it doesn’t have, and it can be really hard for families.” She points out that serious inappetence is one of the main reason owners consider euthanasia in geriatric dogs.

### Recognizing and Managing Age-Related Illnesses and Chronic Pain

With age-related conditions like arthritis, managing pain levels can vastly improve a dog’s quality of life.

Dogs are very stoic creatures that don’t complain much. While acute pain, from, say, a broken leg, is obvious and may result in extreme yelping and limping, creeping, insidious chronic pain symptoms are less easy to spot.

Looking out for subtle changes in normal behavior is the key. Some dogs may go off their food or become withdrawn.

A shocking statistic highlighted by Dr. Gardner is that nearly 50% of dogs in the U.S. don’t see their veterinarian at all the year before euthanasia. Despite it being “the most important life phase when the dog and the family can benefit from veterinary support, particularly in terms of pain management.”

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF FITNESS FOR AGING DOGS**

While geriatrics are not always capable of long hikes or high-impact dog sports anymore, making sure they still get gentle, regular, and appropriate exercise is incredibly beneficial.

Lori Stevens is the owner of Seattle TTouch, a professional dog trainer, certified animal behavior consultant, small animal massage practitioner, and certified canine fitness trainer.

“When a dog can no longer function, e.g. go up and down stairs, go out to relieve themselves, get up to get water or food, their interest in life declines, and they lose their confidence. They are naturally ignored, and they sleep more than anything else,” says Stevens.

“It’s a beautiful thing to see these dogs re-engage with life and their families and to gain confidence. It’s also empowering for the families.”

Doing daily strengthening exercises, where the difficulty level gradually increases and luring the dog with tasty treats rather than forcing them into positions, is a great option. Simple examples include learning to walk over poles on the ground or encouraging the dog to put their front two paws up on a slightly elevated surface, as Stevens outlines in greater detail on her website.

Stevens recommends getting the all-clear from your veterinarian and consulting with a professional initially to make sure you are not taking things too quickly or encouraging improper body positions.

## **THE VALUE OF ENRICHMENT**

Stevens points out that movement is medicine and it provides mental as well as physical stimulation.

Dogs, just like humans, can suffer from age-related cognitive decline. Studies have shown that keeping dogs mentally active could help slow this decline.

Things like puzzle feeders, scent games, slow and sniffy walks, and snuffle mats are all simple and accessible enrichment options.

“Low energy ball play is great,” Stevens also suggests. “You sit in front of your dog and roll the ball between their legs and they push it back to you with their nose.”

## **ADJUSTMENTS AROUND THE HOME**

Making adjustments around the home is often beneficial for geriatric dogs. These will vary depending on the dog’s needs, but include:

Ramps or steps to help them get up and down from beds, sofas or cars

Dog flaps, pee pads, or diapers for incontinence issues

Orthopedic dog beds for extra support and comfort when sleeping

Rug markers for dogs with failing eyesight

Stevens’s top tip is to invest in some non-slip yoga mats. “They are cheap, and they help our aging dogs with the ability to get up and down from the floor and walk into areas where there is tile or wood. Also, put them in front of the food and water bowl,” she recommends.

It isn’t unusual for geriatric dogs to have less tolerance of noise, changes in routine, excitable children, and high-energy young dogs. Respecting your dog’s changing needs and ensuring they have a safe, quiet, stress-free space they can retreat to is important. This, along with appropriate veterinary care and keeping them moving and engaged with life, can have a huge impact on an aging dog’s quality of life.

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## **OLYMPICS FOR DOGS**

Dogs are athletic by nature, and depending on their breed—full of more than enough energy to keep going all day! They can out run us, out play us, and entertain us with all of the goofy, crazy things they do.

But what if those things could be a competition? What if your dog could compete against other dogs playing the silly games they play, and doing what they love? Which event would your dog win?

The Olympics have all sorts of crazy games that were created by people once upon a time, and are now serious competitions. So why can’t dogs be a part of that too? Well, we think they should! So we did a little creative thinking, and decided to come up with our own list of Olympic events they should add just for dogs.

### **100m Squirrel Chase**

Do you own a hunting dog? If you do, you've seen them go BANANAS trying to chase down those pesky squirrels. What if they had to compete against other speedy chasers? Next time they do, try timing their speed to see just how fast they can go. Maybe your dog could win the race.

### **Longest String of Drool**

For all of the Saint Bernards, Newfoundlands, Bernese Mountain Dogs, and any pup who's a part of the drooling class... This competition is for you! How long is your dog's string of drool? 4 inches? 8 inches? A foot?! Your dog might just be a born natural at this Olympic doggy event.

### **Speed Sniffing**

Back to the hunting group. This sport is for any pup with a strong sniffer. Do they love sniffing out little critters in the yard? Maybe they're hunting moles, chipmunks, or even field mice in the ground. Let's watch and see whose hound dog is the fastest at finding those little critters.

### **1x1 Tug of War**

Maybe your precious pup is strong and full of energy. If so, this could be the event for them. This one-on-one event can be played dog vs. dog, or dog vs. human. Who can last the longest? And who can pull who the furthest?

### **Mid-air Frisbee Catch**

Some dog breeds excel at being great athletes and are great competitors in agility competitions. Does your dog have mad hops? Try tossing the frisbee in the backyard to see if they can run and jump to catch it. Then try throwing it higher and higher. Let's see just how high your dog's hops really are.

### **Speed-eating**

Have you ever seen those crazy hot dog or pie eating competitions?! I feel like dogs could blow them out of the water with how much and how fast they can eat. Of course, that's not exactly a healthy thing for your pup. But just imagine how much faster they could eat than one of those champions.

### **50-yard Doggy Paddle**

It's water time! Ready to take your dog for a swim? Certain dogs like Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers, Standard Poodles and Irish Setters are natural born swimmers. Some dog breeds can actually say "water" is their middle name, like the Portuguese Water Dog and the Irish Water Spaniel. If you've got a good swimmer, try throwing a toy or stick into the water for them to retrieve. Just remember to always take dog safety precautions when letting your pup swim in the water.

### **High-jump**

Back to dogs with mad hops. Some dogs have so much energy, they just love to jump as high as possible. The high jump could be when your dog hops straight up and down because they are excited to see you. Or it could be jumping over an obstacle. An Ollie pack member's dog once leaped over a raised baby gate because she wanted to go into a blocked off room. She probably leaped about 3 feet into the air!

### **Wiggle Butt Freestyle**

Think your precious pooch could beat most other dogs in this competition? Anytime my dog gets excited because we just got home, it's meal time, or it's time to play... There goes her "wiggle butt!" How crazy and wild does your dog's "wiggle butt" get?

### **Best Treat Hunter**

This could be a fun everyday game for you and your furry friend. Try hiding treats or their dog food bowl somewhere in the house or in the yard. How long does it take for them to find it? Now try making the hiding spots more and more difficult. Can you stump them?

### **Lowest Crawler**

How low can they go? Does your dog know how to crawl? Try to see just how far they'll crawl. Now try using a limbo pole—or a broomstick—and see if they'll limbo right under it. What else can you get them to crawl underneath?

### **Deepest Digger**

Although you may not love it when your dog digs holes in your yard, it's pretty impressive how fast and how deep they can dig. I've even seen my dog even use her mouth to rip chunks of dirt and grass out of the ground. If only we could get our dogs to dig holes where we actually wanted them.

### **Freestyle Howling**

Does your dog like to sing? Maybe all that crazy howling is just them singing you their very own song. Every howl is just a little bit different, and every breed howls in their own unique way. Could your dog beat out the others in a howling competition?

### **Doggy Diving**

We mentioned swimming already, but what about the actual dive into the water? Some dogs are incredibly graceful as they leap into a pool, pond, or lake. Next time your dog goes for a swim, take a video of their doggy diving skills.

### **Best Tricks**

Do you have a tricky pup? Oh wait, we meant obedience tricks. Maybe your dog can sit, stay, shake, lay down, and roll over. That's awesome! But do they have any special tricks you've taught them? Certain dog breeds are extremely intelligent, and love learning new tricks and skills. It might take a little longer, but you can always teach an old dog new tricks!

### **Go for the Gold!**

Which competition would your dog win? Maybe it's time to brush up on those old tricks or hunting skills. Have some fun with your pup, and start training in your own backyard. You never know what kind of champion you might have.

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LAST CLASSES FOR 2021  
BEGINNING OBEDIENCE AND INTERMEDIATE/CGC CLASSES  
WILL START SEPTEMBER 23.  
SEE OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION.  
WEB SITE: [sandiegoobedienceclub.org](http://sandiegoobedienceclub.org)