

Health in older Coton de Tulears

This guidance will provide you with information regarding health issues which may occur in older dogs including Coton de Tulears. We will consider:

1. Arthritis;
2. Cancer;
3. Kidney disease;
4. Heart problems;
5. Diabetes;
6. Urinary incontinence;
7. Obesity;
8. Vision and hearing loss;
9. Sensory changes;
10. Dementia;
11. Behavioural changes;
12. Hypothyroidism (abnormally low levels of thyroid hormones);
13. Liver diseases;
14. Canine hepatitis;
15. Prostate problems;
16. Hypertension (high blood pressure);
17. Hyperthyroidism (thyroid disease);
18. Gastrointestinal issues; and
19. Veterinary help.

Arthritis

The most common form of arthritis seen in elderly dogs is Osteoarthritis, also called Degenerative Joint Disease . As dogs age, cartilage between their joints can become inflamed or damaged. This causes swelling, pain, stiffness. slower movements, stiffness in getting up, limping, reluctance to jump and a lack of interest in walking and playing.

Of course, elderly dogs are not guaranteed to develop any of the conditions above, they are just put at a higher risk because of their age.

Supplements can be used to help your Coton's joints such as omega 6, primrose oil capsules, cod liver oil and all in one supplements.



Cancer

Older dogs are prone to getting lumps and bumps and luckily, not all of them are cancerous. But age does increase the risk of cancer. Though younger pets can get cancer, it is seen much more frequently in older pets.

Different cancers cause different symptoms, so they can be easy to dismiss.

Cancer is responsible for close to half of the deaths of pets over the age of ten according to the Veterinary Journal research. Other disorders include Thyroid disease; Liver disease; Prostate problems; High blood pressure (hypertension) and Gastrointestinal issues which are each considered later in this document.

Kidney disease

The chronic kidney (renal) disease is usually a gradual process that begins as renal insufficiency and progresses to full renal failure. It occurs when the kidneys no longer function correctly and are unable to remove toxins from your dog's body.

Urinary incontinence is also a symptom of kidney disease. Your dog might also show significantly increased thirst, decreased appetite and lethargy.

Kidney disease is one of the most common metabolic diseases of older dogs. With early diagnosis through blood tests, some dogs can do quite well on a specialised treatment.

Kidney disease can be caused by many things, including other diseases (such as diabetes), medications, kidney stones, or problems with the bladder.

Heart problems

Heart disease can also develop as dogs age. One condition in dogs is congestive heart failure, which occurs when the heart is unable to pump blood around the body adequately. The most common heart disease in the senior dog is chronic valvular heart disease - thickening and irregularities of any of the valves of the heart.

Dog dementia (Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome) may also be linked to heart disease.

Diabetes

While diabetes is often hereditary, it tends to begin when dogs are between eight and nine years old.

Ageing dogs tend to have a higher risk of developing diabetes. Whether due to diet, poor insulin secretion or resistance to insulin. The symptoms to look out for are: Drinking lots of



water, urinating a lot, dull, poor hair coat, listlessness, increased appetite, vomiting, weight loss despite a large appetite, chronic reoccurring infections and cloudy eyes.

In order to try to prevent your elderly dog of developing diabetes, keep your dog lean and active.

Urinary incontinence

Incontinence can be a sign of many different diseases, so it is essential to have your vet rule out other health problems.

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Urinary tract issues can vary from painful infections to incontinence, which can be upsetting to pets that are normally housebroken. Older pets often lose the ability to control their bladders or bowels which results in accidents around the house. Seek veterinary help when you start noticing your dog is having more indoor accidents. Doggie diapers or a permanent toilet near the door can help.

Obesity

Your dog's weight can have a significant impact on their health at any age. An owner sometimes over feeds as an expression of their love.

Older dogs carrying excess weight can cause or complicate health problems like arthritis, heart disease and diabetes. To prevent obesity in older dogs, decrease the dog's food amount as his exercise and activity decreases.

Vision and hearing loss

Vision: Many older dogs experience a gradual loss of vision. This is usually due to degenerative changes in the eye but can be caused by an eye disease.

Age-related cloudiness of your dog's eye lenses is called Lenticular Sclerosis and usually appears when dogs are between six and eight years old. This condition is not painful and only causes minor vision loss. Cataracts are common in dogs with diabetes and can cause cloudiness in the eye and partial or total blindness. Depending on the severity of the blindness, cataract surgery may restore some or all of the vision. If surgery is not an option, dogs are highly adaptable to vision loss. You can help your vision-impaired dog in the home by always keeping furniture in the same location.

Deafness: If you notice your dog having any problems with getting around or they don't respond to calls, deafness maybe the cause.



If deafness is unavoidable, there are some things you can do to make your senior dog more confident, hand signals are a great way of communicating with your dog.

Sensory changes

Many elderly dogs experience decreases in their senses. The ability to see, hear, taste and smell can be affected. Partial or complete loss of hearing and vision can decrease your dog's ability to sense their environment. Due to this your dog may not sense your approach and startle more easily. This can become troublesome around small children. To avoid scaring your dog, try to announce your presence with a loud greeting and approaching from within your dog's line of vision.

As dogs age, the number of taste buds they have decreases. This decrease coupled with a decreased ability to smell, may affect your dog's desire to eat. Food becomes less tasty. Consult with your vet if you notice problems with appetite.

While sensory losses are a natural part of the aging process for many dogs, this may not be the case for every dog. There are several medical conditions and illnesses that cause visual, auditory and other sensory impairments in dogs. It's important to have your veterinarian examine your dog to determine whether their changes are part of the aging process or whether there is an underlying disease or condition.

Dementia

Dementia or Cognitive Dysfunction. Like people, dogs can lose cognitive function as they age, they experience brain changes, resulting in symptoms similar to those of senility or Alzheimer's. Canine dementia causes confusion, disorientation and restlessness.

Fortunately, there are medications that may be able to reduce your dog's dementia symptoms.

Sometimes your once independent dog develops separation anxiety, which can be brought on by cognitive decline. Anxiety in elderly dogs is also rather common.

Behavioural changes

Approximately 50% of dogs greater than 10 years of age show behaviour changes.

It is common for an older dog to slow down and sleep more. However, it is a mistake to assume all changes in your dog are a natural part of the aging process. Behaviour changes such as difficulty getting up or stiffness, anxiety, aggression and other abnormalities can mean something is wrong. There are many health issues that cause pain and discomfort in your dog which lead to their reluctance to move or increased irritability. It is important to



discuss behaviour changes with your veterinarian as some conditions are treatable in order to maintain a good quality of life for your Coton.

Hypothyroidism

This is abnormally low levels of thyroid hormones. Your dog will exhibit weight gain (without appetite increase), high blood cholesterol, lethargy and mental dullness, intolerance of exercise, intolerance of cold, fur loss, frequent ear infections, dull coat and thickened skin.

Liver diseases

Liver diseases are one of the most serious conditions that can afflict older Cotons. When liver disease begins, the liver swells and enlarges. As the disease progresses, the liver cells die and are replaced by scar tissue. The liver becomes rubbery and firm (called Cirrhosis) and is not reversible. Before the liver reaches this terminal stage, the liver can repair itself with the correct treatment.

Common types of liver disease include liver cancer or tumorous growths on the liver.

Canine hepatitis

The Coton has a large liver for a small breed. A number of Cotons have a low to normal ALT (Alanine Aminotransferease) reading. Low levels are generally considered good and are usually not a cause for concern. However, as the Coton gets older (10 years plus), this low ALT can cause such conditions as vitamin B6 deficiency or chronic kidney disease.

Symptoms include:

- Lethargy and fatigue.
- Low appetite.
- Weight loss.
- Drinking less or more than usual.
- Vomiting or diarrhoea.
- Shaking caused by nausea or discomfort.

Other signs may include:

- Digestive disorders such as constipation, gas and bloating.
- Dry, brittle or infected nails.
- Dull eyes, corneal or retinal disorder.
- Jaundice.
- Sinus issues.



- Dark urine.
- Ligament or tendon issues.
- Irritability and aggression.
- Seizures or fits.
- High temperature.
- A painful, bloated belly.
- Spontaneous bleeding.
- Pressing their head against things.
- Ascites (fluid in the abdomen).
- Hepatic encephalopathy (nervous system disorder).
- Oedema (swollen lower limbs).

Prostate problems

Enlarged prostate can affect elderly dogs. Some dogs with prostate problems experience changes in urination such as increased frequency, straining, interrupted streams of urine or blood, and constipation or straining to defecate.

Hypertension

This is high blood pressure which is common in elderly dogs. It can have many causes, but can be successfully managed with medication. High blood pressure in dogs can be a sign of other problems including heart disease, stroke and damage to the kidneys or retina.

Hyperthyroidism

Hyperthyroidism or thyroid disease occurs when your dog's body produces too much of the thyroid hormone, increasing the dog's metabolic rate to dangerous levels. Although rare, it can affect elderly Cotons but if treated early, the prognosis is good.

Symptoms include weight loss, increased appetite, excitability, increase in thirst and urination, vomiting, diarrhoea and increased heart rate.

Gastrointestinal issues

Gastrointestinal issues refer to disorders of the stomach (gastro) or intestines, or other digestive problems.

Causes can also be related to food intolerance, infection (bacterial, viral, fungal) or parasites.

Symptoms include:



- Excessive drooling.
- Vomiting.
- Bloating.
- Straining to defecate.
- Shock and shaking.
- Regurgitation.
- Bleeding.
- Diarrhoea, with or without blood or mucus.
- Constipation.
- Increased gas or flatulence.
- Loss of appetite.
- Weight loss.
- Fever.
- Dehydration.
- Abdominal pain (hunched posture).
- Abdominal enlargement/distension.
- Distress or inability to get comfortable.

Veterinary help

It is important to seek veterinary help immediately if your Coton experiences any of the symptoms listed above as early intervention can help.

