

Caring for Our Senior Pets

by Connie Monahan

Eventually, we will all have senior Cairns. It is important to know how to care for them to provide them with the best golden years possible. But what is “old” in terms of pets? What issues are related to aging pets? How do we address these issues? Why is this topic important? To understand the needs of our aging Cairns, we need to be able to recognize health and behavioral changes. There is also quality of life issues involved. As the caretakers of our pets, we make a variety of important decisions that directly impact their lives. For instance, how do we know when it is time to euthanize our beloved Cairns?

To begin, let's identify dog ages versus human ages. Here is a guideline. Dog Ages (for small dogs):

- 7 dog years = 44-47 human years
- 10 dog years = 56-60 human years
- 15 dog years = 76-83 human years
- 20 dog years = 96-105 human years

So, as our Cairns age, there are several potential health conditions we need to be looking for. Early veterinary intervention is critical. Knowing what to look for as a key. Some of the health concerns for older pets include:

- Sight Impairment/Hearing Loss
- Cancer
- Heart Disease
- Kidney/Urinary Tract Disease
- Joint/Bone Disease
- Senility
- Liver Disease
- Diabetes
- Weakness

What do we look for? What are the common signs of disease?

- *Sight Impairment/Hearing Loss*: Look for decreased response to commands, disorientation, increased reaction to sound, increased vocalization.
- *Cancer*: Signs include abnormal swelling that persists or continue to grow, sores that do not heal, weight loss, loss of appetite, bleeding, offensive mouth odor, difficulty eating/swallowing, loss of stamina, persistent lameness/stiffness, difficulty breathing, urinating, or defecating (Note: Cancer is responsible for approximately half the deaths of pets over 10 years of age.)
- *Heart Disease*: coughing, difficulty breathing, decreased tolerance of exercise, decreased appetite, vomiting are all symptoms to have a vet check your dog.

- *Kidney Disease*: Symptoms include decreased appetite, increased thirst, increased urination, decreased or no urination, poor hair coat, vomiting, sore mouth.
- *Urinary Tract Disease*: increased urination/spotting, accidents in the house, straining to urinate, blood in urine, weakness are all reasons to consult your vet.
- *Arthritis*: favoring a limb, difficulty sitting or standing, sleeping more, stiff, or sore joints, hesitancy to jump, run or climb stairs, weight gain, decreased activity, attitude/behavior changes (including increased irritability), less alert are signs your Cairn needs to be checked out.

Behavioral changes can happen as a result of medical or other reasons, such as cognitive dysfunctions. Studies done during the 1990's identified brain changes in older dogs that were like brain changes seen in humans with Alzheimer's disease. Studies continue to fully understand the effect of aging on the canine brain. These changes may include:

- Increased reaction to sounds
- Increased vocalization
- Confusion
- Disorientation
- Decreased interaction with humans
- Decreased response to commands
- Increased aggressive/protective behavior
- Increased anxiety
- House soiling/decreased self-hygiene
- Repetitive activity/wandering

There are many things to consider when caring for older pets. These include, but are not limited to:

- *Increased Veterinary care*: Senior Cairns may need semi-annual well-pet visits instead of annual. They may also need some tests more often.
- *Diet and Nutrition*: Your older Cairn may need foods that are easier to digest, have different calorie levels and ingredients.
- *Weight Controls*: Weight gain in older dogs increases the risk of health problems.
- *Parasite Control*: Older dogs immune systems are not as good so they cannot fight off disease or heal as fast as younger pets.
- *Maintaining mobility*: Mobility through appropriate exercise keeps older pets healthier and more mobile. There are medications for arthritic dogs. Consult your vet.

- **Vaccination:** Older pet's vaccination needs may change. Once again, consult your vet.
- **Mental Health:** Keep elderly pets stimulated through various interactions. If changes in behavior are noticed, consult your vet.
- **Environmental Considerations:** Older pets may need changes in lifestyle, such as where their sleeping area is or not being exposed to new living conditions (even if temporary).
- **Reproductive Diseases:** Non-neutered / non-spayed geriatric pets are at higher risk of mammary, testicular, and prostate cancers. To minimize risk be sure to have regular physical exams and consultation with vet.

The most difficult decision we have as pet owners is knowing when to euthanize a pet. This is an emotionally fraught decision. How do you make this difficult call?

If you are struggling with what to do it would help to have an honest evaluation of the pet's quality of life and an open discussion with your vet.

Sources of information for this article:

American Veterinary Medical Association Web Page at www.avma.org/public/petcare/pages/caring-for-an-older-pet-FAQS. This web site also contains links to other pages on the AVMA website with information for caring for an older pet.

Editor's Note: Though not part of the article, I beg you to be there at the end of your beloved Cairn's life. Your presence will comfort your pet. Hold your Cairn in your arms and talk to him/her as they cross the Rainbow Bridge. Say your final goodbyes. Many vets report that the hardest thing they deal with is when owners drop off their pets to be euthanized and the pet searches all over the room for his or her owners. You are your Cairn's whole world. Bob and I have always cradled our Cairns in our arms, as they crossed the Rainbow Bridge. We sobbed as we held them, but our beloved dogs knew we were there and that they were loved.

Additional Editor's Note: The opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not express the views or opinions of the Cairn Terrier Club of America.

Article & Announcement Deadline!

The next issue of *The Highlander* is the Autumn Edition 2023. This is also the post Macungie National Specialty issue.

Announcements for all winners who placed during the national specialty weekend will be discounted to the special price of \$130 for randomly placed announcements. Announcements that wish to be placed together will need to purchase a two-page announcement at the regular price.

The discounted rates include wins at Hatboro KC and Devon KC. Additionally, all performance victories will be discounted. Additionally, promising puppies will receive the discounted rate as well.

The deadline for all stories, photos, articles, and announcements is **Wednesday November 1 at 5 pm PST**.

We are always looking for and welcome YOUR contributions. If you don't fancy yourself a writer, no problem. Leslie Stewart can help. Just email her at lesliestewart21@gmail.com well before the deadline. She is always open to suggestions and can help you craft an article.

The discounted themes are:

Winners that placed at the National Specialty, Hatboro and Devon shows. Promising Puppies. Anything to do with performance. New Champions and Grand Champions of any metal. Affiliate Club Announcements.

Announcement designers are available to create SIMPLE announcements at no cost providing they have time. Please note that the editor does not create announcements. All completed announcements must be delivered by the deadline, camera ready and proofed. Contact Leslie Stewart for the names of the two designers. You need to contact the designers and check their availability at least 3 weeks prior to the deadline.

CAIRN CONNECTIONS



Cairn Terrier Club of Denver (CTCD)

by Jan Owen

The big news is the Denver club just held its double specialties "Colorful Colorado Cairns" on August 18 in Greeley, CO. The back-to-back specialties occurred under the direction of Show Chair Robin Bovard who was also responsible for advertising and publicity. Patti McCully was the Trophy Chair. Cathy Cardon headed up Hospitality with her wonderful crew and Rebecca White chaired decorations and welcome bags.



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