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By Steve Brooks C.P.D.T.  
with Janinne Chadwick

# 5 Tips for Growing Old In L.A.



"You're only as old as you feel," Sven seems to be singing. The 12-year-old canine still loves to play and perform music.

**A**s a native Angelino, I see the extremes L.A. residents go through to remain youthful, from health food and exercise to Botox injections and hair transplants. Attitudes on aging are changing, and as a certified Pet Dog Trainer, I see them being reflected in the way older dogs are treated. Although I haven't yet met a Saint Bernard with a facelift, people are increasingly concerned with the health and quality of life of their older animals.

My 12-year-old dog, Sven, is a prime canine example of how to live a happy, productive life while growing old in

L.A. After an impressive career, including TV shows and even making a CD, Sven is actively enjoying semi-retirement. I'd like to share a few tips on how to help your aging "best friend" through his twilight years.

**1** Keep in mind that physical abilities and needs change as we age, and that recognizing limitations can alleviate frustration. Older dogs may need to go out to the bathroom more often, and their diet and exercise regimens may need to be

modified, based on the level of activity they're comfortable with.

**2** Many items can be purchased or built to make life easier for those with mobility problems. Sven has an orthopedic bed with a heating pad under it, and a ramp for getting into my SUV. As well, raised food and water dishes are a must for older animals.



**3** Joint and muscle problems are common in older dogs, and specialized services and products can be useful. Massage, for instance, relaxes and soothes tired old muscles. Sven shook a stuffed animal the other day as if he were still a pup, and had a stiff neck for days. I massage Sven daily to keep his muscles loose and help prevent injury. There are a number of aromatherapy products on the

market designed especially for dogs (don't use essential oils on cats or birds). Just follow the directions. If you're uncomfortable doing this yourself, L.A. has massage therapists as well as acupuncturists who specialize in animals.

- 4** Elderly dogs need extra help with grooming and dental care, and it's easier to help them if they're used to being handled. Achieving basic training and socialization skills early on makes life easier down the road but good manners are the key to success, and it's never too late to learn. In fact, not only can you teach an old dog new tricks, it's in their best interest to do so! As long as she enjoys it, exposing your dog to new stimuli can keep her mind agile. The novelty of a new route on a walk or

a new trick for a treat can recharge older brain cells.

- 5** If you're traveling, plan ahead. Public places with shared spaces, like hotels and campgrounds, can be difficult. We vacationed in Palm Springs recently, and I designed our trip with Sven in mind. A rented house put a pool and everything else we needed at our disposal. I was relaxed and so was Sven.

So have fun with your old dog. Hang out with him whenever you can. Many restaurants welcome customers with well-trained older dogs at their outdoor tables. Older dogs make marvelous companions for seniors and those with illnesses and disabilities. We're all entitled to dignity and respect in our golden years, and there are many wonderful older dogs in shelters who would love to share their golden years with you.



Steve Brooks C.P.D.T is the owner of K9U Dog Training, and provides pet dog training for dogs of all ages. Steve lives in Silver Lake with his dog Sven. Sven's CD, "K9 FUSION" can be googled or found at [WWW.K9U.NET](http://WWW.K9U.NET)

Janinne Chadwick teaches Child Development at Cabrillo College in Aptos. She lives with her family in Ben Lomond, California.