

# How Long Do Dogs Live

Contributed by David Beart  
Saturday, 20 October 2007

>From the time we bring them home as wriggling bundles of joy, we all want our puppies to live forever. As they bond with us and grow into full fledged family members, we tend not to think about the end of their life or how many precious years we have with our canine friends.

However, when picking out our new puppy it is rare that we give adequate consideration to the average lifespan of the dog. There are distinct factors that play into whether our puppy will be with us until our children graduate from high school or if they give us a few good years.

Most experts agree that small breeds tend to outlive large breeds. The general rule of thumb is the larger the dog the shorter the life span. Large medium to large breed dog tend to live about ten years, although there are exceptions to every rule. We have a feisty-willed large breed mutt who is determined to see his fifteenth birthday.

Smaller breeds tend to live longer, anywhere from twelve to fifteen years. Occasionally you will run into the nearly twenty year old Scottie, but most don't make it past their sixteenth year.

Again, every rule has its exceptions. The Irish Wolfhound isn't expected to make it more than six or seven good years although there really isn't a conclusive reason as to why this is so. Of course these figures are taking into consideration overall good health and quality care. Genetics play a vital role in longevity, but those we can't control. There are a few factors in our favorite little guy's life we can do to help him get to his ripe old age. Some of them can even combat predisposition to genetic diseases.

One of the fastest ways to shorten a dog's life is to keep him outside all the time. Dogs that live outside tend to be missing a few key ingredients in their overall care that impact their life span.

Even with a shelter available, dogs do wear down and age quickly when they are dealing with constant element exposure. While some can adjust, most dog bodies find the extremes the environment can dish out at them to be exhausting and threatening.

Dogs who permanently reside outside tend to receive less over all care. Since people spend the majority of their time at home inside, often small health problems go unnoticed until it becomes an overwhelming problem. Even the responsible pet owner can forget to feed or water the dog who is permanently engaged in outdoor activities when the lifestyle inside the home becomes stressed or busy.

Outdoor dogs also lack the essential strong emotional connection with their owners that indoor dogs benefit from. Having their human friends to please and play with goes a long way in their overall happiness and health. Often a sick dog who has no emotional connection will stop eating and caring for themselves long before those who have families who love and care for them. If you want your little guy to live a longer, fuller life, bring him inside and let him be part of the family lifestyle.

Whether you are bringing home a purebred puppy or a distinguished gentleman of questionable descent, their life span can be about the same. Barring any health problems, each should live as long as the other and it really just comes down to personal preference.

>From birth to about two years old your puppy is learning and growing. Every day your little guy is reaching new miles stones and his body is very busy. High quality puppy food packed with nutrition can help set him on the foundation for a healthy life. These foods are a little more expensive, but they can be well worth the cost when considering the effects of malnutrition.

If your little guy comes from a family or breed history of hip and back problems such as hip dysplasia, excessive exercise in the first two years can put added stress on the joints in question and actually exacerbate the potential for later problems. Exercise is good, over doing isn't.

Regular veterinary check ups and of course vaccinations during the first two years can help to catch problems early on, which will increase his overall health. This is the time when your puppy really needs you to watch out for him, whether his body is having health problems or he is ingesting things that can cause long term problems, staying on top of him now reduces health effects in his later years.

>From his second year through his fifth we can consider this his basic years of good health and maintenance. Watch for signs of growing obesity and make sure he is receiving ample exercise and fun play time. If he is a healthy dog then these years should be stress free.

Keep at least annual appointments with the vet for check ups and updated shots. His food should be a high quality protein based variety, but if he's showing signs of too much happy eating either cut back on his portions or switch to a low calorie variety.

Once he gets into his fifth to eighth year we can consider him a middle age to aging dog. These are the years when small but manageable health problems are likely to show up. If he's a really good eater but hasn't shown signs of obesity before, these are the years when his activity will slow down some and he may develop a weight problem now. Again, a good low calorie food and a few perhaps coaxed walks should be enough to help him keep his youthful figure.

Other problems such as cataracts, arthritis, or even heart murmurs are most likely to show up during these years. They are not catastrophic events and can typically be handled with a trip to the vet and either simple procedures or medication. Ignoring problems now however, are likely to grow into unmanageable problems quickly. Stay on top of his check ups and vaccinations to ward off any potential disasters looming about. Most dogs that are generally healthy should make it through these years just fine.

Depending on the size, breed, and overall health of your not so little guy, once he reaches eight years old he may be starting to push toward borrowed time. Smaller breeds won't get there until about ten, but even medium dogs are now starting to wear down.

Just because he's getting old doesn't mean you have to start thinking about euthanasia. There is a possibility that he will have health and happiness for a few more years to come. However now is the time when health problems can erupt quickly and strike hard. Eight years old and beyond is when you are most likely going to face making tough decisions about your faithful canine's quality of life. The care you gave him as a puppy is now doing its part to take care of him as he ages.

Some older dogs need to be encouraged to eat. If your once upon a time eating machine is suddenly losing weight, switch to a higher protein, higher fat content dog food to help him maintain his energy.

Our care for our dogs all the way through their lives can make a huge difference in how long they live a full and happy life. When bringing a new puppy home remember that how you treat his body right now will carry a direct effect to his life span down the road. Many dogs outlive their life span and are happy and energetic the whole way through. A little love and responsibility can go a long, long way. Any dog that has touched your life will certainly live forever. About The Author David Beart is the owner of <http://www.professorshouse.com>. Our site covers pets, dogs, finances, family, cooking and other household issues.