

How to Care for Your Older Newfoundland.

Caring for an aging Newfoundland can present some special challenges.

So, the inevitable has happened, a day you have dreaded for years. Your newfie has somehow become old! You may be wondering, what happens now? Does anything change? Should I take him or her to the vet more often? If you're anything like me, you have a lot of questions.

The average life span for a Newfoundland is eight to ten years. But a whole lot of newfies are living longer, which is fantastic! Most vets consider a seven-year-old newfie a senior. They will want to do a routine check-up and blood tests to establish what the normal values are for your newf. Your dog has most likely already had blood tests done by the age of seven, so it's just a matter of making sure everything remains normal. Some vets will want to see your newfie every six months for a check-up; some will also want to do a blood test every six months.

As your newfoundland gets older, it's important for your vet to see him or her more often. Dogs age much faster than humans and giant breeds age even faster than smaller breeds. Problems can arise quickly and if your vet sees your dog more often, he or she can treat a problem while it's still in the beginning stages instead of having to deliver a possible poor prognosis about your beloved newf.

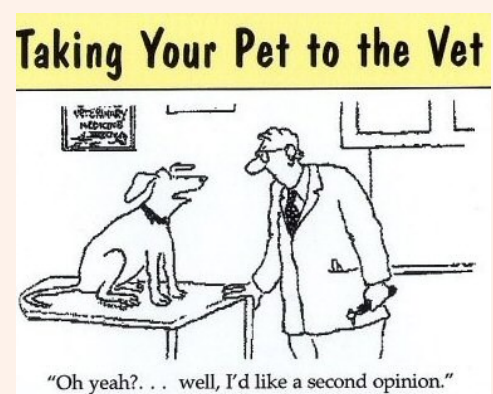
Common ailments.

Abnormal Lumps. Every week while grooming your newf you should be feeling for any abnormal lumps, bumps, skin changes, heat or swelling. I remember when I first felt a lump on my newfie, I panicked and got her into the vet right away. It was a lipoma, a simple non-cancerous fatty tumour. A lot of dogs get these (skinny or overweight, happens to both). Your vet will use a needle to aspirate the lump and look at the cells under the microscope. If your dog has a lipoma, look out for any changes and report them to the vet. Not every lump you may find is a lipoma. It could be something more serious like cancer. So if you find any abnormal lump you should always have the vet check it.

Do you know how to tell if your newf is in pain? They can be a very stoic breed! One of the most common causes of pain in any dog is arthritis (joint inflammation) which can range from very mild to severe. Most Newfoundlands will develop some form of arthritis as they get older. Maybe your newf has difficulty getting up or laying down, is limping slightly or just slowing down. These are all signs of possible pain. When examining my newf for any physical changes I can tell when I get to a sore area, she will close her mouth slightly, or just look the other way. Very subtle signs!

Arthritis. Mild arthritis is easily treated. Your vet may suggest buffered aspirin, gentle massage, and a soft, padded bed. Talk to your vet about dietary supplements such as glucosamine and chondroitin that may help keep the joints lubricated. Keeping your newf at a healthy weight and exercising is important. Walking can loosen up stiff joints and it keeps muscles in shape. Swimming is second nature to most newfies. It's a low impact, easy on the joints exercise. Older newfs can become tired more easily than their younger counterparts, so take it easy on your older friend!

A more severe form of arthritis is osteoarthritis. It is a degenerative joint disease in which the cartilage in joints is gradually lost. Treatment can involve surgery or medicinal management of any pain. Nonsteroidal Anti-inflammatory drugs, NSAIDs, are often used to treat pain and inflammation in dogs. They can have side effects such as liver, kidney and gastrointestinal disease. Your vet will want to do blood tests every three to six months to make sure any NSAIDs being used are not causing problems. Your vet will tell you what kind of outward signs to look for such as vomiting, diarrhoea, loss of appetite and lethargy. Some commonly known NSAIDs are Rimadyl, Metacam, Deramaxx and Etodolac. You and your vet will decide which medication will work best for your dog.



Injuries. Injuries are common in older dogs. Maybe they ran too hard the day before or perhaps they simply turned wrong while laying down. Sometimes it doesn't take much to cause an injury in an older animal. A lot of injuries resolve on their own with restricted movement and rest. It's a good idea to see your vet if your newf seems to have an injury that isn't getting better in a day or two, or in the case of severe pain or injury, call your vet right away.

Tips for Caring for an Aging or Injured Newfoundland. Taking care of an older, handicapped or injured Newfoundland isn't always easy, they are big and heavy and most of the time hard to move!

Large padded bed: This is a must for a newf that cannot get around on its own. You want to prevent bedsores so turning a dog is necessary if they cannot do it on their own. I have a four-inch-thick orthopaedic foam bed that is 36"x54" for my newf. When it became worn out a bit, I bought a queen size foam mattress topper, cut it to size (two pieces) and put the pieces under the actual bed for more support. It is a nice thick comfortable bed that isn't too soft or too firm. Thinning of the hair may also be an issue with an older dog. I found that my 12-year old was developing sores on her elbows, so in addition to a soft bed and more rubber backed rugs for her I made some elbow pads. She loves them and they have made a tremendous difference in her health and confidence. Some owners find yoga mats are useful. However, there are many newfies who INSIST, all their lives, on sleeping on cold hard surfaces. They have no interest in padded dog beds or padding of any kind--eggshell foam, air mats, water mats, yoga mats, folded blankets, fleece mats. No interest. Anyway, your dog will know what he or she wants, no matter what you think about it. You can only do your best.

For incontinent dogs: You can buy piddle pads to place under him or her, or a waterproof mattress pad. I have a waterproof mattress pad that goes around the actual foam bed, and under the bed cover. Any accidents are easily cleaned up by throwing the bed cover and mattress pad into the washer.

Bathing and grooming: This can be difficult, if not impossible. I have found that trimming the hair especially under the tail to a more manageable length helps immensely with clean-up, and also helps regulate body temperature as this is more difficult as they age. Baby wipes work well if you have a newf that leaks or dribbles urine on him or herself. Always remember to check claw length regularly.

Transport sling: Moving a newf that needs help can be tricky. I have a canvas sling that is lined with fleece, it goes around the abdomen and has quick connect buckles attached with nylon and has two nylon handles. You can find slings in most pet supply catalogues. I use a collar or harness, and short leash to help my newf when she is wobbly on her front end. If you can't afford a special harness, I have used a regular old bed sheet for assistance and it works fine.

Hydration: Make sure you offer water to your newf often if they cannot get to it on their own.

Ramp: To reduce the chance of injury and strain on joints I suggest a ramp for getting in and out of vehicles. I have a ramp instead of stairs for going into the yard, as well. Rubber-backed rugs are essential on slick surfaces where your newf might lose its footing and fall.

For dogs with failing eyesight and hearing: Eyes can become cloudy with nuclear sclerosis, a harmless clouding of the lens. Some newfs develop cataracts which can be surgically removed. Hearing may start to fail as well. Make sure everyone knows how to get his or her attention without startling them.

Warning Signs for Older Newfoundlands Most of us know when something is wrong with our newfs. We have a feeling or an intuition that tells us to take a closer look. Sometimes it's obvious that something is wrong and we need to consult the vet. Always watch for the symptoms of serious illness – particularly bloat, pyometra in older bitches and of course cancer, which is being found increasingly in younger dogs as well as oldies.

