

DOG INCONTINENCE: VETERINARIAN ROUNDTABLE

By Lori Jo Oswald

READER'S QUESTION OF THE MONTH: *I have read with interest your first two newsletters. I, too, am dealing with a beloved dog about 15, who is having "bathroom" problems in the house. It is just old age catching up with her. My carpet is pretty stained. I always took good care of it until now. It is heartbreaking to watch a pet age, wondering how many days are left in our relationship. My dog had to be put in the garage while I am at work (winter only); I can no longer leave her alone in the house for an extended period of time. I drive home for lunch every day to visit and encourage her to eat and relieve herself outside, but I have to clean up a lot of accidents in the garage because as they age they just cannot hold it in. It's back to the paper, but she doesn't always go on the paper. I wonder if other dog owners have experimented with diapers. Have you heard any advice? Maybe pet lovers will write in with their experiences. I don't know how I will survive the pain of losing her.*



ALASKA PET NEWS

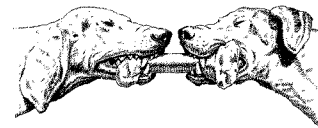
RESPONDS: Thank you for being so caring about your dog. We have been researching your problem and have sent your question to Anchorage veterinarians and dog trainers. We are also printing your question in case any of readers have some suggestions. In the meantime, here is some information we found on a web page, responses from veterinarians, and a response from a member of a dog chat line.



FROM THE INTERNET:

"The most common occurrence of incontinence is in the older spayed bitch. Most often this is due to a hormonal imbalance and as such is easily treated by one of two drugs. The traditional way is with doses of DES (estrogen). Typically, the dosage is varied until the incontinence stops, and often the dosage can be later reduced altogether. Another method of treatment is with phenylpropanolamine (PPA, brand name Dexatrim), which tightens

all the muscles. DES replaces the hormones, restoring the hormonal balance. PPA works independently of the hormones and as such, may introduce new problems. Both drugs are known to cause problems and side effects, although typically, the level of dosage that DES is administered at for incontinence will not cause problems. At high dosages, DES is thought to be linked with breast cancer and obesity. Since PPA tightens all muscles in the body, it can potentially cause serious side effects, especially with the heart. There is speculation that PPA is often prescribed at dosages too high for dogs. In humans, PPA is not advised when thyroid levels are low; this might also be a problem with dogs. Which drug is safer for your particular spayed bitch depends on the particular dog and her particular veterinary history. What's best for one dog might be bad for another, depending on what other veterinary conditions or susceptibilities she has."



FROM A VETERINARIAN: Thanks for your question regarding the 15-year-old female dog

having urine accidents. As people are taking better care of their pets with regular veterinary care and good nutrition, pets are living longer. Therefore, we are beginning to see more geriatric problems. The first thing I would recommend for this old girl is a thorough exam at her vet's. Her veterinarian will also take a history (background information) of the problem. With most urinary problems I suggest having a urine analysis done to rule out kidney problems, infection, diabetes and other problems. Other labwork might be indicated from the physical exam findings. Sometimes older pets that are arthritic have a hard time getting up to get outside in time.

If the history, exam, and labwork correspond with a diagnosis of incontinence, I discuss treatment options with the owner. As you mentioned in the newsletter, there are two medications commonly used. DES, the estrogen supplement, and phenylpropanolamine. I have used both with success. I discuss possible side effects of each medication and if any follow up labwork is needed (for instance, I recommend monitoring dogs blood counts yearly if they stay on DES). I haven't had any experience with diapers for dogs, other than the little pads that folks sometimes use for dogs that are in heat. I hope this information will get the owner pointed in the right

direction. It sounds like she loves her old girl very much, but urine and stool accidents can be very frustrating for both the owner and the pet.--Lorelei Lamere, Veterinary House Call Services of Eagle River



FROM A VETERINARIAN: First she should have a urinalysis to check for urinary tract infection. UTI is the most likely cause or related factor. Hormone-related incontinence is the next rule out. I usually just send home a test Rx of estrogen. Another possibility is low thyroid. Older dogs with low thyroid often appear senile, spaced out or fearful. Correcting a low thyroid can at least help or improve the incontinence.-
-Dr. Thomas, Chester Valley Veterinary Hospital



FROM A DOG CHATLINE: Have you had the old girl to the vet lately? Is it a lot of #1 or #2? If it's #1 the diapers will work; just cut out for her tail. Make sure she

doesn't have an infection. Is she drinking more? Does the urine smell strong? Diapers and #2 can be messy if she's got loose stool. Try using a crate; she won't have the freedom to move around as much and won't need to go as often. Watching your pet get to the stage that your old girl is at is very hard, but the time you've had together will always be with you. With our pets we have the choice to relieve them of their pain. When she gives you that look of how sorry she is that she made the mess and she tries so hard to please you but doesn't have the strength to do so. It's never easy but you'll know in your heart when that time has come. Because she's lived such a great life and it hurts you more to see her in such condition. It's not going to be easy but you'll get through it and then you'll find a new bud. New buds never replace the old ones but they tend to ease the pain and the loneliness caused by the other's departure. Good luck and God bless. -Jo

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