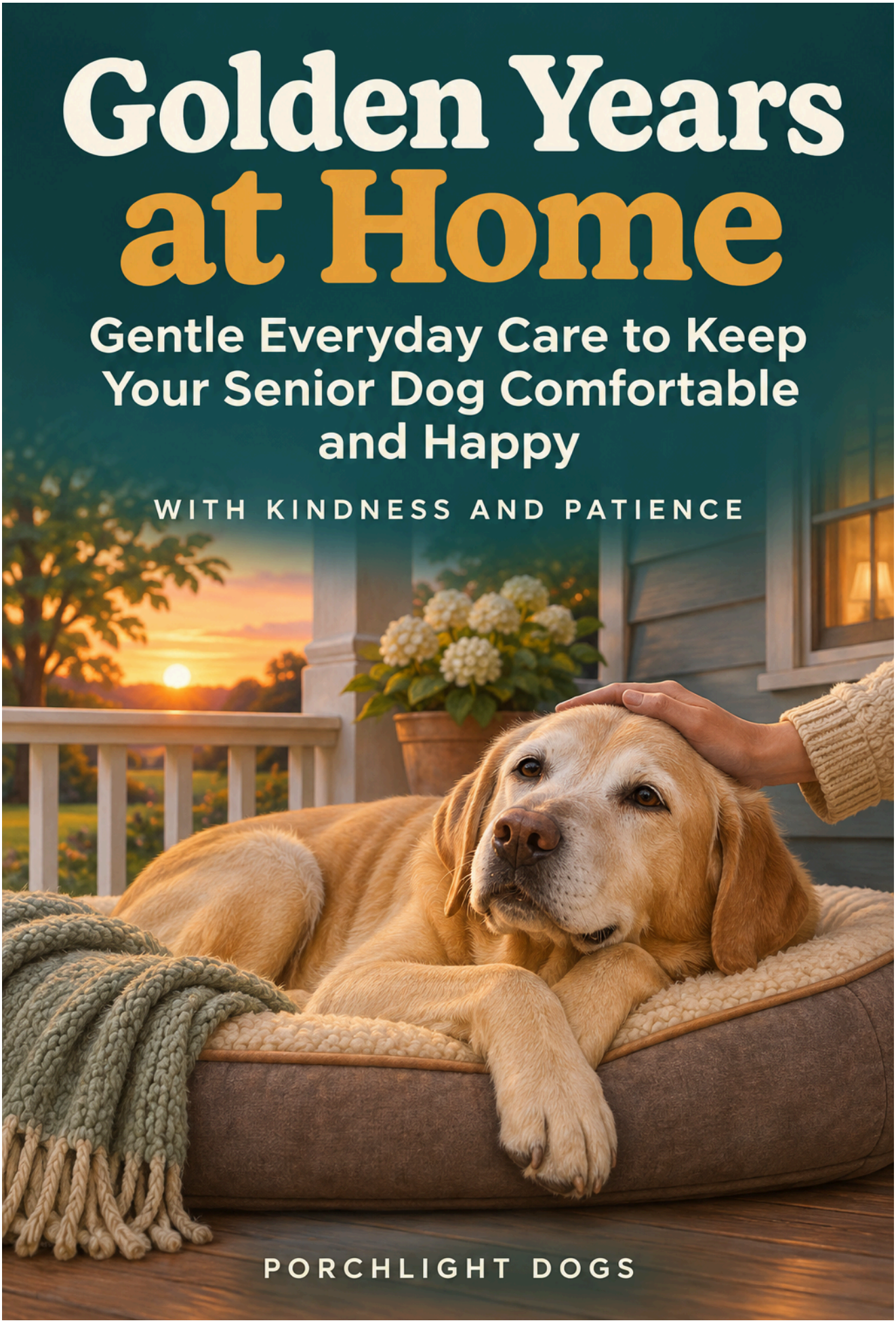
Golden Years at Home

Gentle Everyday Care to Keep Your Senior Dog Comfortable and Happy

WITH KINDNESS AND PATIENCE



PORCHLIGHT DOGS

Golden Years at Home

Gentle everyday care to keep your senior dog comfortable and happy.

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BEFORE YOU START

Read This First

Small changes at home can make a big difference to an older dog.

Important safety notice

PLEASE READ

This book is general education for owners of older dogs. It is not veterinary advice, and nothing in it replaces your vet. Many changes we put down to "just getting old" are treatable medical problems. When in doubt, ask your vet.

- See your vet promptly for sudden changes in eating, drinking, peeing, breathing, walking, or behavior.
- Never give your dog human pain medication. Several common ones are dangerous for dogs.
- Check with your vet before starting supplements or a new exercise routine.

Who this book is for

This book is for anyone sharing their home with a gray-muzzled dog: slower on the stairs, sleeping more, maybe a little confused at night. You want them comfortable, happy, and still themselves for as long as possible. This guide gives you practical, gentle ways to do that, room by room and day by day.

What to expect, honestly

We can't stop aging. What we can often do is make each day more comfortable: less slipping, better sleep, more engagement, and earlier help when something changes. Every dog ages differently. Your vet is your best guide to your own dog's health.

PART 1 · CHAPTER 1

When Is a Dog "Senior"?

It depends on size, breed, and the individual dog.

1.1 Age depends on size

Larger dogs tend to age faster than smaller ones. Many vets start thinking of giant breeds as senior around 5 or 6, and small breeds closer to 8 or 10. Your vet can tell you where your dog is.

1.2 Common changes with age

Area	What you might notice
Joints and muscles	Slow to get up, stiff after rest, hesitating at stairs or the car, slipping on smooth floors.
Senses	Not hearing you call, startling when touched while asleep, bumping into things in dim light.
Sleep	Sleeping more in the day, restless or pacing at night.
Weight	Weight gain from less activity, or weight loss that needs a vet check.
Teeth	Bad breath, chewing on one side, dropping food.
Mind	Seeming lost in familiar places, forgetting routines, changes in how they greet you.

1.3 Pain is easy to miss

Dogs often hide pain. Instead of crying out, they may move less, sleep more, avoid stairs, lick a joint, become grumpy when touched, or pant at rest. If your dog "is just slowing down," ask your vet whether pain could be part of it. Arthritis is common in older dogs, and there are many ways to help.

PART 1 · CHAPTER 2

Partner With Your Vet

Earlier checks catch problems while they're easier to manage.

2.1 How often to visit

Many vets recommend checkups about every six months for senior dogs, often with blood and urine tests. Things change faster in older dogs, and early detection gives you more options.

2.2 Questions to bring

- [ ] Is my dog at a healthy weight? What should they weigh?
- [ ] Could my dog be in pain? What are the options?
- [ ] Are their teeth OK? Do they need a dental cleaning?
- [ ] What exercise is right for my dog now?
- [ ] Should we change their diet?
- [ ] What changes should make me call you right away?

2.3 Call your vet soon if you see...

DON'T WAIT

- Drinking or peeing much more than usual
- Not eating for more than a day, or losing weight
- New lumps, or lumps that grow or change
- Coughing, heavy breathing at rest, or fainting
- Sudden confusion, head tilt, falling, or circling
- Vomiting or diarrhea that doesn't settle quickly
- Crying out, limping, or not wanting to move

PART 2 · CHAPTER 3

A Senior-Friendly Home

Walk through your house the way your dog does.

3.1 Floors and grip

Slippery floors are one of the biggest problems for older dogs. Every slip can hurt, and fear of slipping makes dogs move less.

- Lay non-slip runners or yoga mats along your dog's main paths.
- Keep nails trimmed and the fur between paw pads short, so paws can grip.
- Ask your vet about non-slip socks or toe grips if your dog still slides.

3.2 Beds and rest

- A thick, supportive bed (memory foam or orthopedic) cushions sore joints.
- Put beds in quiet, draft-free spots where your dog likes to be, close to the family.
- A bed with a low entry is easier to step into.

3.3 Stairs, cars, and furniture

- Use baby gates to block stairs if your dog is unsteady.
- Ramps or pet steps help with beds, couches, and cars. Teach them slowly with treats.
- A support harness with a handle lets you help your dog up without lifting their belly.

3.4 Food and water

- Put water in several places so your dog doesn't have to walk far.
- Place bowls on a non-slip mat.
- Ask your vet about senior diets, portion sizes, and soft food if chewing is hard.

3.5 Light and senses

- Night lights in hallways help dogs with poorer vision.
- Keep furniture in the same place. Your dog may rely on memory to get around.
- For dogs with hearing loss, teach hand signals and gently tap the floor or use a flashlight blink to get their attention. Approach a sleeping dog so they can feel your footsteps or smell you first.

PART 2 · CHAPTER 4

Gentle Movement

Keep moving, just differently.

4.1 Shorter, more often

Several short walks usually suit older dogs better than one long one. Let your dog set the pace. Choose soft ground like grass when you can.

4.2 Sniff walks

A slow walk where your dog sniffs everything is exercise for the brain as well as the body. Ten minutes of sniffing can tire a dog more than you'd expect, in a good way.

4.3 Low-impact options

- Gentle walking on varied, safe surfaces
- Swimming or water therapy, if your vet recommends it
- Simple balance and body-awareness games your vet or a rehab therapist suggests

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Canine physical therapy and rehabilitation is a growing field. If your dog has arthritis or weakness, ask your vet about a referral.

4.4 Weight matters

Extra weight puts more strain on aging joints. Even a small amount of weight loss can help a stiff dog move more easily. Work with your vet on a target weight and a plan.

PART 2 · CHAPTER 5

A Busy, Happy Mind

Mental exercise keeps older dogs engaged.

5.1 Easy brain games

- **Find it:** hide treats around one room and let your dog sniff them out.
- **Snuffle mat or towel roll:** roll treats inside a towel for your dog to unroll.
- **Food puzzles:** start very easy so your dog succeeds.
- **New tricks:** yes, old dogs can learn them. Short sessions, lots of rewards. Try "touch my hand" or "chin rest."

5.2 Cognitive changes

Some older dogs develop changes in thinking and memory, sometimes called canine cognitive dysfunction. Vets often describe the signs with the letters **DISHA**:

Letter	What it means
Disorientation	Getting lost in familiar places, staring at walls, stuck in corners.
Interaction	Changes in how they relate to family or other pets.
Sleep-wake	Awake and restless at night, sleeping more in the day.
House soiling	Accidents in a dog who was house-trained.
Activity	Less interest in play, or aimless pacing.

If you see these, talk to your vet. Other illnesses can look similar, and there are diets, medications, and enrichment strategies that may help.

5.3 Better nights

- More daytime activity and sniffing, to encourage night sleep.
- A last potty trip right before bed.
- A night light and the bed close to yours if your dog seems anxious alone.
- A calm, predictable bedtime routine.

PART 2 · CHAPTER 6

Everyday Care

Little routines that add up.

6.1 Grooming and nails

Older dogs may groom less and develop mats. Gentle brushing a few times a week keeps skin healthy and lets you check for lumps. Long nails change how a dog stands and walks; trim them regularly or ask your groomer or vet.

6.2 Teeth

Dental disease is common in older dogs and can be painful. Ask your vet about cleanings and safe home care, such as toothbrushing with dog toothpaste.

6.3 Potty breaks

Many older dogs need to go out more often. Offer more frequent breaks, keep a path to the door clear, and consider washable pads near the door. Accidents are often a sign of a medical issue, so mention them to your vet.

6.4 The weekly body check

- [ ] Run your hands over the whole body: new lumps, sore spots, heat
- [ ] Look at eyes and ears: discharge, redness, smell
- [ ] Check teeth and gums
- [ ] Look at paws and nails
- [ ] Note weight, appetite, water intake, energy

PART 3 · CHAPTER 7

Your 2-Week Comfort Plan

Small upgrades, one at a time.

Days 1-3: Look and Listen	Observe
Do	Walk through the home at dog height. Note slippery floors, stairs, bed spots. Start the daily journal.
Vet	Book a senior checkup if it's been six months or more. Write your questions (Section 2.2).

Days 4-7: Comfort Upgrades	Home
Do	Add rugs or runners on main paths. Upgrade the bed. Add a second water bowl. Night lights.
Also	Trim nails and paw fur, or book a groomer.

Days 8-11: Move and Think	Body and mind
Do	Switch to shorter, more frequent walks with sniff time. One brain game a day.
Also	Start teaching one easy new trick.

Days 12-14: Routine	Make it stick
Do	Set a calm bedtime routine. Do the weekly body check. Review the journal.
Also	Share anything new or worrying with your vet.

PART 3 · CHAPTER 8

Quality of Life

The hardest chapter, written with care.

8.1 Good days and hard days

As dogs get older, many owners find it helpful to keep track of good days and hard days. A simple calendar with a smile or a frown each day can show patterns that are hard to see from day to day.

8.2 Questions to ask

Veterinarians use quality-of-life scales to help families think clearly. One well-known example, by veterinary oncologist Dr. Alice Villalobos, looks at areas like:

- Is pain well controlled?
- Is my dog eating and drinking enough?
- Can they stay clean and comfortable?
- Do they still enjoy things and seek company?
- Can they move around enough to do what they need to?
- Are there more good days than bad?

Your vet can walk through these with you. There is no single right answer, and it's okay to ask for help with these decisions.

8.3 Enjoy now

Older dogs often love simple things: a sunny spot, a slow sniff around the block, a car ride to see the world, quiet time next to you. Make room for those moments.

TOOLS

Appendix

Print and keep handy.

A. Home comfort checklist

- ☐ Non-slip paths on smooth floors
- ☐ Supportive bed in a quiet spot
- ☐ Gates on stairs if unsteady
- ☐ Ramp or steps for car, bed, or couch
- ☐ Water in more than one place
- ☐ Night lights
- ☐ Nails and paw fur trimmed
- ☐ Support harness if needed

B. Good day / hard day tracker

Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
1							
2							
3							
4							

Sources and further reading

1. American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA). *Senior Care Guidelines for Dogs and Cats*. 2023.
2. Mills, D. S., et al. "Pain and Problem Behavior in Cats and Dogs." *Animals*, 2020.
3. Villalobos, A., and Kaplan, L. *Canine and Feline Geriatric Oncology: Honoring the Human-Animal Bond*. Wiley-Blackwell (quality-of-life scale).
4. ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center: aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control

This book is for education only and is not a substitute for advice from your veterinarian. Every dog ages differently. © 2026 Porchlight Dogs.