

Pure Dog Talk 424 – Senior Living: Simple Hacks and Good Medicine for Old Dogs

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Laura Reeves:

Welcome to Pure Dog Talk. I am your host, Laura Reeves, and I am super excited to be joined again by our veterinary voice, Dr. Marty Greer, from the Veterinary Village. And today, we've been talking a lot just the last few months, Marty and I were just talking about this. We've been talking about puppies, all kinds of puppy stuff. And we decided today we are going to talk about old dogs and some of our old dog stuff, and things that we can see in our dogs as they age, that are just aging. They're not sick, but they're getting older, and so I think that these are hard things for a lot of us. I will use my own old dog as an example. He is a 12 year old Wire-coated Ibizan Hound. And he's started showing signs of being old, and I don't know a better way to say it than sort of senility. He wants to sleep in weird little spaces and things like that. So talk to us, Marty.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Sure. So there is actually a syndrome called canine cognitive dysfunction, CCD. If you look it up, you can find out a lot of information about it. And this was first kind of brought to the attention of veterinarians and their owners, probably 20 years ago. I was fortunate enough to be in a clinical drug trial, well to have dogs in a clinical drug trial. I didn't take the drugs, the dogs did. It was a company called Deprenell. Anapril was the product that ended up coming to market. And it was determined at that time that people were starting to see changes in dogs that reflected canine cognitive dysfunction, or CCD. Similar to Alzheimer's, senility, dementia. Those kinds of changes that we see in people.

Laura Reeves:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

And there's really no reason to believe that it shouldn't happen in a dog or a cat for that matter. But a lot of people didn't recognize it until that point. So the first product that came to market was Anapril. And it's still on the market as Anapril, the generic name is Selegiline. And then to market came a product called Hills BD, B stood for brain or behavior, whatever you wanted to use it for. And again, the Hills diets and the other prescription diets don't have drugs in them, but they do have a fatty acid ratio and selenium, and a few other anti-inflammatory products that reduce inflammation in the brain and seem to improve brain function. So we had five dogs in the clinical trial for the drug. We had 10 dogs in the BD trial, so we got a really good close, upfront and personal look at what these products could do for our dogs.

And in fact, if we want the personal story, my 13 year old Pembroke Welsh Corgi, the first dog that I ever owned on my own, was the love of my life. And at 13, she was in the clinical trial for BD. She wasn't on the drug trial, but she was on the nutritional trial. And it was really interesting because we had a double blinded study. We had 10 dogs in the study and 10 bags of food, and the food came in plain white bags, and I was blinded to it. So I literally didn't feed my dog. My husband fed the dog so that I couldn't even see the kibble shape, size, color, anything about it. So that I was completely unaware of whether she was on regular dog food or whether she was on this BD diet. And at 13 years old, I took her to her national and she won at the national. It was like, rolling back the clock to where she was like nine or 10 again. So it didn't make her a puppy again, but it really showed me that there were some pretty important things nutritionally that we could do for our dogs.

So I actually had a client who had a blind Bassett Hound in the study, one of the 10 dogs in the food study, who was a really great client. She was a veterinary technician, worked in a university setting, doing research. And at the end of the clinical trial, she came in and her dog was filmed by Hills as the poster child for this diet, because the dog had clinically improved so much. She quit her job in Milwaukee. She moved to Topeka, Kansas, and she went to work for the Hills company, because she was so excited and so impressed by the kind of research that they were doing.

So I lost a really great client. She's a sighthound person and she's still out there doing dogs, but I lost her as a client. And then more recently, we've seen Purina come to market with two diets. One is called Bright Minds. You can buy it over the counter. You don't need a prescription for it. You can buy it at your local feed store, the local stores online. And then their higher level, it's got three times the amount of fatty acids and some of the other important nutrients in it called Neurocare, which is a prescription diet. And we've seen behavioral changes in that. We've seen reduction in number of seizures. So there's a lot of really interesting things we can do. We feed our dogs anyway.

Laura Reeves:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

So you're not talking about putting them on a drug or putting them on anything different. You're just talking about changing their diet to something that's going to improve their cognitive function. So I've gone up to the Hills and the Purina people and said, so what nutritional supplements do you take? Because now that you have this research, I want to know your eating, because I want to keep my brain really young too. So DHA and fatty acid ratios. And some of those other things are really important in how those nutrients are put together. So if you have a dog that has some of these cognitive changes, take a look at that. Now it's easy to find a list of where all the cognitive changes are on the web. So I don't have to read them all off to you. You've already mentioned several of them.

One of the most common and the one I was dealing with, with a client yesterday was loss of housebreaking skills. Dogs forget, they go outside, they go out there and they kind of look around and they're like, I can't really remember what I came out here for. And then they come back in the house and they urinate or have a stool on the floor. Now we've all had that moment where we've left a room to go get something, and you can't remember what it is when you get to the room you're going.

Laura Reeves:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

So you go back to it and look again, and that's kind of what our dogs are experiencing.

Laura Reeves:

Fortunately, my old man has not reached that point, but where I do see in addition to the sleeping in very strange places, and his willingness to eat is kind of going in and out. And we know his teeth are bad. He's a 12 year old sighthound, I'm not putting him under anesthesia to do anything about his teeth. That'll kill him faster than the teeth will kill him. So, some of those sorts of things that we can look at.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Sure. And one of my favorite things to do for these old guys that you're reluctant to do anesthesia on, is called pulse dosing of an antibiotic. We typically use Clindamycin Anaerobe. Clindamycin is a generic name, Anaerobe is the trade name. It comes as capsules. It comes as liquid. And the pulse dosing works, that you give it for five days every other month. And what it does, is it does a really good job on the anaerobic bacteria that live under the gums of our dogs, as they get older, that cause that really foul, nasty breath. So it actually reduces the bacteria load in their mouth. So it's a really nice way to keep your dog's mouth more healthy, without using an anesthetic procedure.

Laura Reeves:

Literally, my jaw is on the floor, say this again, pulse dosing five days every month?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Every other month.

Laura Reeves:

Every other month?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, we go January, March, May, every other month. So the first five days of the month, I just send home multiple bottles of medication and put it on the calendar. And then the first five days of every other month, the client gives a five day course of Anaerobe or Clindamycin, and the dose is the normal dental dose, which is 11 milligrams per kilogram, twice a day for five days. And it will considerably improve your dog's health. And we know bad teeth aren't just a bad breath issue. We know that it causes heart disease, kidney disease, and systemic disease.

Laura Reeves:

But there are also concerns. And you can maybe speak to them more than I can, just say, no, I don't want to. But there are concerns about geriatric patients and anesthesia?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right. But we have some better anesthetic protocols now. My really very favorite drug right now for anesthesia for these older guys, is Alfaxan. I started using it for C-sections, but I almost transitioned most of my patients. I was using a lot of Propofol as my induction agent within gas, for maintenance. I am not a fan of the Domitor, Dexdomitor reversible anesthetic agents because they cause very slow heart rates and I'm just not interested in doing that with an older patient. But Alfaxan is very, very safe for a cardiac patient, for a renal patient.

Laura Reeves:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dr. Marty Greer:

It does a great job if you overdose it by mistake, if you keep that patient ventilated, it will wake up. It is a tremendous drug. It's very short acting. It's great for sighthounds. It's great for C-sections and we've had really great success. I use it for the ear crop puppies that we do, because I'm anesthetizing babies. So anything that I can do to make it safer is great. And it's actually, your veterinarian may be concerned about the cost. It actually costs less per anesthetic dose than Propofol does. It costs more per cc, but the number of ccs you use is half of the amount of Propofol. So I've been a real big fan of it. I've been very, very happy with it. So it's a nice, safe way to do anesthesia.

Laura Reeves:

Interesting. Okay. So there is an option for your geriatric patients that particular anesthesia, if you want to get in there and do a really thorough dental, which I think is something that we see in a lot of our older dogs. Even ones that have been maintained and brushed and chews, and all of those things, it's still an issue. And I love this antibiotic loading pulsing. Isn't that what you said? Pulsing?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yes, pulse dosing.

Laura Reeves:

Nice. Okay, so what about are just crunchy, right? We're just creaky, crunchy. It's hard for the dog to get up. It's hard for the dog to lie down. They sort of totter, just sort of like, I feel most mornings, I totally feel their pain literally. So what are some suggestions on that?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Sure. And there's some really great pharmaceutical agents on the market now. We've seen in the last 20 years, some really good nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs come to market. For cats, we've got Onsior. For dogs, we've got Metacam, Rimadyl, Previcox, Galliprant is the new one. It's in a different drug class and it's really great. And sometimes we'll have our dogs on one of those medications for a long period of time. And then it seems to just not be working well anymore. So a transition to a different nonsteroidal can sometimes reinvigorate our dogs. And of course, along with that, we want to include the glucosamine supplements, my favorite is Dasuquin. In fact, I've been taking Dasuquin personally since before Dasuquin was Dasuquin, I took the dog stuff before it came to market, really true.

Laura Reeves:

Okay. So I'm definitely adding that to my diet, to my list full of pills (laughs).

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. So the Dasuquin works great for the dogs. There's a number of different products that are similar to that on the market. But Dasuquin is the one that has research behind it and actually shows that it contains what it says it's going to, and it can meet the claims that it says. So I'm very careful with the supplements that I use. I'm going to spend the money on a supplement, I want to make sure that it's going to be safe and effective. And because a lot of these products don't have drug claims on them, FDA doesn't oversee them. So as long as it doesn't kill a patient, they can put in it sawdust if they want, and it really may not necessarily include what it says. So you want to be very careful with the source of nutritional supplements that you purchase for your dogs.

If they are going to be on a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory longterm, there is a recommendation to do monitoring of the blood. I think that it needs to be monitored at the time that the drug has started. If we're going to see a reaction that's untoward, it's going to be in the first three days, not six months down the road, but it's a good idea to have a blood panel done in your dog every six months, just to make sure that everything is healthy. And of course, cats. I don't want to leave cats out of the discussion, but it is a Pure Dog Talk talk, so don't forget cats are in this category as well.

Laura Reeves:

Cats are people too (laughs).

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly. So we've got lots of things that we can do. And then of course, you've got the memory foam beds that you can do. You can put little booties on their feet that keep them from slipping. You can put rugs down with non-slip backs on them. And of course, they tell us not to put rugs down for us because we're likely to trip, but then we put them down for our dogs because we're more worried about our dogs than us.

Laura Reeves:

I'll jump over the rug, but the dog has to be able to walk.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly. So we keep those runners down for the dogs, want to watch the stairs so that they don't have an accident going up or down the stairs. And I think that a lot of dogs as they become older, have a difficult time in dim lighting. So sometimes something as simple as solar lights or tap lights on the steps, so that you can illuminate the stairs and the dog is less likely to fall when they're on their way out, or back into the house is really important because we don't want any

injuries. I've seen dogs take a tumble down an entire flight of stairs and that is life changing. Unfortunately, life changing.

Laura Reeves:

For all of us.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It doesn't end well.

Laura Reeves:

No.

Hang tight guys, got a little bit of information for you. We'll be right back to the podcast in a minute.

Alright folks, 2020 has, to put it mildly, presented some challenges for all of us. The good news, our patrons numbers are still growing, almost daily. I truly, truly cannot thank all of you enough for your support. It's been overwhelming. And for those of you, who've had to reassess your budgets. Please know, I totally get it. And I will always be grateful for your belief in this program and the power of great content.

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Laura Reeves:

Eyesight, that's something I hadn't even thought about that we should probably talk about. I mean not, I had cataracts or whatever, but just old age, deafness and blindness.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right. If the dog is still visual and the dog has lost their hearing, I'll have people teach the dog to come back into the house at night. It of course doesn't work during the day. But at night, if you flip the light switch at your back door a few times so that the dog can see the light going on and off, that can be helpful.

Laura Reeves:

We use that all the time, yeah.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, and you can do that. Make sure that the dog has an illuminated collar. You can buy those collars that have led lights in them. So if the dog wanders off too far in the yard, that you can find them. So getting back to the original question of what are the symptoms? They get lost in the yard, they get lost in the corner of the doorway. They forget which side the door opens on. They don't interact with people when they come home, they have lost their housebreaking skills.

It's like, we've talked about, there's just a lot of changes that, like you said, they don't eat well. Sometimes raising the food dish so that they can reach the food and water bowls more comfortably can help. If you have a dishwasher in your kitchen, you can put one of those non-slip mats and just put your bowls on the dishwasher door. And then the dog can go over and eat it, chin level, instead of having to reach down. That can be comfortable, especially if they have leg pain or neck pain, something that is making them reluctant to reach to the bowl for food and water. So there's a lot of little

life changes that we can make for our dogs around the house, to make it more comfortable, to make it more safe so they can communicate with you, you can communicate with them.

You can put a bell at the door like you did when they were puppies for housebreaking. So if they do need to go out more often, because a lot of dogs urinate more, often drink more, urinate more, as they become older because of either a disease process or just an aging change. So, all those little things that you can do that can be really helpful. And there's actually a book called Living with a Blind Dog. So if your dog does have vision loss, it can be really helpful. My son has a corgi from us that is avisional in one eye, completely blind in one eye. And really shouldn't be visual in the other, according to the ophthalmologist, every time he takes him in to see him. He detached a retina and the ophthalmologist brilliantly reattached it. And this is now seven years later, and he's still visual in that eye, which is like a miracle.

Laura Reeves:

Yeah.

Dr. Marty Greer:

But little things that you can do around the house to change the dog's ability to communicate with you and get around and be comfortable and not fall and not slip, and sleep on a comfortable bed where they're not too hot and they're not too cold, can really make a big difference in how they feel and their quality of life and their longevity, because everyone I know wants their dog to live as long as possible. I very seldom have somebody that comes in and says I was ready two years ago for them to leave. And then we need to talk about weight as well.

Laura Reeves:

Yes. Oh my gosh. So my dog, I don't struggle with him being too fat. I struggled with him being too skinny, but I think weight. And certainly I want to hear what your suggestion is on this, but I see so many dogs that are just 10, 20, 15, 30% overweight?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right. And Dennis Lawler headed the study at Purina a number of years ago, which they now put on the bottom of their commercials that says, Purina dog chow fed correctly will help your dog live longer. And that was their obesity study. It was an 11 year study and they were able to document that dogs that were overweight, significantly overweight, and they did a double blinded study. Again, they had one litter mate that got to eat all the food they wanted, another one that was restricted to 75% of the litter mates amount of intake. And then at 11 years they were able to compare longevity and they looked at joints on x-ray and they saw less arthritis on x-ray. They saw less problem with mobility and they saw dogs that lived two years longer. And that's two years, like 14 years to me and you, two years longer if they weren't overweight or obese. So that's huge. So you need to keep your dog at an ideal body weight.

And of course, spaying and neutering contributes to that difficulty because they need to have their calorie content cut by 25% on average, when a dog is spayed or neutered, to keep them at an ideal body weight. And so many of our dogs by the time they're older, even if they were in a breeding program, are now spayed and neutered that we have to really be cognizant of that. As far as underweight, there's a couple of products on the market. There's Mirtazepine, it comes as an ear gel, mostly for cats to improve appetite. And then there's Entice, which is a liquid labeled for dogs, is also used in cats, to improve appetite. So if you're struggling with a dog that's not eating well, there are two pharmaceutical agents, they're prescription. You need to get them from your veterinarian, but Mirtazepine is used on the human side extensively for depression, but it improves appetite. And then, Entice is the product that's come to market for an appetite stimulant. So dogs in kidney failure, dogs with liver disease.

Laura Reeves:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Dogs that have cancer, dogs that don't eat well for a variety of different reasons, will eat better on those two products. So it's really great to be able to offer clients something more intriguing than here's some Prednisone, maybe that'll improve his appetite.

Laura Reeves:

Right? Well, I'll tell you what, that's funny. I just had an interview with Dale Martinson to Shay Chen, talking about some of your life hacks as a breeder. What's this what's that, he was the first time I heard Entice. Now I've got it twice in one week. I'm like, wait, tell me again.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right.

Laura Reeves:

I mean, he just said it was fabulous. What is it that's in this product, that's really encouraging the appetite like that?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, I mean that's the drug's purpose is to improve the appetite.

Laura Reeves:

Okay.

Dr. Marty Greer:

So it was brought to market as an appetite stimulant. It comes as a liquid. It comes in three different size bottles. It's relatively expensive, but if you've got a little dog, it's not that expensive.

Laura Reeves:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dr. Marty Greer:

Mirtazepine is a generic and it works well for dogs. And the other thing that I think we sometimes overlook, and I actually had a client in earlier this month regarding this, it was an older dog and it lost its housemate, it's buddy.

Laura Reeves:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dr. Marty Greer:

And the dog was really at a loss for how to respond, how to live, how to do some of those things. And so the dog wasn't eating particularly well and maybe dogs do have some form of depression or clinical depression. We don't really have a way to know that, but Mirtazepine is a great solution for that. I give it at bedtime because it can cause drowsiness. So if you have a dog that needs to be on one of those medications, you should contact your veterinarian and discuss those two products. The Mirtazepine comes as a gel for cats, but there's no reason that you can't use the human drug and it's very inexpensive to use, Mirtazepine, it's a super affordable drug. So it's something that people can be looking to their veterinarian for some assistance with.

Laura Reeves:

Okay. I really like that. And one of the things that we could, I think touch on as a final component, is some of this conversation about how do we think about our dogs who have lost a friend? Is it good to bring a puppy? Is it not good to

bring a puppy? That type of conversation is constant in my world. People that, I just lost my old dog or my dog is getting old, but I don't want to get a puppy until he dies or I do or, experience and thoughts on that?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, I think it really depends on the dog. I think some dogs are rejuvenated by having a younger dog in the home. It's something fun to play with. It's something interesting, but remember some of them, aren't going to be happy about it. That puppy is going to chew on him. It's going to bite him. It's going to bother him at the food dish. It's going to be just generally annoying. So I think if you're going to get another dog to help that older dog, as they transition, that you need to get them when the dog is still mobile and happy and still willing to play. A lot of people do like the older dog to have a chance to teach the younger dog new things. And I think that's a really interesting way to look at it because I think they do learn from each other. I think we overlook that.

I have a former employee who runs agility and she has Samoyeds. And she had one of her Samoyeds in the back of her van, week after week after week after week, watching agility. And she finally said, okay, it's your turn. And the dog came out and ran the course. Like she had been learning how to do it by watching from the crate.

Laura Reeves:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dr. Marty Greer:

So I think they can learn a lot from each other, but we need to know our dogs and be self aware enough to know ourselves, if that's going to be an impediment to our dogs aging and interfere with their ability to enjoy a graceful older lifestyle, or if they are still youthful enough that a young dog is going to be helpful to them. And in fact, that's one of the things that we cover in the book that I'm in the process of working on, the Pandemic Puppy Book, because I think it's really important that we have that thought process of how that happens. An old lady cat that has a new puppy that comes in, man, you've got to really be careful with that.

Laura Reeves:

Yeah.

Dr. Marty Greer:

You got to give the old lady, dog or cat, some place that they can go that the puppy's not going to bother them. They can get into a crate or someplace, that the puppy can't get to them. You've got to feed them and have water where they aren't going to be bothered. You've really got to make sure that their primary needs are met, before that puppy just becomes so annoying that the older dog lets them have it. And typically they will tolerate a lot until the puppy is between four and four and a half months of age.

And that's what Dr. Ian Dunbar calls their puppy license. They lose their puppy license at about that age. And the older dog says, okay, you've pulled my hair. You've yanked on my glasses. You've done all these things as many times as I'm going to let you just like you would with a baby, and you have now got to behave yourself. You're enough of an adult to grow up. So stop it. And they'll kind of turn around and snark at them. And I've seen some pretty serious injuries that an older dog has provided to a younger dog, if they've overstepped and we haven't been supervising adequately to make sure that the puppy stays safe.

Laura Reeves:

Well, and I think you just hit the one that to me is really, really critical. And it's supervision. We have introduced to our 12 year old wire-hair Pointer and our twelve-year-old wire-hair Ibizan Hound, a brand new baby puppy Spinone. So, she's a Spinone so she's pretty chill, but she's still a puppy and it has kind of rejuvenated them. Like they miss her when she goes and has custodial visits with her other mother, stuff like that, and they look for her. But at the same time, they're like, please quit pulling my ear, that would just be so amazing. And it's been very interesting to watch that interaction and watch how they develop. But the supervision piece, the puppy goes in a crate to eat. She doesn't get the opportunity to go steal the old dog's food, 'cause that's not fair. So those sorts of things I think are so, so important.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Completely agree. And you don't want to supervise to the point that you don't let them have any fun.

Laura Reeves:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

But you have to know when enough is enough and when too much is too much, and just step in before something goes terribly wrong, because that can be a really tragic outcome.

Laura Reeves:

Yeah.

Dr. Marty Greer:

You know, you just have to really be thoughtful about how you manage everybody in the house, because that older dog should not be tormented by the puppy. So give them a place that they can go that's safe. And the puppy just flat out is not allowed, just flat out not allowed.

Laura Reeves:

Yeah. I think that that's very important. And the other thing that I think we need to kind of, as we're looking at whether it's our old dog transitioning or introducing a new puppy into the transition, is where do we fall in that process of, is the puppy the one who is going to be contained or is the adult the one that's going to be safely contained? And figure that out, and know that in advance and be intentional about it. I think that's really important.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right. And as a multiple dog owner, I don't really want to come home to an empty house. So a lot of people have that fear is they look forward to coming home and meeting the dog, and now that so many people are working at home, they want a companion, they want somebody that's there at their feet, hanging out with them and another heartbeat in the house. So it really is something that you have to think about, whether you're going to be able to emotionally handle losing a dog, not being with the dog and how that transition has to happen for you. So it does take some family discussions and self awareness to know what is best, not only for the dog, but for your mental health as well, because an empty house is a really lonely place.

Laura Reeves:

Well, and I think that we have talked on this podcast about the human animal bond and how important it is. You have your pandemic puppies book you're working on. I mean, there's so much. I know I'm so excited, I can't wait till that's done and we can talk about it more, but there's a little tease there guys. But I think that as breeders people are a little frantic because during this unsettling and trying, challenging time, many people want puppies and they want a dog in the house for all of the reasons that you've said. And as breeders, we're hysterical, we're like, no, no, they'll go back to work and they won't want the puppy anymore. But I think we have to be respectful and aware of the human animal bond and find ways to make this a positive for everyone.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yep. I agree.

Laura Reeves:

So old dogs, new dogs and pandemic puppies, that seems like-

Dr. Marty Greer:

It's an interesting collision of all these ages.

Laura Reeves:

It's okay. It's all right. It's the labor day, end of summer sale on your podcast (laughs).

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah.

Laura Reeves:

Oh my gosh. All right. Well Marty, thank you so much as always. You are a joy to my Sunday mornings and I absolutely treasure the time we get to talk.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, good. I'm glad I could be here again today.

Laura Reeves:

Excellent. Well take care of your puppies. I have to go take care of mine and my old dogs.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Thanks.

Laura Reeves:

All right.

As always, if you have any questions or input, we'd love to hear from you. The show notes and links to resources on today's topic are available at [puredogtalk dot com](http://puredogtalk.com). Drop us a note in the comments or email to Laura at [puredogtalk dot com](mailto:puredogtalk.com). Remember guys, this podcast is for you. So if you want to know something, give me a holler. We'll do a podcast for you. If you wouldn't mind, you could help me out here. Take a couple minutes to visit iTunes and give us a review.

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