



# Why We All Need to Consider Adopting an Older Dog

*"The ultimate barrier is at age five. Once an animal turns five, it is nearly impossible to place quickly. And, if turned into a shelter, is almost certainly guaranteed a quick euthanization. Most shelters are so overcrowded, the only practical solution for them is to destroy the 'unadoptable' animals. How many animals were destroyed last year for the crime of being over five years old?" -- Notes from a dachshund rescue*



Buddy; age 10-11



Cassie 2; age 5



Cecily; age 5

*Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter.  
~Mark Twain*

Age can be a touchy subject for some of us. We may know from ourselves that increasing age has its benefits and drawbacks, both physically and mentally. The same is true for a dog. Older dogs in any rescue organization typically take longer to be adopted. Puppies draw a lot of attention, but also continued misperceptions about older dogs prevent their consideration by many appropriate adopting families.

## Misperceptions about Older Dogs

### Old as dirt: Not True!

First, let's get this "old" term understood. Do we ever feel as old as the "number"? Most of us would say we feel younger than our reported (or unreported) age. The same holds true for dogs. Like us, individual dogs can vary in the way they age. Beagles can live an average of 14-16 years. But many factors such as genetics, environmental exposures, nutrition, and proper veterinary care and prevention can affect how long a beagle will live. Some will live longer and some will live fewer than 14-16 years (even under the best care and circumstances).

Most vets consider beagles to be seniors at age 7. This estimate is based on

their weight and over all size of their breed. A 7 year old beagle at 20 pounds is approximately the same age as a 44 year old human. Thanks to advancements in veterinary and medical research, dogs and humans live longer and have healthier lives. In other words, the forties are the new thirties! Especially for a happy-go-lucky breed like the beagle, an "older" beagle, oblivious to the unattractive label given to her, will run and play until the sun sets! But between play sessions, who doesn't enjoy a daily nap to recharge the batteries?

### Something has to be wrong with an older rescue dog: Not True!

From our TBR experiences, we can recall a number of young dogs in need of advanced vet care. The vast majority of our older dogs who come to us are very healthy and happy and remain so for many years. As with anything in life, there are no guarantees and crystal balls don't exist! Most older beagles come into a shelter/rescue due to the owner's circumstances, not the dog's. For example, a new baby in the family arrives, employment is lost, the family moves, a change in lifestyle, the kids go to college, a work schedule change, a new partner, and so many



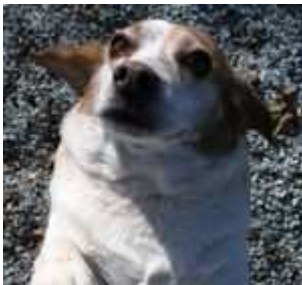
Dimples; age 8-9



Mollie, age 9-10



Sam; age 6



Skye, age 5



Togy; age 10-11

other reasons that have nothing to do with the actual dog. We have had several instances lately when an elderly owner could no longer care for his/her dog due to illness or loss of mobility. Still, they want their dogs to continue to have a good life, but with fully capable, loving families.

**Older dogs cost more than younger dogs: Not True!**

Check this out.....

**Puppies - The First Year**

Veterinary Care/Laboratory Tests - \$100 to \$200

Immunizations - \$50 to \$100

Internal/External Parasite Treatment and Control - \$100 to \$150

Spay/Neuter - \$40 to \$200 (the cost often depends on the dog's size and age).

Food - \$150 to \$250

Miscellaneous (collars, leads, obedience training) - \$200 to \$225

**Total: \$640 to \$1,125**

**Dogs - Annual Costs**

Veterinary Care/Laboratory - \$50 to \$125

Immunizations - \$40 to \$75

Internal/External Parasite Preventatives - \$100 to \$150

Food - \$150 to \$300

Miscellaneous - \$100 to \$125

**Total: \$440 to \$775**

From Dr. Jon's column, 2007, [www. petplace.com](http://www.petplace.com)

Costs vary from region to region and between vets and stores. Also, types of food and unforeseen medical conditions, serious illness, and accidental injuries will increase the cost. Puppies typically require more routine veterinary attention than adult dogs. Yet, some statistics show that older dogs (those over eight years old) will require more veterinary care than younger ones.

**Older dogs can't be trained: Not True!**

Dogs can be trained at any age. The old adage, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks," just isn't true.

Older dogs still have lots of spunk and can learn new tricks. Sydney Armstrong's Sassy is a **13 year old beagle** that still runs in competitive agility trials at the highest levels in 4 different organizations. She's been



competing for 9 years. While she has slowed down a bit, running fewer runs per weekend, she still gets out there and beats the younger dogs. In her last outing over the weekend, Ms. Sassy ran 6 runs and achieved qualifying scores in all six! In several of the runs she was 20-30 seconds UNDER the standard course time. Several competitors called her the "**Energizer Beagle**" because she just keeps going and going and going.

Because of Sydney's knee injury, Sassy has had to learn new tricks and adapt her ways of running to accommodate a new handler. She's also just recently learned a new trick- sitting up on her haunches for food. Sassy proves that old dogs can learn and process new ideas into a trick in a short period of time.

"My current pack of dogs", explains Sydney, "consists of 4 beagles and 1 mixed breed dog. Four of the five dogs are 10+ years old and the "baby" is 7 years old. I love my 'oldsters' and we have great times together. Older dogs can be a lot of fun, so please don't hold their age against them."



## Benefits of Adopting an Older Dog

**Pretrained:** Older dogs often have had some training, both in obedience and house manners. (Some dogs, due to the confusion and upset of being uprooted and finding themselves in a chaotic shelter environment, may temporarily forget their housetraining. Inevitably, once established in their new home, they remember.)

**Better focus:** Because their puppy energy has mellowed, older dogs are better at focusing and learning a new set of household rules or new tricks.

**Understand "No":** Older dogs have learned what "no" means and how to leave the furniture, carpets, shoes, and other "chewables" alone. (If they hadn't learned that, they wouldn't have gotten to be "older" dogs.)

**Know how to fit in:** They have been "socialized" and learned what it takes to be part of a "pack" and to get along with humans and, in most cases, other dogs, and in some other cases, cats, as well.

**Fast Bonding:** Older dogs, especially those who have once known it, appreciate love and attention and quickly learn what's expected of them to gain and keep that love and attention.

**Patience:** Older dogs know how to let you finish the newspaper, sitting calmly next to you, while your workday stress flows away and your blood pressure lowers. They are also instant companions, ready for hiking, riding in the car, walking on leash, fetching, etc.

## **What you see is what you get:**

Finally, unlike puppies, older dogs are a "known commodity." They are easy to evaluate for behavior and temperament, and you also don't have to guess how big they'll grow!

-Some material borrowed from *The Older Dog Project*.

For a terrific web site and lots more information on adopting older dogs, go to:

**<http://www.srdogs.com/index.html>**

Lizz Langstaff Lyon

*You paused outside to look into my cage. I tried to play it right, wanting to catch your eye with a shy glint in my own, a soft bark, that said, "Choose me," in a canine grammar I hoped you'd understand.*

*R.S. Jones, his account of his dog Scout's adoption from a shelter*

