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Comparing dog years to human years varies by breed and whether you know your dog's birth date.

Written by [Caitlin Ultimo](#) 



Calculating your dog's age may be harder than multiplying by seven. [ekinyalgin/istock/Thinkstock](#)

Whether you have had your dog since he was a puppy or crossed paths when he was a bit older, like I did with my two dogs, you may wonder from time to time how old he actually feels. As each year comes and goes and birthdays celebrated with a juicy boneless steak and candle pass, your dog is indeed aging, but how quickly?

### Estimating Age

"In general, we say that each dog year of life is equivalent to seven years of a human's," says Stephanie Liff, DVM, and co-owner of Brooklyn Cares Veterinary Clinic in New York. "However, if you think that most pets reach full adult size and development states by 2 years of age, the 1 to 7 ratio is a bit off when calculating dog years."

Pets in general do have shorter life spans than their two-legged companions, so it makes sense that they age more rapidly.

A few factors can play a part in how fast your dog ages. For instance, in most cases, the larger the dog's



**CAITLIN ULTIMO**

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breed, the lesser the life expectancy is in comparison to small and toy breed counterparts. "I believe that the giant and large breeds grow rapidly but age a bit more slowly than the medium, small and toy breeds," Liff says.

Try thinking about it like this: The larger dogs have more growing to do and, in turn, do so at a faster rate. Developmentally though, the smaller dogs are a bit more advanced, and small-breed female dogs reach sexual maturity earlier than large-breed females.

"I have far more teenage small breed pets in my practice than large breed dogs of the same age. However, just as people achieve different life expectancies, there are exceptions," Liff says.

#### Playing Detective To Determine Age

I've had Dodger since 2011 and the rescue group we adopted him from said he was about 1 year old. Two years later I adopted Daisy from the same organization, and they guessed her age to be around 3 years old. So from what I know, both my Chiweenies (Chihuahua-Dachshund mix) should be about 4 years old. Dodger's face has now grayed and although Daisy is as spritely as ever, her teeth have always been coated with tartar that I've never been able to completely remove. They don't necessarily seem to be the same age to me, but apparently it's close to impossible to ever know for sure. I can't even really ask how old my dogs are in human years, without really knowing their age in dog years to begin with!

"It is very hard to determine age in pets who have an unknown history and have already reached adulthood," Liff says. "Once juvenile teeth fall out, there are few ways to positively know how old a pet is. Graying of the face, age-related ocular changes such as iris atrophy, lenticular sclerosis or cataract formations can be indicative of older age, but may also occur in younger dogs with a genetic predisposition. Additionally, arthritis generally occurs in older pets, but can have cases of early onset due to other factors perhaps related to orthopedic trauma at a young age. Dental tartar accumulation can also be deceiving, as many young pets that are not well cared for as puppies will have dental disease that is beyond their years."

#### Making The Best Of The Years Together

While our pets surely leave a paw print on our lives forever, all pet owners want their dogs to live the healthiest and longest lives they can — I know I do. Short of finding the fountain of youth for dogs — which I would totally scour the earth for if I knew it existed — there are some things we can do to keep our pets feeling young and help them age gracefully.

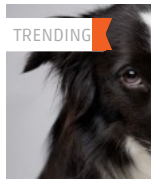
Exercising your pet is an easy way to keep him feeling his best.

"Generally, I think that regular activity to keep your dog fit and trim, paired with proactive veterinary care is a perfect combination for promoting longer healthy years," Liff says. "As they age and encounter the changes that come along with senior life, such as arthritis or cognitive dysfunction, there are supplements, pain medications and holistic modalities of treatment, like acupuncture and massage therapy that can enhance our pets' quality of life in their golden years."

Comparing our dogs' ages to our own is just another way we humans try to connect with our pets. And while it would be great to know them more closely in that way, whether they're wise beyond their years or our eternal puppies, we just want them to be healthy, happy and feel their best.

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