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WHY DOGS SOMETIMES WALK IN CIRCLES BEFORE THEY DIE

# Why dogs sometimes walk in circles before they die

Circling is a common behavior in healthy dogs that takes on new meaning when combined with other end-of-life symptoms. Here's what you should know about this habit.

Written by [Liz Finch](#) – Medically reviewed by [Dr. Dwight Alleyne](#) & [Dr. Erica Irish](#)

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## The essentials

- **Circling is not considered a common indicator of dying in dogs** – There are far more common signs that a dog is nearing the end of its life, but circling is one thing to watch for.
- **Dogs circle for many reasons** – Whether to get comfy, tell you they need to go outside, simply to pass the time, or as a result of an underlying condition such as certain neurological disorders, dogs walk in circles for many reasons, and not all of them are cause for concern.
- **Don't take circling behavior lightly** – While circling may not always be a

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sign of impending death, circling can signify a number of serious health problems. It's a good idea to seek immediate treatment from a professional veterinarian if you suspect any serious health issues.

Dogs communicate through an array of behaviors, and circling is one that is often misunderstood by their people. Though some pet owners worry this behavior signals serious health issues or is a sign their pet is nearing the **end of their life**, the reality is that dogs circle for many reasons – from the perfectly natural to the medically significant.



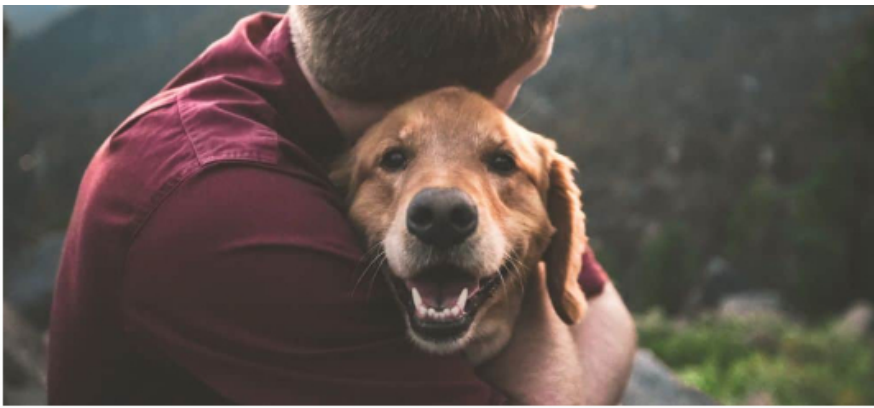
### **Is your dog's circling a warning sign?**

In short, while some dogs do walk in small circles before they die, this is a fairly uncommon behavior, and there is often more than one possible explanation behind the circling. However, many of the common causes of such behavior are still worthy of your concern. In some cases, such as if you notice this kind of activity paired with other troubling symptoms like inappropriate urination, limping, or whining, you should consult your veterinarian as soon as possible to determine the exact cause and seek proper treatment.

### **Understanding your dog's behavior**

Circling can be a way for a dog to get comfortable or they may simply be bored. Your dog may also feel anxious or fearful, or there may be some other underlying medical problems at play. Basically, if you see your dog walking in circles or seeming to be having a hard time, don't just assume they are dying. Discuss any concerns and medical symptoms with your vet, and you may find that not only does your dog have plenty of years left to spend with you, but you can make those senior years comfortable and healthy, too.





## 9 factors behind circling behavior

Understanding your dog's needs means looking at more than one symptom or behavior. To figure out exactly why your dog walks in circles, you need to look at the big picture and chat with a professional when you feel uncertain if an underlying medical issue may be involved.

### Natural and instinctive behavior

Some dogs just circle instinctually. You've probably seen your dog or someone else's pooch pace around or walk in circles for minutes before committing and lying down. Many animals do this as they hunt down the perfect spot to rest, and the pacing can also be a way to clear an area of debris or unwanted critters.

Now, you probably don't have branches and snakes littering your carpet, but those evolutionary behaviors still dominate your pet's brain. If your dog has been known to circle before plopping down for a nap, there's likely no reason to be concerned that the circling means anything new, unless other symptoms arise.

### Confusion, disorientation, or stress

You likely have paced back and forth before in your life. Maybe you were mulling over a math problem or planning out the meals for the week. That pacing can also be a sign of stress or nervous energy when faced with a hard choice. A dog walking in circles can simply be their way of expressing a similar kind of emotion.

If a dog is confused about where to go or what its owner wants, they may walk in circles out of indecision. Anxiety, perhaps triggered by loud noises or a lot of new activity in the home, might also spur your dog into walking in circles. If you notice that the circling happens in times of high stimulation or if the circling stops when your dog is well-rested and calm, this is normal behavior and you likely have nothing to worry about. Just be attentive to your dog's needs and try to keep your home comfortable and stress-free for your furry friend.

### Pain, discomfort, or hunger

On a more concerning level, walking in circles can be a sign of physical distress, injury, or certain medical conditions. This distress might be very mild, though. For instance, if your dog is walking in circles by the door, they might simply just need to be let out to go potty or want to take a long walk. Hungry dogs have also been known to circle before meal times, some rather excitedly, as a way of communicating with their owners.

Physical pain might be another reason dogs wind up walking in circles. Just like you might grab

your forehead when a headache strikes or clutch at a sprained wrist, dogs circle as a way of expressing pain they cannot otherwise relieve. Here is where you need to be particularly attentive. If this circling is paired with whining, limping, or other signs of distress that feeding and bathroom breaks do not relieve, you should take your pet to the vet to see if there are any head injuries or internal problems causing the discomfort.



## Canine cognitive dysfunction syndrome

Just as with humans, as dogs age, their minds can begin to fade. [Canine cognitive dysfunction \(CCD\)](#) is a broad term for various ways a dog's mind can begin to slip as they grow older. As its mind degenerates, preferences, personality, and behavior can all shift. Walking around in circles can often be one such change an older dog may experience, and CCD provides one possible explanation.

Sadly, not much can be done in the event of this kind of degeneration, but you can work with your veterinarian to ensure that your dog can live out its remaining time in as much comfort as possible.

## Strokes and other brain afflictions

While rare, [strokes](#) can cause significant damage to a dog's brain, which can lead to behaviors signaling confusion or disorientation like loss of balance or walking around in circles. A stroke occurs when a blood clot blocks a vessel in the brain or when blood from head trauma spills across the brain. If you notice sudden circling along with rapid pupil movement, blindness, head tilt or pressing, and collapse, seek out an emergency vet immediately.

Other brain-related medical conditions like [meningitis](#) or [diseases linked to parasites](#) can also result in odd behavior like circling. As with a stroke, these ailments often come with other symptoms and behavioral issues, so if you notice the circling, look for other warning signs like weakness, paralysis, drooping head, and fever.

## Brain tumors

As [brain tumors](#) grow, they swell and press on parts of the brain, which can adversely impact blood flow and brain function. The symptoms of a growing tumor can be similar to that

of a stroke as well as seizures. These tumors can be caused for many reasons and require extensive attention from veterinarian professionals.

## Canine vestibular disease

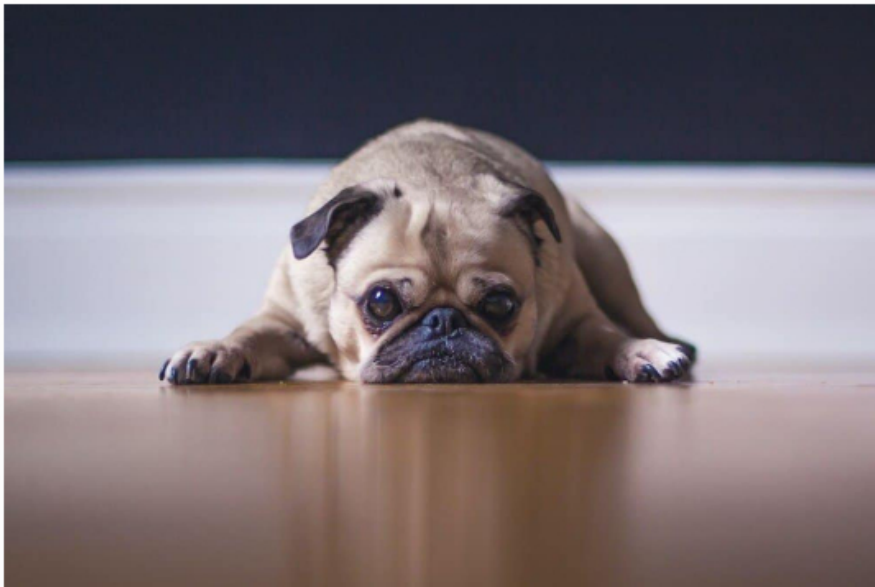
Since it is the network responsible for balance and coordination, any diseases affecting the [vestibular system](#) are likely to make your dog more clumsy or move erratically. Revolving mainly around the inner and middle ear, the vestibular system is vulnerable to inner ear infections or other problems that might disrupt balance there like tumors or ear trauma. Canine vestibular disease, also called vestibular syndrome, is often responsible for canine circling.

## Circling disease

When researching reasons why dogs circle, you may find the aptly named “circling disease” pop up, but this rarely affects dogs. The germ responsible tends to prefer livestock like sheep, but animals afflicted with this disease can be observed moving erratically or walking in small circles.

## Terminal agitation

As a catch-all phrase for restless behaviors at the end of life, terminal agitation characterizes actions like pacing, circling, irritability, and general restlessness to some individuals experience at the end of a terminal illness. While this sort of thing is more often observed in humans, many species can behave this way near death, including dogs.



## Other signs your dog is nearing the end

Walking in circles is not likely to be the first or only indicator that your dog's life may be coming to an end. In fact, there are far more [common signs](#) that pet parents should be on the lookout for.

- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss

- Lethargy or excessive sleeping
- Lack of interest and depression
- Decreased mobility
- Isolation
- Incontinence
- Diarrhea or vomiting

Any combination of these symptoms should be cause for concern. You should visit your vet and discuss all possible options, including the best ways to ensure that your dog's passing is as painless and comfortable as possible.

## Coping with the Loss of your beloved pet

If the worst is to be and your dog does pass, you may be left wondering [what to do](#) now that your dog has died. There are no easy ways to move on and feel better, but there are steps you can take to start down the road to recovery.

First, it's worth acknowledging that any sadness or despair you may feel is valid. Dogs are man's best friend, after all, and no one should fault you for [grieving the loss of a friend](#). Once you have attended to the body and decided on burial or cremation arrangements, you should look to caring for yourself and your family.

Consider conducting some sort of memorial. This may be a ceremony where you and your family reflect on memories of your lost pet or assembling an altar or monument to your departed friend. A photo on a countertop or a marker out in the yard can be a way to help you process the delicate and abstract emotions that go along with loss.

You may want to seek out a counselor or therapist who understands the profound impact of pet loss. You've lost a member of your family, and the right professional can guide you through your grief with compassion and help you develop healthy ways to remember your companion.

And when you feel ready, you might consider adopting a new dog. Finding a new and deserving pooch to love can help fill that void and allow you to carry on the memory of your old friend through how well you care for and train the new addition to your home.



## Final thoughts on dogs walking in circles

The prospect of losing your best four-legged friend can be a hard one to bear, but if there is a chance that your pup is in pain or needs help, you cannot ignore the warning signs. While circling by itself is unlikely to be a sign of imminent death, you should still familiarize yourself with how circling when paired with other symptoms may be cause for concern. That way, if the worst is to happen, you can know that you did everything to care for your furry family member who cared so much for you.

### Frequently asked questions

#### How do you know when a dog is coming to the end of its life?

Dogs who are about to die suffer from excessive weight loss, loss of energy, loss of interest in beloved activities, and loss of appetite. And sometimes, there simply are no warning signs.

#### Why does my old dog keep walking around the house?

As dogs age, their minds begin to fade, and wandering around the house may be a sign of cognitive degeneration.

#### Why does my dog keep circling?

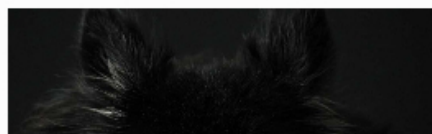
Dogs circle for many reasons. They may be distressed, bored, hungry, in need of a bathroom break, or simply looking for a comfy spot. Once you take care of these basic needs, more serious cognitive issues may be to blame for continued circling.

#### Why is my dog going around in circles and falling over?

This sort of behavior could be the result of issues in the inner ear or a sign of serious brain ailments like stroke, tumors, or metastatic disease.

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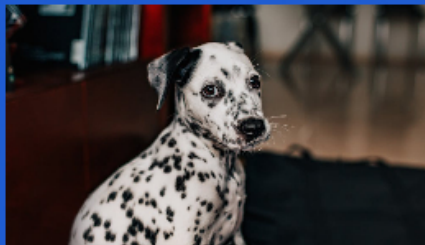


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