

# Caring for older sheep and goats

The expected life expectancy of a sheep or goat is hard to know for certain, since most are sold before they would naturally die. Most sources say it is around 10 to 12 years, though some sheep/goats survive into their teens, and many are productive past ten. Pets usually live longer, but not always. The important thing to know about pet sheep/goats is that they are a long-term commitment.



Older animals usually have a harder time maintaining their body condition. They don't compete as well for feed. Their teeth are likely to be worn, and they may be missing all or most of their front incisors. Missing teeth (or other dental problems) makes it harder for them to graze, especially short pasture. Older animals may require supplemental feed in the form of hay (soft) or concentrate (pellets, best) to maintain sufficient flesh. Chaffhaye or hay pellets can be a good feed source for older animals. Adding water will make feeds easier to chew. Always make sure sheep/goats have access to water (of appropriate temperature) and species-specific mineral.



The immune system of older sheep/goats is usually compromised. They are more susceptible to parasitic worms and other diseases. Some diseases do not appear until an animal is older (wasting diseases such as CAE, Johne's, cancer, and scrapie). Older animals are more likely to have joint pain or arthritis. They may require medicine or supplements for pain relief and inflammation. As with other pets, geriatric sheep/goats should be humanely euthanized if/when the time comes.

