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Are you too old for an Irish wolfhound?

Well, they *aren't* for everyone. You'll hear this over and over if you're thinking of owning one and do the research. And, it's true. You not only need a sizable, fenced yard and financial resources to raise one, you need to be nimble and deranged, too. No, *really*.

But don't let that stop you. Once owned only by kings and royalty, today's Irish wolfhounds live with humans in many walks of life. Many of them are sane, to all outward appearances. Not only that, I know several wolfhound owners in their 60s and older. Me, for example. Please stop looking at me that way. My hounds are worth every one of these scars...

They'll bring you unexpected joy, but Irish wolfhounds also present unique challenges, especially if you're old like me, your memory isn't what it once was and several times a day you check to be sure you put on *two* shoes.

Let's talk geriatric gymnastics...

**You need to get up to speed fast.**

They say you slow down with age. I haven't found this to be true. I have wolfhounds. I have the reflexes of a fruit bat. It's not just when you walk them. They can go from napping to the counter across the room in a heartbeat. Don't believe me? Leave a hot dog on top of the fridge. Look to the left. Look back. Look at your hound on the couch, licking her lips, openly smirking. Need an instant replay? Put a fresh hot dog up there while I rewind the tape.

Wolfhounds are members of the sighthound group. Don't let those big bones and mass fool you. Fast, verrrry fast. And, they're always watching you for the tiniest slip. Leave the fridge ajar? Forget to

barricade the bedroom? Did you leave your cup of cocoa (or anything else tasty or potentially ingestible) right out there in plain sight? They're on it. Not to worry. Adrenaline and outrage are your friend. You'll be twitching like an alley cat in no time.

### **Wolfhounds help you stay in the moment.**

Worried that your mind isn't what it used to be? Find yourself forgetting keys, passwords and your spouse's name? Wolfhounds are here to help. You're out for a walk and your attention strays to a butterfly on the buttercups. *Helloooo*. Your wolfhound just snapped up the ice cream the baby in the stroller was clutching. The mother is glaring murderously. Remember where you put your wallet? It'll come to you.

### **Meeting the daily requirement.**

Geriatric experts now say that if you're over 50, you should be getting 150 minutes of exercise a week. It doesn't have to be in lengthy sessions. Ten minutes at a stretch will do it. Got a wolfhound? It will not be a problem. At least 15 times a day, you'll be lunging after your hound and the roast, paycheck, heirloom necklace or your favorite shoes he just idly snatched in passing. A mad scamper all through the house will inevitably follow.

Experts also say to work on your balance, strength, endurance and....that other thing. I forget. I was chasing a dog across the bed and over the bookshelf... I covered all of three above and you will too, easily. And if the local track team ever needs someone to cover the hurdles and high jump, you are standing by.

### **A word about your bones.**

As you get older, you may not be able to take a beating like you used to. While a wolfhound would never deliberately injure you,

remember that they're as big as a horse, used to take knights off their saddles and break their backs and killed every single wolf in Ireland. And anymore, you bump into a pillow and you bruise. So, you know, you may just not care to be slammed into a wall when you say your hound's name and they gleefully whip around. Precautions are in order. For example, I put on extra pounds to have the padding. Now when I'm pulled off the porch, I break a lot less bones. Which bring me to my last point...

### **Pay attention to your footing.**

Wolfhounds are good at leash walking. They know they could easily jerk you into Thursday. They love you and, from a practical standpoint, they need your thumbs to open cans and drive them places. But they *are* sighthounds. Thousands of years of thundering after wild prey have hardwired the wolfhound to fire like a missile if they spot erratic movement. The kind cats and squirrels make. At these times, you want to be aware of what you're standing on.

I've been pulled off my feet when I was standing on gravel, crushed stone, pea gravel, asphalt, sand, mud, moss, linoleum floors, concrete, wooden floors, carpet, grass, wet grass and duck poop. So, it happens. Unless you've developed your reflexes or stay away from cats and squirrels altogether. Which is impossible. So you learn to watch for cats and squirrels *relentlessly*. So you can brace.

A word about bracing. Don't. Reread the list of surfaces above. A wolfhound's lunge will zing your feet clean out from under you no matter *what* you're standing on. Learn to power walk. Or sprint. You may be tempted to wear roller skates. Don't. Your dog needs *some* sort of resistance to remind him you're there. He'll ignore your yips, yells, cries and squeaks. So go with the flow. And keep your chin up. At least higher than the duck poop.....