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I notice that, like me, many wolfhound people are living in what we euphemistically call our "golden years." That's right, we're old as dirt, but we're still totally up for taking our giant, brawny friends on a stroll. We just have to fall back on a few sensible tactics to avoid being mangled or snapped like an old stick.

What's the good life without a few interesting challenges, yes? Because no matter how creaky we are, we're *not* doing without our wolfhound.

Of course, wolfhounds are generally well-behaved. And they adore us. They don't mean to harm us. Not anymore than we *mean* to step on ants. But...stuff happens.

Some tips I've learned the hard way for our more aged wolfhound guardians :

Feet, Don't Fail Me Now

Keep moving those feet. No matter what.

Most wolfhounds are gentle on a leash, especially if you've worked with them since they were a puppy. But, they do like to poke around in bushes and see what's over.....*there*. You're going along. No, you just *are*. It's only for a few feet, but that turf or pavement will give your face a complete makeover if you're not on your toes.

It takes a little longer for some of us to get up to speed these days. So stay *up* to speed. When Oona or Oisin are chest deep in a boxwood fishing for god knows *what* it is they smell deep down in there, they may be a while. Or, they could dart off again in a

millisecond. I keep on shuffling. Back and forth. Kind of like a racehorse at starting gate. Only with a little less pep.

Finding The Sweet Spot

A leisurely lope for a wolfhound is a mad dash for us. Long legs. We don't want to be a buzzkill by constantly reeling them in or making a lot of noise bouncing off curbs and trees. But we don't want to pull too many G's racing towards a heart attack, either. So we try to find a happy medium.

"Medium" is a subjective thing, of course. For a wolfhound, it's a dizzying clip. So I try to make it to the gym every day at the old folks hour. I ratchet the treadmill up until it starts to smoke. I try to keep it up for 30 minutes or until the lights dim and the paramedics show up. It's great for my cardio, but what it's *really* for is power walking. This is how I hit a wolfhound's "medium" pace. Seems to keep my doctor happy, too.

Reach For The Sky, Pardner

Strangely, after six decades, my tendons just aren't as loose and limber as they used to be. And my joints tell me to cut out *whatever* rash thing I'm doing to them. So, before I lash myself to two gigantic furry rockets, I stretch. Gently, for a long time.

Stretching not only helps me keep up to speed without throwing gears and other parts, it prepares me for those brutal stops my wolfhounds make going back to smell some apparently irresistible speck they missed on the first pass. It helps me pivot without hearing those ugly snapping noises when they lurch to the side to inspect an important leaf. Stretching lets me clatter along with the best of them.

Padding the Account

If nature hasn't blessed you like it has me with a few spare pounds as I've aged, remember, odds are, you're going to get tipped over, dragged off something or run into a tree or lamppost eventually out walking your gentle giant. There's no shame in stuffing your pockets with paper or wrapping your knees and elbows before heading out. Maybe a leather jacket like motorcycle riders use in case they go down on pavement. Armor is impractically heavy and I haven't found a rubber suit yet that breathes enough for sprinting after wolfhounds but a jumpsuit crammed with bubblewrap might just be the way to go. As long as the popping doesn't startle your hound into the next county.

A Few Do's and Don't's

DO drink your milk and take your calcium supplements. Bones are your friend. Take good care of them.

DO file a flight plan. Let your spouse, significant other or heirs know where you're going. If your hound comes back alone, they'll know which ditch or ravine to search for you.

DON'T worry how you look hobbling along in your padded suit or what have you. Old? You're a seasoned veteran. They're wearing spandex. They don't look nearly as good as they imagine. And *you're* walking an Irish wolfhound, the king of dogs.

DON'T try roller skates. At first glance, the fluid motion of those little wheels might sound like *just* the thing to roll like the wind behind your wolfhound. When was the last time you saw them walk in a straight line? *Ever*. Can you say "crack the whip"? And "snap the wrists" and shatter the knees"? Just don't...

In short, there's plenty you can do keep on trucking with your hound *and* up the odds that you'll....come back again, too. Happy trails!