



Senior Wellness



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Is your pet a senior citizen? The good news is that today's dogs and cats are living longer. In fact, while the average life expectancy for a cat just 20 years ago might have been 4 to 6 years, today it is not uncommon for cats to live 15 years or more. Life expectancies for dogs have also increased, and with proper care, many age-related changes in dogs and cats can be treated successfully or at least slowed.

Health care for your older pet goes beyond regular vaccinations, parasite control, dental cleaning, regular exercise, and good nutrition. Our patient customized health care program seeks to not only promote health but prevent, or at least slow, disease in older pets by focusing on the body systems that are most affected by aging.

We begin the process by obtaining a complete patient history and performing a thorough physical examination. Knowing what to look for is extremely important. That's why we believe in performing screening procedures so that we always have accurate information about your pet's needs and can provide the care required to prolong and improve the quality of your pet's life.

During this exam we will evaluate the following:

- Weight /senior nutritional issues
- Skin for masses, parasites, or hair loss
- Musculoskeletal system to assess for arthritis
- Eyes for cataracts or infection
- Ears to look for mites or infection
- Teeth and gums and discuss dental care
- Heart and respiratory system
- Abdomen through palpation to evaluate the intestines, kidneys and liver

We will also perform the following laboratory tests:

- **CBC or Complete blood count:** This test helps in the diagnosis of cancer, infections, anemia, dehydration, clotting problems, blood parasites and bleeding problems and provides clues to the status of your pet's immune system.
- **Serum Chemistry Profile:** This test is used for assessing the function of the liver, kidneys, pancreas, and other organs and for early diagnosis of diseases such as diabetes mellitus (sugar diabetes), kidney and liver failure and sometimes cancer.
- **Thyroid level (T4):** This test is used for assessing the function of the thyroid gland, which helps to regulate the metabolism of the body;
- **Urinalysis:** A urine sample will be checked for evidence of infection and to assess kidney function. It can detect early kidney problems (before changes are

seen in the blood), evidence of diabetes, infections, liver disease, and bladder stones.

- **Blood Pressure:** High blood pressure is especially common in older cats and dogs with kidney disease and cats with thyroid disease. It can lead to heart problems or blindness.
- **For dogs:** a heartworm antigen test
- **Other tests:** Additional testing will be recommended as needed, and may include EKG's, x-rays, or adrenal gland testing.

All screening procedures will be discussed with you at the time of your appointment. The test results and any treatment plans will also be discussed with you within 48 hours of your visit.

Remember, just as when people have an annual physical, in most cases the results are normal. Even then, it's good to know that everything is "all right" and the evaluation provides valuable baseline data on which to compare future results. If a condition is revealed, you know it has been discovered as early as possible and treatment can be started.

We want to work with you to ensure that your pet lives as long, healthy, and happy a life as possible. It's the least we can do in return for all the love that our pets give us!



Your Dog's Age in Human Years

For years people have believed that one year of a dog's life was equal to 7 years of a human's life. However, in recent years, this has proven to be nothing more than a myth. Generally the larger the breed and the heavier the dog, the more quickly they age.

Below is a chart that will give you a rough idea of how your dog's age stacks up against yours. Please note that these numbers are approximations.

Key	Early Years		Middle Age		Senior	
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Your Dog's Age in Actual Years	Your Dog's Age in Human Years				
	15-29 lbs	30 – 49 lbs	50 – 74 lbs	75 – 99 lbs	100+ pounds
1	12	13	15	17	20
2	19	19	21	23	26
3	25	25	27	29	32
4	30	31	32	34	37
5	35	36	37	39	42
6	40	40	42	44	47
7	44	45	46	49	52
8	48	49	51	53	57
9	52	53	55	57	62
10	55	56	59	62	67
11	59	60	63	66	72
12	62	64	67	71	77
13	66	67	71	76	83
14	69	71	76	81	90
15	73	75	80	86	96
16	77	80	85	92	104
17	82	84	91	99	112
18	86	89	97	106	121
19	91	95	103	114	131
20	97	101	111	122	142

Common Diseases	Signs/Symptoms
Cancer	Abnormal swellings that persist or continue to grow Sores that do not heal Weight loss Loss of appetite Bleeding or discharge from any body opening Offensive odor Difficulty eating or swallowing Hesitation to exercise or loss of stamina Difficulty breathing, urinating, or defecating
Cataracts and Glaucoma	Cloudy appearance to eyes Bumping into objects Not retrieving objects
Cushings disease	Increased thirst and urination Increased hunger Increased panting Pot-bellied abdomen Obesity Fat pads on the neck/shoulders Loss of hair Lack of energy Inability to sleep Muscle weakness Lack of a menstrual period Shrinking of testicles Darkening of the skin Appearance of blackheads on the skin Thin skin (from weight gain) Bruising (from thin, weakened skin) Hard white scaly patches on the skin, elbows, etc.
Degenerative joint disease/Arthritis	Difficulty rising Difficulty climbing steps and/or jumping Behavior changes - irritable, reclusive House soiling Loss of muscle
Dental disease	Bad breath Difficulty eating or swallowing Weight loss
Diabetes mellitus	Increased thirst and urination Weight loss Weakness, depression Vomiting
Dry eye	Yellowish-green discharge from eyes
Heart disease	Exercise intolerance Coughing, especially at night Weight loss Fainting Panting

High blood pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seizures Circling Disorientation Blindness Dilated pupils Retinal detachment Eye hemorrhage Blood in the urine Protein in the urine Bleeding from the nose Swollen or shrunken kidneys Heart murmur Weakness, either on one side of the body or in the legs Rolling of the eyeballs
Hypothyroidism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weight gain Dry, thin coat Lethargy and depression
Kidney disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased urination and thirst Weight loss Vomiting Loss of appetite Weakness Pale gums Diarrhea Blood in vomit or black, tarry stool Bad breath and oral ulcers Changes in behavior
Liver disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vomiting Loss of appetite Behavior changes Yellow or pale gums
Obesity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overweight Exercise intolerance Difficulty walking or getting up Unkempt coat, especially in anal area
Urinary Incontinence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urine in bed or sleeping area

Arthritis

Arthritis is a painful, progressive degenerative joint disease that affects one in five adult dogs in the United States. It is even more common among older dogs, particularly overweight and larger breed dogs. Unfortunately, many cases go undiagnosed because owners attribute the subtle changes in their dogs to “old age” or “slowing down.”

Caused most often by elbow or hip dysplasia, canine arthritis can also be a result of the normal aging process or due to an injury. Arthritis involves the deterioration of joint cartilage, can affect one or more joints, and can lead to pain, stiffness, joint swelling, lameness and reduced mobility, all of which can result in a reduced quality of life.

As the disease progresses, there can be additional destruction of cartilage on the bone surface, and production of extra bone around the joint. If left undiagnosed and untreated, arthritis causes irreversible damage and can prevent dogs from fully participating in everyday activities such as walking, running, and swimming.

What Are the Signs of Arthritis Pain?

Any dog can develop arthritis, and knowing the signs of arthritis pain will help you determine when to consult your veterinarian:

- Decreased activity
- Reluctance to walk, run, climb stairs, jump or play
- Stiffness
- Limping
- Difficulty rising from a resting position
- Lagging behind on walks
- Soreness when touched
- Yelping or whimpering in pain
- Acting aggressive or withdrawn
- Exhibiting other personality changes

What Can I Do to Help Manage My Dog's Arthritis?

While there's no cure for degenerative joint disease and arthritis in dogs (with the exception of joint replacement), the pain associated with these conditions, and the stiffness and lameness they cause, can be managed.

- If your dog is overweight, losing those extra pounds can relieve some of the stress on painful joints. Ask us about a weight management program for your dog.
- Moderate exercise can help strengthen joints and reduce the chances of further damage. Most home exercise programs encompass simple, low-impact exercise routines you can do with your dog.

- Acupuncture is an ancient technique that centers around using small needles placed in specific points in the body to decrease pain and promote healing. Acupuncture is sometimes the only treatment an arthritic pet may need but it can also be used in conjunction with other treatment modalities.
- Joint supplements and other vitamins can also play a vital role in your pet's joint health. Ask us if these supplements are appropriate for your pet and if they may help to improve joint health and function.
- We can prescribe a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug, commonly known as an NSAID, or other pain medications to relieve arthritis pain and inflammation. These drugs often provide safe and effective pain relief and can have a significant effect on your dog's quality of life.

With recent advances in veterinary medicine and therapeutics, there's no reason for any dog to suffer from the pain of arthritis. It's important to remember that arthritis is a chronic disease that requires continuous treatment and communication with us. Pain and inflammation can return if medications or therapy are discontinued, so be sure to follow our instructions carefully.

Obesity

Nutrition is a key factor in the health of aging dogs, and the nutritional needs of dogs change as they age. While obesity is a common health problem for all dogs, older dogs are more likely to be overweight due to decreased activity and reduced daily energy needs. Obesity increases the risk of serious diseases and health problems, such as diabetes, and cardiovascular, respiratory, and musculoskeletal disorders. A study done by Purina also showed that, on average, lean animals will live 1-2 years longer than obese animals.

Although some medical conditions (especially metabolic diseases like an underactive thyroid gland) can cause obesity, over-feeding generally is the culprit. As a senior dog's metabolism slows, caloric needs decline. If you do not adjust the food intake of your older dog, weight gain is likely to result. If your pet is already overweight, a weight loss program should be considered. First, however, have your dog thoroughly evaluated by your veterinarian to identify any medical problems that could be causing weight gain. Generally, recommendations for weight loss in senior dogs are very similar to recommendations for people seeking to lose weight. Program steps include:

- **Portion control:** Make sure to follow the guidelines outlined on your pet's food bag. Always make sure to use a 1 cup measuring cup so that you can be sure you are measuring out the food appropriately. If your pet is used to "grazing" throughout the day, you can figure out your pet's daily requirements and then offer ½ that amount in the morning and ½ in the evening.
- **Treats:** One of the biggest mistakes that clients make is offering their pets too many treats. Jerky treats and milk bones are rather like getting a candy bar with every treat. In-stead, you should try offering healthy alternatives such as baby

carrots , snap green beans, ice cubes, apple wedges, plain rice cakes (with no salt or sugar added), or even just 4-5 pieces of their daily allotted kibble per day. You can also make healthy treats by mixing plain canned pumpkin and non-fat plain yogurt in equal portions and freezing them into bite sized snacks! It is important to remember that even too much of a good thing be bad, so still offer these healthier treats in moderation. **Please stay away from grapes, onions, macadamia nuts, and raisins as they can be toxic.**

- **The “Green Bean Diet”:** Most dogs do enjoy green beans as a treat. As you decrease the amount of kibble that your dog is eating, he or she may act hungrier. You can offer either frozen green beans or no salt added canned green beans along with your pet’s meals. This will help to add filler to your pet’s diet and allow your pet to feel fuller without ingesting too many calories. In general, 1 can of green beans is equivalent to approximately 1 cup of dog food. Therefore, if you decrease your pet’s food by ½ cup, then you can offer ½ can of green beans instead.
- **Exercise:** Increasing exercise to burn more calories will also help your pet to lose weight. Please talk with your veterinarian prior to starting an exercise program for your pet.
- **Keep a log:** It may help to modify your own behavior to prevent regaining your pet’s lost weight. A daily or weekly log of exercise duration and pet weight yields the best results.

Selecting a food for your senior dog has been made easier thanks to recent advancements in senior nutrition. Pet foods are now available that have been formulated with fewer calories, more protein, antioxidants, and vitamins to meet the specific nutritional needs of senior dogs, as well as diets formulated especially for weight loss.

Exercise is an important part of a senior dog’s weight management program. A simple walk in the park may be just what your senior dog needs to help control weight and stay in shape. Exercise increases energy use and promotes more efficient calorie burning, as well as toning muscles.

Before starting any exercise program with your senior dog, check with your veterinarian to make sure your plans are suited to your pet’s physical condition. Then begin slowly, by walking your dog on a leash for 10 minutes per day. Depending on your dog’s condition, you can increase each week until you are up to 30 minutes a day of walking. And don’t forget—your dog’s exercise program can reap health benefits for you, too!

Therapy for Osteoarthritis

Advances in veterinary medicine have allowed our pets to live longer and healthier lives. While we stand to reap immeasurable benefit from the years of love and companionship our pets will provide, this increased longevity brings new problems. One such problem is a dramatic increase in the number of animals, especially large breed dogs, suffering from osteoarthritis.

Osteoarthritis is a painful condition caused by the “wear and tear” of cartilage and other parts of the joints. Obese animals are prone to developing osteoarthritis at an earlier age. The disease also progresses more quickly as the extra weight increases the pressure on already achy joints. You may notice limping or lameness, decreased activity, or stiffness, especially after sleeping. A complete physical examination and x-rays are necessary to diagnose osteoarthritis and to rule out other causes of lameness.

Once arthritis has been diagnosed, there are a number of treatment options. First, the dog’s pain must be addressed. Pet Care is implementing the Companion Therapy Laser which dramatically decreases pain associated with arthritis. Pain management can also be accomplished with the use of NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs). Rimadyl (carprofen), Deramaxx (deracoxib), Metacam (meloxicam) and buffered aspirin all fall into this category. As with any medication, there are potential side effects. These include problems with the kidneys, liver, and gastrointestinal tract. If not detected in time, these can become serious, even potentially fatal. It is extremely important that you discuss with us any other medications, including over-the-counter pills that your dog may be taking while he is being treated with NSAIDs. If you notice any decrease in appetite, vomiting, dark stools, yellowing of the skin or gums, or change in drinking habits, please discontinue the medication and notify us immediately.

The key to minimizing the chance of your pet suffering from these adverse reactions is regularly scheduled blood work. To evaluate the liver, kidneys, red blood cell levels and other parameters, we recommend these blood profiles be run prior to starting the treatment, again after one month of therapy, then every three months during the first year and then every six months for the duration of the treatment.

While the use of anti-inflammatories can vastly improve your dog’s comfort level and quality of life, these medications do not treat the underlying damage to the cartilage and joints. Nutraceuticals such as Cosequin (glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate), Dasuquin (glucosamine, chondroitin sulfate and avocado complex), Osteo3 (glucosamine, MSM and FA) are products specifically designed for dogs and cats with osteoarthritis. Many pets have benefitted greatly from this product, which increases joint fluid and promotes new cartilage growth. Use of Cosequin, Dasuquin, or Osteo3 can sometimes allow us to decrease or even eliminate the use of NSAIDs and their associated side effects. If your dog has a refractory case of arthritis, or is unable to take NSAIDs due to an underlying medical condition; there are a few veterinarians who perform acupuncture and chiropractic medicine. While studies of the efficacy of these treatment options have proven inconclusive, we will be happy to refer you if the standard treatment protocols are ineffective for your dog.

Senior Cat Wellness



Osteoarthritis is a common but under-recognized condition in senior cats. Management is ideally holistic, attending to both the cat and its environment in the following ways:

- Provide food and water at floor level, raised slightly
- Add ramps or steps to allow easier access to favored sleeping areas
- Use deep, comfortable bedding
- Use large litter boxes with a low entry for easier access and high sides for cats that can't squat (ex: dog litter box). Use a fine consistency litter that is easier on the paws.
- Manage obesity to reduce stress on the cat's joints
- Diet created for management of osteoarthritis may improve joint mobility and comfort
- Joint supplements can be given daily. Other medication can be added for pain control. See us for further information.

The age at which 50% of cats have signs of cognitive disorders (mental processing, perception, and problem solving) is about 15 years.

- Signs of cognitive disorders include: altered behavior, inappropriate elimination, altered interaction with family members, changes in sleep/wake cycles (sleeping more during the day, up all night), changes in activity, increased vocalization (especially crying at night).
- Cognitive changes may result from illness (hyperthyroidism, Hypertension), brain tumor, true behavior problems (separation anxiety), or Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (senility).

Hypertension (high blood pressure) appears to be recognized most often among cats over 10 years of age.

- Regular blood pressure checks in cats from 7 years old onward are recommended.
- Common causes of high blood pressure in cats are hyperthyroidism, and kidney disease.
- Visual impairment or blindness is usually the first sign of high blood pressure. Other symptoms may include lethargy, depression, and seizures.
- Close monitoring is vital, and even when the blood pressure has been stabilized it should continue to be checked.

Diabetes Mellitus is an increasingly common disease, most commonly diagnosed in middle age, obese male cats. It remains a significant disease in senior cats, with almost half of all diabetics being 10 – 15 years old.

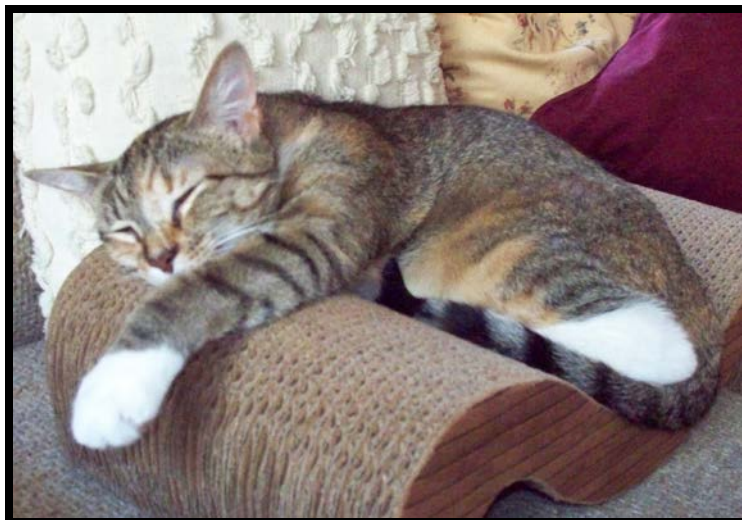
- Although most cats are insulin dependent at the time of diagnosis, early control may lead to clinical remission.
- Feeding a canned, low carbohydrate, high protein diet can help.

Quality of Life in the senior cat means managing chronic illness through the control of pain and distress.

- Owners need to be aware of whether their cat is following its former predictable routines for sleeping, resting, grooming, eating, playing, and socializing.
- Hospice care patients benefit from examination every 2 – 4 weeks, or as deemed necessary to assess comfort, quality of life, and quality of the relationship.
- Feel free to call us (473-0111) for any questions or concerns.

General tips for older cats:

- Nightlights help cats feel more comfortable at night. Older cats have decreased vision and nightlights help them feel more secure.
- Feed small meals more often. To increase your cat's appetite, try adding a small amount of water to the food and then warming it.
- Older cats have a decreased sense of thirst. To increase water intake, add ice cubes to water, add water to food, add a pet water fountain or freeze the juice from tuna in ice cube trays and then add one to the cat's water bowl.



Common Diseases	Signs/Symptoms
Anemia	Exercise intolerance Light colored gums
Arthritis	Difficulty jumping or climbing stairs Behavior change - irritable, reclusive Urinating or defecating outside of litter box
Cancer	Abnormal swellings that persist or continue to grow Sores that do not heal Weight loss Loss of appetite Bleeding or discharge from any body opening Offensive odor Difficulty eating or swallowing Hesitates to exercise Difficulty breathing, urinating, or defecating
Dental disease	Bad breath Difficulty eating or swallowing Drooling Food dropping from mouth when eating Weight loss
Diabetes mellitus	Increased thirst and urination Weight loss or gain Decreased activity or weakness Change in appetite Vomiting Walks on hocks
Heart disease	Exercise intolerance Labored/increased rate of breathing Weight loss Rear leg paralysis
Hyperthyroidism	Increased activity Increased appetite Weight loss Increased thirst and urination Vomiting Labored or increased rate of respiration Increased heart rate (pulse)

Inflammatory bowel disease	Diarrhea Vomiting Mucous or blood in stool Defecating more often and outside of the box Weight loss
Kidney disease/failure	Increased urination and thirst Weight loss Vomiting Loss of appetite Depression and lethargy Diarrhea Blood in vomit or black, tarry stool Bad breath/oral ulcers
Liver disease	Vomiting Loss of appetite Diarrhea Abdominal distention Yellow or pale gums Behavior changes Weight loss
Urinary infections/Bladder stones	Difficulty urinating Urinating outside the litter box Blood in the urine



Your Cat's Age in Human Years

No one really knows how to calculate exactly how old your cat is in human years. For a long time people thought that one human year was equal to seven cat years; however, in reality a one-year-old cat is far more mature than a seven-year-old child.

Animal experts generally agree that the first two years of a cat's life are roughly equal to the first 25 of a human's. After that, each additional year equals approximately four cat years. Make sense? To help eliminate some confusion we have included the chart below.

Your Dog's Age in Actual Years	Your Cat's Age in Human Years
6 months	15 years
1 year	24 years
2 years	28 years
3 years	32 years
4 years	36 years
5 years	40 years
6 years	44 years
7 years	48 years
8 years	52 years
9 years	56 years
10 years	60 years
11 years	64 years
12 years	68 years
13 years	72 years
14 years	76 years
15 years	80 years
16 years	84 years
17 years	88 years
18 years	92 years
19 years	96 years

Hypertension (High Blood Pressure) in Pets

We have all heard of high blood pressure in people, but not many of us know it can occur in our pets as well. It is known as the "silent killer" in humans because many people have hypertension without any symptoms. Pets rarely have symptoms of hypertension; however, it is commonly associated with certain diseases and as pets age. In pets, high blood pressure can lead to blindness as a result of a detached retina as well as neurologic and cardiac problems.

In humans, high blood pressure is often considered primary, meaning there is no other disease causing it. In animals, primary hypertension is unusual; there is almost always another disease causing it. Hypertension in pets may be seen with the following diseases:

- Chronic renal failure (kidney disease) – both dogs and cats
- Hyperthyroidism in cats
- Cushings disease (overactive adrenal gland)
- Diabetes Mellitus (too much blood sugar)
- Glomerular disease (a type of kidney disease)

Blood pressure is measured in pets similarly to the way it is in humans. An inflatable cuff is attached to the leg or the base of the tail of the pet. An ultrasonic device is held over the artery to hear the blood flow. The cuff is then inflated to occlude (stop) blood flow through the superficial artery. The cuff is then slowly deflated to a point when blood flow is again heard in the artery. This is the systolic blood pressure. Normal systolic blood pressure in cats and dogs ranges between 120 – 160mm. Some pets are more nervous at the veterinarian's office and this can lead to higher blood pressure readings. In these cases, the blood pressure measurements are repeated on different days.

High blood pressure in pets is generally treated with oral medications and a low sodium diet. Controlling the underlying disease will also help to reduce the blood pressure.

