



Claws & Paws

VETERINARY HOSPITAL®

I DON'T WANT MY PET TO BE A SENIOR CITIZEN!

With recent advances in disease detection and treatment, your pet's senior years can be a healthy and happy time. By sharing life and love with you, your pet has given you a priceless gift. Now that your pet has earned senior status, you have an opportunity to give something in return: the special love and care that can make the golden years happy and healthy.

It is estimated that your pet ages five to seven years for every one of yours, which suggests that health problems in your pet can progress at a faster rate. Therefore, we recommend frequent examinations for our older pets. In this manner, we can help prevent or treat many age-related conditions and enhance your pet's quality of life. No one knows your pet better than you do, so it's up to you to report any and all changes to your veterinarian.

As pets age, there is a decline in organ function, mental abilities, sensory function and immunity. The following is a short list of the most common problems for aging pets: heart disease, arthritis, kidney disease, dental disease (tooth loss and infection), cataracts, glaucoma, blindness, weight gain or loss, change in appetite, loss of house training, incontinence, changes in sleeping patterns, hearing loss, skin and hair coat problems, increased thirst and urination, decreased immune system, endocrine dysfunction (thyroid), behavioral changes (due to medication problems or cognitive dysfunction), and cancer.

Physical Examination

A physical examination performed at a minimum of every six months will enable us to detect the presence of small problems or changes in your pet's health before they can become major health problems. During this physical exam, the veterinarian will examine the following systems: cardiovascular system, respiratory system, gastrointestinal system, urinary and reproductive systems, central nervous system, eyes and ears, skin and coat, mouth, teeth, and gums, and a weight assessment. For some patients, we will recommend a physical examination every three months.

A thorough physical exam alone is not capable of detecting all possible health problems. It is impossible to obtain and understand a complete picture without also performing other tests. Blood work gives us a means of checking your pet's internal functions in a non-invasive manner.

Diagnostic Blood Work

Because of our strong commitment to providing the best medicine that we can for your pet, we strongly believe that regular blood testing is important in helping your pet to achieve a long and happy life. Even though our pets may appear to be healthy based on physical appearance and activity, many clinical signs of disease do not develop until late in the disease process. Pets cannot tell us when they do not feel 100% and because of their instinct to protect themselves, many animals will 'hide' their illness. A good example of this situation is a cat with kidney disease. This patient may be afflicted with kidney disease for months to years before developing signs of disease because a pet can lose up to 75%



HOURS

MON
7:30AM – 6:00PM

TUE
7:30AM – 7:00PM

WED
7:30AM – 6:00PM

THU
7:30AM – 6:00PM

FRI
7:30AM – 6:00PM

SAT
8:00AM – 1:00PM

of kidney function before clinical signs will develop. Performing blood work will detect early changes in kidney enzymes and allow us to manage this disease process properly—allowing the patient to live a longer and healthier life.

We feel that blood work is the most important diagnostic test that we can perform on our older pets. Yes, we do not like to admit it, but most of our pets are senior citizens at seven years of age. Giant breed dogs attain senior citizen status at five to six years of age. Because of rapid aging changes at this stage of your pet's life, we strongly recommend blood work on an annual basis. We can compare current and previous blood work results in order to evaluate the process of a disease and its response to therapy.

A normal result on blood work is great! You have not wasted your money. We now have a baseline for how your pet is doing at this time. If future blood work reveals changes, then we can tell how long there has been a problem and are assured that we are indeed catching the problem early. Normal blood work results give both of us peace of mind that your pet is doing well.

A CBC (Complete Blood Cell Count), Comprehensive Blood Serum Chemistry, and thyroid test are good screening tests to help detect health problems for your pet.

Complete Blood Cell Count (CBC)

This test provides information about the various types of blood cells. Red blood cells carry oxygen to tissues. White blood cells are the body's primary defense against infection. Platelets are involved in the clotting process. Abnormalities with any of these values help to potentially detect anemia, inflammation, acute or chronic infection, bleeding disorders, blood parasites, dehydration and autoimmune diseases.

Comprehensive Blood Serum Chemistry

This is a series of individual tests that analyzed together give us valuable information concerning the kidneys, liver, pancreas, intestinal tract, and endocrine diseases.

Bun, Creatinine, and Phosphorus—Kidney

ALT, Alkaline Phosphatase, and Bilirubin—Liver

Amylase and Lipase—Pancreas

Total Protein and Globulin—Immune System, Dehydration

Glucose—diabetes, insulin tumor

Cholesterol—hypothyroidism, cushings disease, pancreatitis

Calcium—kidney disease, hyperparathyroidism, some tumors

Electrolytes—endocrine disease, kidney and dehydration

Thyroid

Hyperthyroidism is extremely common in older cats. It can cause hypertension, heart disease, and weight loss. Dogs tend to get hypothyroidism which causes weight gain, problems with the hair coat, and dysfunction of many internal organs.

Sometimes other diagnostics may be recommended based upon these results. Some of these involve specialized tests at outside laboratories. Some of the more common diagnostics involve:



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Urinalysis: This is a common test that will help to detect kidney disease, diabetes, infection, inflammation, and metabolic disorders. Kidney disease is first evident here.

ECG (Electrocardiogram): This enables us to see the electrical activity of the heart. Abnormalities may indicate a serious problem and a chest x-ray or a cardiac ultrasound may be recommended to further diagnose heart disease.



Ultrasound: This is a specialized piece of equipment that allows us to obtain a three dimensional image of your pet's organs. We can visualize the heart, liver, spleen, kidneys, stomach, intestines, pancreas, adrenal glands and bladder. When diseases of the liver or kidney are detected, the ultrasound can give us a look at the internal structure of these organs and allow for ultrasound guided biopsies to help further identify the cause of the disease. We strongly recommend an ultrasound on all of our cardiac patients, especially cats. Older cats are prone to HCM—Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy. This is a disease in which the heart muscle enlarges, decreasing the available volume of blood to be moved through the heart. Radiographs

will not diagnose this disease; it can only be diagnosed via ultrasound. This disease is fatal without specific and appropriate medical management. Cardiac ultrasounds help to individualize heart medications for both dogs and cats.

Blood Pressure: Many older cats and dogs become hypertensive, especially with hyperthyroidism and/or kidney disease. This machine works much like the blood pressure monitors in human medicine. The test is quite simple and easy to perform.

X-Rays (Radiographs): These can help to detect problems with the heart, lungs, kidneys, liver, bones, soft tissue and intestinal tract. They are used to identify disease and also to monitor progress/response to therapy. X-rays are an essential component in the work up of heart patients.

Glaucoma testing using the Tonopen: Many older pets can have problems with increased intraocular pressure (glaucoma) same as people do. Increases in pressure in the eye will cause pain and also lead to blindness if not detected early and treated appropriately.

Other Considerations

Advances in medical diagnostics and treatment enable us to help your pet be more comfortable and also to prolong his/her life. You and your veterinarian can form a partnership whose goal is to maintain an improved quality of life for your pet as long as we can.

Many older pets suffer from arthritis. This may be presented as lameness, difficulty getting up or climbing stairs, increased irritability, decreased appetite, and overall decrease in activity. New pain management medications help pets with chronic pain have a better quality of life. Nutritional supplements containing Glucosamine and Chondroitin Sulfate help with joint maintenance and repair and are good to use in conjunction with other anti-inflammatory medications.

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The medication that is best for your individual pet's needs will be chosen after discussion between you and your veterinarian. Acupuncture is another option for pets with arthritis. Please refer to our Acupuncture article for more information. Chinese herbal formulations are also available.

In addition to medications, appropriate nutrition for your pet's condition will also prolong his/her lifespan. All veterinarians agree that older pets need to be on a high quality diet. Most older pets suffer from obesity. These pets would benefit from increased dietary fiber. Other pets with kidney problems or heart disease may need specialized diets restricting sodium and protein. Skin problems can often be improved by adding omega 3 fatty acids to your pet's diet. Immunomodulators and antioxidants will often help immune compromised and cancer patients. Some older pets will actually do better with a diet high in carbohydrates and increased protein. Together, you and your veterinarian will decide upon an appropriate diet based upon your pet's individual needs.

Many older pets will suffer from various dental problems: tooth decay and loss, gingivitis, infection and oral tumors. Pain caused by a tooth abscess can cause your pet to have a decreased appetite, be more irritable, and also lead to infection elsewhere in the body. These problems can be treated with antibiotics, anti-inflammatories, teeth cleaning and oral rinses.

Behavioral changes may be an early signal of various medical problems. Many of these can be related to pain from arthritis, dental disease, etc. Cognitive dysfunction is due to age-related changes in the brain. Some symptoms of this are confusion and disorientation, decline in social interactions, changes in the sleep-wake cycle and house soiling.

With detailed information obtained through a physical examination and diagnostics, you and your veterinarian can formulate a plan for keeping your senior pet as healthy as possible. This overall patient assessment will include diet, exercise, and treatment recommendations. Certain medical, nutritional, and behavioral changes could signal a need for special care and diagnostics. With your love and dedication, these can be your best years together!

For most pets at age 7, the equivalent in human years exceeds 40 years of age.

We care about your pet's health as much as you do, and we want your pets to live as long as possible without unnecessary suffering or illness. We also know that it is much less costly to detect problems early rather than wait and treat an illness that becomes more advanced later on.

Pet's Age	Pet's Size (in Pounds)			
	0-20	21-50	51-90	>90
5	36	37	40	42
6	40	42	45	49
7	44	47	50	56
8	48	51	55	64
9	52	56	61	71
10	56	60	66	78
11	60	65	72	86
12	64	69	77	93
13	68	74	82	101
14	72	78	88	108
15	76	83	93	115
16	80	87	99	123
17	84	92	104	
18	88	96	109	
19	92	101	115	
20	96	105	120	

Senior

Geriatric

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