



Your Senior Dog

Old age is not a disease

As a result of advances in Veterinary Medicine, more knowledgeable care and improved nutrition, dogs are living much longer, healthier lives. But just as for humans, the passage of time has its effects, and you may begin to notice that your once-frisky pet seems to have slowed down a bit. Being aware of the natural changes that can occur as your dog reaches his or her golden years, as well as what you can do to help keep your pet as healthy, active and comfortable as possible, can ensure that you both enjoy this final stage in your dog's life to the fullest.



Keep your vet informed

You should tell your veterinarian about any noticeable changes in your dog's physical condition or behaviour. A problem that you may assume is simply related to your pet's age may be actually be a result of a medical condition. For example, your dog's reluctance to exercise may not stem from the normal decreased energy that comes with age, but from arthritis. Regular, semi-annual checkups can thus help your veterinarian work out a suitable preventative health program for your pet and catch any problems early to provide effective treatment. Working together, you can both ensure that your dog's senior years will be healthy and happy ones.

Physicals now come twice a year

As your dog ages, regular checkups become more important than ever. In fact, at this stage of your pet's life, it is recommended that he or she receive a thorough exam every 6 months, as adult dogs can age as much as 3 years (in human terms) within the period of 1 calendar year. Besides the usual complete physical examination, your Veterinarian may conduct a blood screen as well as urine testing.

How will I know my dog is getting "old"?

As dogs move into the geriatric phase of their lives, they experience gradual changes that are remarkably like those of an aging human: hair turns grey, their bodies are not as limber and reflexes are not as sharp as they once were, hearing, eyesight and the sense of smell may deteriorate and energy levels, as well as attention spans seem to diminish.

A healthy dog will most likely age later than one that has been affected by disease or environmental problems early in life. Again, as with humans, the aging process will vary with the individual pet.

Something to chew on

As your pet ages, your dog's nutritional needs may also change. You may find that, although your pet is eating less, they still put on weight. This could be due to a slow metabolism or decreased energy level. Excess weight can aggravate many medical conditions, including the heart, skin, respiratory, and joints problems. To better help your companion, ask your Veterinarian for advice about your pet's individual nutritional needs.

Put comfort on the menu

You should also ensure that your dog is comfortable while eating. Most pet owners place food dishes and water bowls on the floor, but this may be a source of discomfort for a large or overweight dog, or for one who's arthritis makes it difficult, or even painful to bend down. Many pet stores have eating tables that are designed with cutouts for food and water dishes and are available in various heights and sizes to suit each dog.



Age	Feline		Canine		
	Weight (lb)				
	0-20	0-20	20-50	50-90	>90
1	7	7	7	8	9
2	13	13	14	16	18
3	20	20	21	24	26
4	26	26	27	31	34
5	33	33	34	38	41
6	40	40	42	45	49
7	44	44	47	50	56
8	48	48	51	55	64
9	52	52	56	61	71
10	56	56	60	66	78
11	60	60	65	72	86
12	64	64	69	77	93
13	68	68	74	82	101
14	72	72	78	88	108
15	76	76	83	93	115
16	80	80	87	99	123
17	84	84	92	104	131
18	88	88	96	109	139
19	92	92	101	115	-
20	96	96	105	120	-

Table courtesy of Fred L. Metzger, DVM, DABVP

COLOUR KEY adult senior geriatric

Top 10 health tips for senior pets

1. Take your dog to his or her Veterinarian for twice a year check ups
2. Become informed about conditions and diseases common to senior pets, be on the lookout for these symptoms and should they arise, inform your Veterinarian
3. Feed your dog the best quality food possible
4. Don't overfeed – obesity causes many health problems
5. Consider, on your Veterinarians recommendations, the use of dietary supplements such as glucosamine/chondroitin for arthritis
6. Make sure your dog receives adequate exercise, according to their physical capabilities
7. Look after your dog's dental health. Brush their teeth daily and have the cleaned professionally by your Veterinarian
8. Have your Veterinarian do a risk assessment to determine an appropriate vaccination protocol for your dog
9. Do your utmost to control ticks and fleas and make sure your dog's environment is clean (bed, play area etc.)
10. Give your dog lots of love and attention. Do all that you can to keep them interested, happy, active and comfortable



The Important of a Wellness Profile

Dogs and Cats often “hide” clinical signs of underlying disease and may not show signs of illness until the disease or disorder is well advanced.

Testing blood and urine allows us to:

- Detect disease early
- Adjust treatment where there is underlying organ dysfunction

What tests may be included in a “wellness” profile?

Test	Some Disease Implications for Senior Pets	
Complete Blood Count (CBC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underlying infection • Mild, unresponsive anemia due to chronic disease (+/- clinical signs) • Immune-mediated disease (spherocytes and a responsive anemia) • Cancer (abnormal lymphocyte count and morphology) 	
Albumin	<p>Decreased:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liver failure (70-80% live function loss before significant albumin drop) • Protein losing nephropathy (e.g. nephrotic syndrome) • Posing losing enteropathy (e.g. lymphangiectasia – will produce low albumin and globulin) 	
Alanine Aminotransferase (ALT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liver disease – liver cells leak ALT when damaged. Persistent levels over 2-2.5 x normal are cause for further investigation and may indicate ongoing damage (please note: ALT values may be normal in end-stage liver disease) • “Reactive” hepatopathy due to inflammatory bowel disease, hyperadrenocorticism, right-sided heart failure, diabetes mellitus. 	
Serum Alkaline Phosphates (SAP)	<p>Increased in dogs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steroids (exogenous and endogenous) • Anti-convulsants • Idiopathic vacuolar hepatopathy • Nodular hyperplasia 	<p>Increased in cats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hyperthyroidism • Liver disease (cholangiohepatitis, fatty liver)
Blood Urea Nitrogen (BUN)	<p>Increased:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renal dysfunction (75% or more renal damage) 	<p>Decreased:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End-stage liver disease (cirrhosis and acquired portovascular shunts) • Starvation or protein restricted diets

Serum Creatinine

Increased:

- Renal failure (with inappropriate urine specific gravity)

Decreased:

- Older pets (especially cats) with muscle wasting
- Idiopathic (cats)

Serum Calcium (Ca)

Increased:

- Hyperparathyroidism
- Some cancers (lymphoma, perianal adenocarcinoma)
- Kidney disease

Serum Phosphorus (P)

Increased:

- Renal disease
- Hyperthyroidism (cats)

Serum Potassium (K)

Increased:

- Addison's disease

Decreased:

- Polyuria and polydipsia
- Inappetence and gastrointestinal upset (vomiting and diarrhea)

Glucose

Increased:

- Diabetes Mellitus
- Stress (particularly in cats)
- Hyperadrenocorticism (dogs)

Decreased:

- Insulin-producing tumors
- Liver dysfunction
- Hypoadrenocorticism

Urinalysis

(Specific Gravity, Dipstick, Sediment)

A first morning urine sample is recommended

- Normal Specific Gravity
 - Cat >1.040
 - Dog >1.025
- Inappropriate urine concentration may indicate:
 - Renal disease
 - Hyperthyroidism and hypothyroidism
 - Hyperadrenocorticism
 - Hypercalcemia
 - Diabetes Mellitus
- Proteinuria (if ruled out inflammatory disease)
 - Microalbuminuria (may be early indicator of renal disease)
 - Protein losing nephropathy

