



What age is considered senior?

Answer: As a general rule, 7 years old is considered a senior for dogs and 8 is considered senior for cats. However, the true age of your pet is best assessed by using his weight, health concerns and breed as well as actual years of life. Some pets may be considered senior at the age of 6 or 9.

What kind of special health issues do we most commonly see in our senior patients?

Answer: The most common issues are dental disease, osteoarthritis, and obesity. Other common problems are diseases of the endocrine system (diabetes, hyperthyroidism for cats and hypothyroid for dogs, etc), vision or hearing concerns, skin and hair coat concerns, and lumps and bumps.

Dental disease: Dogs and cats can have tooth decay and dental disease just like their human counterparts. People brush their teeth twice a day and see the dentist on a regular basis- when was the last time you brushed your pet's teeth? Bacteria in the mouth contribute to tooth loss, bone, and heart disease. Tooth decay leads to significant pain in the mouth. Unfortunately, most owners don't notice until their furry friend stops eating all together...and by that time there is often a lot of damage and pain.

Osteoarthritis: Cats and dogs can lose mobility for many reasons -- osteoarthritis, neurologic degeneration, or both are 2 of the most common. Osteoarthritis is often diagnosed based on history, physical examination and radiographs. Most pets can be treated with medical management and have a very good quality of life.

We have many modalities to treat pain secondary to osteoarthritis- not all of them medications! Laser therapy, nutritional supplements, and exercise modification as well as traditional pain medications (NSAIDs, also known as Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatories) can keep your pet active for years to come.

Obesity: Obesity is a major health issue because of the many consequences it can have on the aging cat or dog's body. It adds stress to joints, makes the heart work harder, makes it more difficult to move and exercise, and can exacerbate respiratory problems. We welcome the use of our scale any time you need a weight check- no appointment necessary!

Diseases of the endocrine system: The endocrine system deals with hormones. Diabetes, hyperthyroidism (in cats), and hypothyroidism (in dogs) are common concerns in older pets and one of the reasons senior blood work is routine. It is MUCH easier (and less expensive) to treat these conditions if they are caught early on.

Itchy skin and ear infections: This isn't a problem that is specific to senior pets, but we see skin and ear issues often enough that they should be mentioned. What many owners don't realize is there is always an underlying cause to itchy skin, skin infections and ear infections- these things don't just happen on their own! The stress of chronic skin and ear issues can be hard on older pets as well as the medications commonly used to treat them. Our goal is to diagnose and treat the underlying condition in the hopes of preventing future problems.

Lumps and bumps: There are many kinds and causes of growths both on and under the skin. The dreaded “C” word is always on an owner’s mind especially with older pets. Rather than worry and wait we can do an aspiration (think of it like a reverse vaccine poke) and cytology that can usually tell us if we even need to worry or not! We can also help you decide if the lump should come off and how we can best help your pet live a long and happy life – even with their extra bumps!

Is there any testing (blood, urine, exams) you routinely recommend? What are the advantages to do these kind of workups? How often should they be done?

Answer: Physical exams and fecal testing (for parasites) should be done yearly for all pets. Once a dog is 7 years old or a cat is 8 years old, we recommend annual blood work. This may include urine testing.

By doing regular physical exams and fecal/blood/urine testing, veterinarians can get a baseline for a pet and possibly uncover any emerging health problems. Diseases like renal insufficiency (kidney disease), hepatitis (liver disease), and thyroid disease can cause increased levels, but so can certain medications and aging. We have to interpret the results in light of the clinical history and physical examination of the patient. Another important reason to do annual exams and testing is to make sure any medication your pet may be on is appropriate.

What about the changes of sight or hearing?

Answer: Often vision changes are benign and do not mean your pet is blind! Dry eye is quite common and can lead to vision loss but is also very treatable. Hearing loss is a lot harder to diagnose and treat and is often related to aging. A lot of pet owners are very concerned with their pet's quality of life with changes in these senses, but dogs and cats can adapt very well to loss of vision or hearing. Some adjustments need to be made, but pets can still live very happy and comfortable lives.

We are here to help you and your pet. Please call us at: (563) 583-8387

