

## GERIATRIC CARE

Our dogs and cats age at different rates to humans. Generally dogs and cats are considered a “senior” at around 8 - 10 years of age (younger if a large breed dog such as a Great Dane or older in tiny breeds such as Chihuahuas).

Here are some tips to help keep your senior pet as happy and healthy as possible:

- Schedule regular check ups

A full vet check every 12 months can help with the early detection of problems. We may suggest performing a screening blood test which can help pick up changes in liver and kidney function, changes in blood counts and thyroid hormone levels (especially important in cats). We can also check for changes in blood pressure which can help detect both cardiac and kidney disease in ageing pets.

- Monitor body condition

Excessive weight gain in ageing animals can lead to worsening arthritis, increase strain on hearts and the risk of metabolic disease such as diabetes. Weight loss may be a result of dental, kidney, thyroid, liver or heart disease.

Rapid changes in your pet’s body weight (either up or down) are worthy of investigation.

- Take care of your pet’s mouth

Dental disease can be painful which can lead to avoiding food which results in weight loss. A painful mouth will also lead to loss of grooming behaviours in cats.

Periodontal disease can affect other organs with bacteria from the mouth lodging in the heart, kidneys and other organs.

Regular dental treatments and chews, daily brushing or dental prophylactic cleaning performed under anaesthesia in hospital can all be utilised to maintain oral hygiene.

- Feed your pet to maintain ideal body weight

Fatty acids such as DHA and EPA and supplements such as glucosamine and chondroitin can help to alleviate mobility issues. Adequate protein levels are especially important for cats as they are obligate carnivores. Special diets are available for animals with heart and kidney disease where sodium or protein levels need to be restricted.

- Exercise is important to maintain healthy joints and muscles

The intensity and type of exercise needs to be tailored to individual pets.

- Environmental enrichment such as food puzzles and interactive toys helps to burn off excess calories and keep pets occupied.

- Providing special accommodations

Older, arthritic animals may benefit from ramps instead of stairs. A soft bed which is easy to access helps rest tired joints. Arthritis dogs may need rugs or carpet on hard floor surfaces to allow them to gain traction. Older cats may prefer a litter box with lower sides as it is easier to climb in and out of.

- Changes in behaviour

Older cats and dogs may demonstrate a number of changes in behaviour. Loss of vision and hearing may alter an animal’s interactions with people and the environment. It is wise to approach blind and deaf animals carefully to avoid frightening them. Care should be taken to keep impaired animals away from driveways and roads as they are likely to have increased reaction times. Cognitive dysfunction (similar to dementia in humans) can occur in dogs and cats as they age. This can lead to changes in responsiveness, learning, memory and can cause anxiety. If you suspect that your pet is suffering from cognitive dysfunction, schedule an appointment so that we can discuss treatment options.