

Celebrate Senior Pets



“Senior Power 2006” celebration is Oct & Nov.

The joy and companionship our senior pets bring to our lives makes us want to ensure that their “golden” years are the healthiest they can possibly be. These months dedicated to senior pets provides an opportunity for pet owners and Countryside Veterinary Clinic to focus on their wellbeing. Included in our celebration we will be distributing senior pet literature, Senior Club Cards, displaying senior photos, showing blood work trends, offering Eukanuba and future wellness visit coupons. We also will be holding several drawings with prizes for each senior blood work performed. We are holding a drawing for Pick the “Senior Theme 2007”. Random senior pet photos and stories (100 words maximum) that are

submitted will be published in the Kendall, Plano, Sandwich Records and Oswego Ledger in December.

Thanks to advances in veterinary medicine, pets are living longer than ever before. However with this increased lifespan comes an increase in the types of ailments that can afflict senior pets. As pets reach the golden years, there are a variety of conditions and diseases that they can face, including weight and mobility changes; osteoarthritis; kidney, heart, and liver disease; tumors and cancers; hormone disorders such as diabetes and thyroid imbalance; and many others. Just as the health care needs of humans change as we age, the same applies to pets. AAHA is the only organization that accredits animal hospitals throughout the U.S. & Canada. AAHA-accredited hospitals adhere to the highest-quality standards available, which helps ensure the best care for your pet. Further information about AAHA can be accessed at their website, www.healthypets.com. AAHA has developed guidelines that provide a framework for veterinarians to provide optimal care for all senior pets. It’s critical for pet owners to work closely with their veterinarian to devise a health plan that is best for their senior pet.

When Does “Senior” Start?

Pets are considered seniors as early as seven years of age. Generally, smaller breeds of dogs live longer than larger breeds, and cats live longer than dogs. Beyond that, the life span will vary with each individual, and your veterinarian will be able to help you determine what stage of life your furry friend is in.



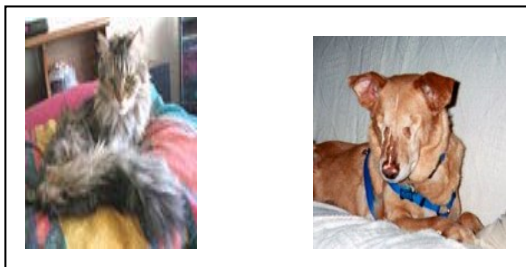
Senior Health Exams

Scheduling regular veterinary examinations are one of the most important steps pet owners can take to keep their pets in tip-top shape. When dogs and cats enter the senior years, these health examinations are more important than ever. Senior care, which starts with the regular veterinary exam, is needed to catch and delay the onset or progress of disease and for the early detection of problems such as organ failure and osteoarthritis. AAHA recommends that healthy senior dogs and cats visit the veterinarian every six months for a complete exam and laboratory testing. Keep in mind that every year for a dog or cat is equivalent to 5–7 human years.

In order stay current with your senior pet’s health care; we will send senior reminder cards for wellness examinations every 6 months. During the senior health exam, your veterinarian will ask you a series of questions regarding any changes in your pet’s activity and behavior. The veterinarian will also conduct a complete examination of all of your pet’s body systems. Providing education and laboratory testing are also key components of the senior exam.

Laboratory Testing

Veterinarians depend on laboratory results to help them understand the status of your pet's health. When your pet is healthy, laboratory tests provide a means to determine your pet's "baseline" values. When your pet is sick, the veterinarian can more easily determine whether or not your pet's lab values are abnormal by comparing the baseline values to the current values. Subtle changes in these laboratory test results, even in the outwardly healthy animal, may signal the presence of an underlying disease.



Complete Blood Count

This test measures the number of red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets in a given sample of blood. The numbers and types of these cells give the veterinarian information needed to help diagnose anemia, infections and leukemia. A complete blood count also helps your veterinarian monitor your pet's response to some treatments.

Urinalysis

Laboratory analysis of urine is a tool used to detect the presence of one or more specific substances that normally do not appear in urine, such as protein, sugar, white blood cells or blood. A measurement of the dilution or concentration of urine is also helpful in diagnosing diseases. Urinalysis can assist the veterinarian in the diagnosis of urinary-tract infections, diabetes, dehydration, kidney problems and many other conditions.

Blood-Chemistry Panel

Blood-chemistry panels measure electrolytes, enzymes and chemical elements such as calcium and phosphorous. This information helps your veterinarian determine how various organs, such as the kidneys, pancreas, and liver, are currently functioning. The results of these tests help your veterinarian formulate an accurate diagnosis, prescribe proper therapy, and monitor the response to treatment. Further testing may be recommended based on the results of these tests.

For cats, an additional routine blood test is recommended in order to check for hyperthyroidism, a common ailment in senior cats. Additionally, depending on your individual pet's condition and other factors, other tests and assessments might be recommended. These include heartworm tests; feline leukemia/feline immunodeficiency virus test in cats; blood pressure evaluation; imaging such as x-rays, ultrasound, and echocardiography; and ophthalmic evaluations, among others. Additional tests become especially important in evaluating senior pets that show signs of sickness or are being prepared for anesthesia and surgery.

Parasite Evaluation

Microscopic examination of your pet's feces to detect the presence of intestinal parasites, such as roundworm, hookworm, whipworm, tapeworm and giardia.

The Effects of Age—Sensory Changes



With the senior years comes a general “slowing down” in pets. As their major senses (sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell) dull, you may find that your pet has a slower response to general external stimuli. This loss of sensory perception often is a slow, progressive process, and it may even escape your notice. The best remedy for gradual sensory reduction is to keep your pet active—playing and training are excellent ways to keep their senses sharp.

Pets may also be affected mentally as they age. Just as aging humans begin to forget things and are more susceptible to mental conditions, your aging animals may also begin to confront age-related cognitive and behavior changes. Most of these changes are rather subtle and can be addressed in a proactive manner. Bi-annual senior health exams can help catch and treat these problems before they control your pet’s life.

Physical Changes

The physical changes your pets experience are generally easier to spot than the sensory changes. As the body ages, its ability to respond to infection is reduced, and the healing process takes longer. Therefore, it is crucial to consult a veterinarian if you notice a significant change in behavior or the physical condition of your pet. Many of the signs indicating that animals are approaching senior citizenship are the same for both cats and dogs, but they can indicate a variety of different problems (see Signs of a Problem)

A very common and frustrating problem for aging pets is inappropriate elimination. The kidneys are one of the most common organ systems to be affected on a cat or dog, and as hormone imbalance affects the function of the kidneys, your once well-behaved pet may have trouble controlling his bathroom habits. If you are away all day, he may simply not be able to hold it any longer, or urine may dribble out while he sleeps at night. In addition, excessive urination or incontinence may be indicative of diabetes or kidney failure, both of which are controllable if caught early enough.

Nutrition

Older pets benefit from specially formulated food that is specific to their needs. Because older pets often have different nutritional requirements, these special foods can help keep your pet’s weight under control and reduce consumption of nutrients that are risk factors for the development of diseases, as well as organ- or age-related changes.

Exercise

Exercise is yet another aspect of preventive geriatric care for your pets. You should definitely keep them going as they get older—if they are cooped up or kept lying down, their bodies will deteriorate much more quickly. You may want to ease up a bit on the exercise with an arthritic or debilitated cat or dog. Otherwise, you should keep them as active—mentally and physically—as possible in order to keep them sharp.

Surgery for the Older Pet

In the event your pet is in need of a dental, surgery or any other procedure in which anesthesia is needed, special considerations are taken to help ensure the safety of your senior pet.

AAHA recommends all senior dogs and cats undergo diagnostic testing prior to any anesthetic procedure. A blood pressure evaluation and additional tests might also be recommended, depending on your individual pet. These screening tools can provide critical information to the health care team to help determine the proper anesthesia and drug protocol for your pet, as well as make you aware of any special risk factors that might be encountered.

Pain Management

Pets experience pain just like humans do. The different types of pain include acute pain, which comes on suddenly as a result of an injury, surgery, or an infection, and chronic pain, which is long lasting and usually develops slowly (such as arthritis). You can play a key role in monitoring your pet to determine whether he suffers from pain.

To help ensure your pet lives comfortably during the senior life stage, it's critical to work with your veterinarian to tailor a senior wellness plan that is best for your dog or cat. Be sure to monitor behavior and physical conditions and report anything unusual to your veterinarian, who can help your pet head into the platinum years with ease.

Signs of a Problem

- Increase in water consumption or urination
- Sudden weight loss or gain
- Significant decrease in appetite or failure to eat for more than a day
- Significant increase in appetite
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Difficulty in passing stool or urine
- Change in housebreaking habits
- Lameness
- Change in vision
- Open sores or scabs on the skin
- Foul mouth odor or drooling
- Increasing size of the abdomen
- Increasing inactivity or amount of time spent sleeping
- Hair loss, especially if accompanied by scratching or if in specific areas
- Excessive panting
- Inability to chew food
- Blood in stool or urine
- Generalized weakness
- A seizure (convulsion)
- Coughing or gagging
- Breathing heavily or rapidly at rest

