

SENIOR PET EDUCATION

Thanks to better care, pets are living longer now than they ever have before – but as pets get older, they need extra care and attention.

Regular veterinary examinations can detect problems in older pets before they become advanced or life-threatening, and improve the chances of a longer and healthier life for your pet.



What problems are more common in senior pets?

While it's easy to spot the outward signs of aging such as graying haircoat and slower pace, it's important to remember a pet's organ systems are also changing. An older pet is more likely to develop diseases such as heart, kidney and liver disease, cancer or arthritis. Cancer accounts for almost half of the deaths of pets over 10 years of age. Dogs get cancer at roughly the same rate as humans, while cats have a somewhat lower rate.

Contrary to popular belief, dogs do not age at a rate of 7 human years for each year in dog years.

It is normal for pets to lose some of their sight and hearing as they age, similar to humans. Older pets may develop cataracts and they may not respond as well to voice commands. If you teach your pet hand signals at a younger age, it may be easier for you to communicate with your pet as his/her hearing worsens with age. Simple gestures such as "come" or "stop" can allow you to safely retain control of your pet without the use of words.

Pets with poor sight or even blindness can get around well in familiar environments. If your pet's eyesight is failing, avoid rearranging or adding furniture or other items that could become obstacles.

Changes in behavior

Behavior changes in your pet can serve as the first indicators of aging. These changes might be due to discomfort or pain (arthritis, etc.) or worsening sight or hearing, but they may also be due to the normal aging process. Some behavior changes in older pets may be due to cognitive dysfunction, which is similar to senility in people.



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Common behavior changes in older pets that may be signs of cognitive dysfunction:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• easily disturbed by loud sounds• unusually aggressive behavior• increased barking/meowing• anxiety or nervousness• less interest in playing• not responding to voice commands	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• confused or disoriented behavior• increased wandering• house soiling (“accidents”)• changes in sleep patterns• repeating the same• more grouchy or irritable than usual
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How does weight affect senior pets?

Weight can have a tremendous effect on an older pet’s health. Obesity in older pets increases the risk of arthritis, difficulty breathing, insulin resistance or diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, skin problems, cancer and other conditions. An overweight pet may not show any early warning signs of health problems, so regular visits to your veterinarian are recommended.

Once your veterinarian evaluates your pet’s condition, he or she can recommend a proper diet and suggest other steps to help your pet maintain a healthy lifestyle.

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Sudden weight loss in an older pet is also a source for concern, especially in cats. Hyperthyroidism (an overactive thyroid gland), diabetes and kidney disease are common causes of weight loss in senior cats. If you notice any sudden changes in your older pet’s weight, contact your veterinarian.

