



**Help your pet enjoy  
their senior years**

**As a caring owner you'll know that healthy food, enough exercise, loving attention, access to veterinary care and the occasional treat are all key to ensuring your pet lives a happy life. We're here to help you keep your pet healthy and active for as long as possible. Pets today reach a much greater age than they used to, and so they are at risk of developing health conditions comparable to those that elderly humans experience.**

Watch out for any changes! Any differences you see, hear, smell, or feel with your pet could be important and are worth sharing with the veterinary team. Changes may be easy to spot, such as your pet being a bit stiff when getting up or developing lumps and bumps on their body. However, they can sometimes be more subtle especially in cats, where simple behavioral changes can sometimes be early indicators of hormonal changes or organ problems.

### **When is your pet classed as senior?**

A 12 month old dog is equivalent to 15 human years old and is classed as an adult at 24 months. It then becomes a little more complex.

Recent research suggests that a dog is classed as senior at around seven years old (dependent on breed) and at 12+ years, they are geriatric. For cats this is slightly different. They are classed as senior at 11-14 years old and super senior at 15+ years. A 16-year-old cat is roughly equivalent to an 80-year-old person.

Noticing symptoms early and seeking advice from your vet will greatly benefit your pet's health. Vets can then work with you to understand the changes and what they mean.

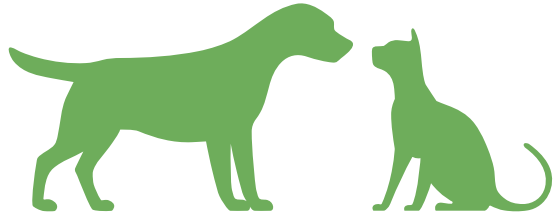
### **Common signs of age-related illnesses:**

- Change in appetite/weight gain or loss
- Increased or decreased thirst
- Uncharacteristic changes in behaviour
- Difficulty getting up from resting or increased sleeping
- Difficulty climbing stairs, jumping onto surfaces, or getting in/out of the car
- Reluctance to exercise, play or lagging on walks
- Appearance of lumps and bumps
- Changes in vision or hearing
- Reduced ability to groom or keep themselves clean
- Increased vocalisation or separation anxiety
- Disorientation, staring at walls, looking distant
- Change in toileting habits
- Bad breath

To help support our senior patients and their owners, we offer consultations, developed for older, yet still healthy, cats and dogs.

We'll ask you to fill in a questionnaire about your pet, which will help us assess their needs and identify any concerns you may have about their health. Then we'll give your pet a thorough check-up to help spot any potential problems. Our nose-to-tail check will look specifically at:

- Eyes
- Weight
- Ears
- Heart rate and breathing
- Teeth
- Coat
- Joints



We'll discuss the check-up findings with you to agree together any changes in food or exercise that your pet might benefit from, and arrange further monitoring, vet examinations or tests if necessary.

### **Top tips to help keep your pet happy and healthy in their mature years**

Keeping your older pets comfortable

- Older pets may need more rest. Somewhere quiet where they won't be disturbed in a soft, cosy bed away from draughts.
- Make sure everything your pet needs is easily accessible, so they don't have to go too far to find their water, food, toys, and bed. Also, it's a good idea to add a second source of water so that pets don't have to go too far to hydrate.
- Ensure your cats bedding, scratching posts, litter trays and toys are at lower levels to avoid the stress of jumping.
- Smooth, slippery floors can be difficult for older dogs to walk on, so put a rug or carpet down to give them something to grip and make them feel safe, secure, and comfortable. Think about using a ramp to help older dogs get into the car boot, or up and down steps (if too big to lift).
- Older pets, especially cats, can easily become dehydrated especially if they have medical problems. Use wide bowls for cats so their whiskers are not irritated by the sides of the dish and opt for easy to clean bowls, such as those made from ceramic. Water bowls should be positioned away from food bowls.

## Feeding your pet

As they get older your pet's dietary requirements change. It varies with species, breed and size, but a vet can advise what's best.

Food is best served at room temperature, including different textures, fed little and often.

Monitor how much your pet is eating and drinking – mention any changes in their eating habits or weight to your vet as there could be an underlying medical reason.

Think about raising the height of food and water bowls. Find a comfortable height for your pet to eat, for example by using a stand. Non-slip mats can also help older pets to balance while eating on a tiled or hard wood floor. For dogs that still need plenty of mental stimulation, try food-dispensing devices to encourage them to work for their food.

## Changing needs of older pets

Older dogs still need regular exercise and mental stimulation - walking them little and often will help keep their weight down and toys and puzzle feeders can keep them entertained.

For dogs, wearing a coat when out and about can help keep them warm and dry.

In general, gentle grooming can help you spend quality time with your pet, which also gives you the chance to check for lumps and bumps, aches, and pains.

## Health and welfare

- As pets age, their eyesight and hearing declines, they are less sure on their feet, and they have less fat for padding and can easily get chilled. Avoid sudden loud noises so that they don't get startled.
- Older dogs and cats may need their nails trimming more often if they're exercising less. This is something our veterinary nurses can do for you.
- Mention to your vet any changes in toileting, for example if they are weeing or pooing more often or if what they are passing is different from normal.
- Stiffness on rising from sleep or rest and trouble getting up and down stairs are common sign of arthritis in dogs, reach out to your veterinary team for help and advice on what to do next.
- Cats are more likely just to change their habits and behaviour when they have arthritis, limping is rare even when cats are in pain. Reach out and discuss any behaviour changes you notice.
- If you have any concerns about your older pet, always check with a vet. Changes in behaviour may be signs of underlying issues, not just down to old-age, so make sure to take them for a regular health check.

## Contact Us:

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