

“PAWS” FOR SENIOR PETS

Celebrate Senior Pets!

Your pet enters his or her senior years beginning at around 7 years old. Just as with a new puppy or kitten, you want to start a senior pet off on the right paw. Older pets have different medical needs and benefit from specialized services and testing. That's why it's a good idea to establish a baseline that can be used to measure changes as your pet ages. Many diseases can begin to develop and many can be unnoticeable for quite some time, which makes preventive health care so important. Diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer can be detected early which can minimize suffering with appropriate treatment.

Scheduling your senior pet for twice-a-year physical examinations is important since pets age about 7 years for every year of human life or 3 1/2 years in just six months!! Consequently, problems can develop much faster in dogs and cats than in humans. Just as more frequent examinations and more extensive laboratory tests are a reality for middle-aged people, increased attention is important for disease detection in pets reaching the seven-year mark. Testing is the veterinarian's way to look inside your pet's body and find problems. Also, with most of our age related health issues the longer they go undetected, the less chance we have for a positive outcome.

The health of your pet can change quickly, especially as he or she gets older. Early detection and proper senior care can lead to many more happy years with your dog or cat.

Problems with Aging Pets

With humans, getting older almost always means having one or more health issues. The same is true for dogs and cats. Some ailments are easily noticed by the pet owner since you know your pet better than anyone. The following are common conditions and their warning signs that affect dogs and cats. If your pet shows any of these physical or behavioral signs, consult the clinic for diagnosis and treatment.

Kidney disease: Increased thirst and water intake, increased urination and accidents; weight, muscle and appetite loss; lethargy; vomiting; bad breath. Usually once signs are noticed, up to 75% of the kidney function is gone.

Diabetes: Increased food and water intake; increased urination. Diet and obesity can increase a pet's risk of developing diabetes.

Liver disease: Poor appetite; jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes); vomiting or diarrhea. If detected, especially early, liver disease can be effectively managed with limited progression.

Arthritis: Stiffness, reluctance to walk, climb stairs, jump or play; limping; difficulty rising from a resting position; lagging behind on walks; behavior changes, irritability. Obesity in pet's can increase the severity of arthritis. Many medication options are available to help improve your pet's quality of life and comfort level.

Cataracts and vision loss: Bumping into furniture, doors and walls; easily disoriented; cloudy eyes; irritability. Vision loss may be more noticeable at night.

Cushing's disease: Pot-bellied appearance; increased water or food intake; frequent urination; hair loss; muscle weakness; changes in activity level

Hypothyroidism: Reduced activity, weight gain, hair loss, shivering and reduced cold tolerance; possible irritability. Usually affects dogs more frequently than cats.

Hyperthyroidism: Weight loss; increased appetite; diarrhea; vocalization. Usually affects cats more frequently than dogs

Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (CDS): Confusion; wandering aimlessly, staring off into space; decreased or altered response to family members; abnormal sleep-wake patterns; loss of housetraining; increased vocalization. CDS can be compared to Alzheimer's in humans.

Heart disease: Labored breathing; coughing; sluggishness, fatigue, or lethargy; shortness of breath; poor exercise tolerance; fainting; swelling of the abdomen. Call our office immediately if your pet is gasping, having difficulty breathing, or faints.

Dental disease: Bad breath, buildup of plaque on teeth; red, inflamed, sensitive, or bleeding gums; excessive drooling; reluctance to be touched on face or near mouth. Untreated dental problems can lead to severe infections that can spread throughout the pet's body, affecting the heart, kidneys, and liver.

Cancer: Unusual growths or abnormal lumps and bumps; sores that don't heal; unexplained weight loss; loss of appetite; bleeding or discharge from a body opening; offensive odor; difficulty eating or swallowing; loss of stamina; persistent lameness or stiffness; difficulty breathing. Pets that are not neutered or spayed are at an extremely higher risk of developing prostate, testicular, and breast cancer.

Remember, many diseases can remain hidden for quite some time before signs appear. This is why it is crucial to work with us at Flanary Veterinary Clinic to start a senior wellness program when your pet reaches 7 years old. Early detection can literally mean life or death in some cases. Senior tests can definitely minimize pain and distress for your pet and create peace of mind for you.

Lucky Number 7!

When your pet reaches 7 years old, he or she will enter into the Celebrate Seniors wellness program at Flanary Veterinary Clinic. This will mean several things for your pet.

As pets age nutritional needs change, and they should be switched to a quality senior food, such as Science Diet Mature Adult that gives a balance of vitamins and minerals for

older dogs. A senior pet food provides balanced nutrition to sustain mobility and muscle mass.

Exercise is essential in every dog and cat's life, and it remains equally important as a pet reaches his or her senior years. It helps maintain a healthy body weight; helps keep the heart healthy, and can help delay degeneration of joints that are affected by arthritis. If your pet does have arthritis, there are many prescription medications available for pain relief, as well as Glucosamine compounds that act as oil on aging joints.

Groom your senior pet at least once a week. Check for lumps, sores, parasites, and foul-smelling ears or discharge. Older pets may need to be bathed with a medicated or a moisturizing shampoo.

If your pet has not been spayed or neutered, talk to the clinic staff about having this procedure done to avoid tumors of the breasts, testicles or prostate glands.

Dental care is very important throughout a dog or cats life, including during his or her senior years, when problems can be more prevalent. Left untreated, dental disease usually leads to tooth loss, and serve as a reservoir of infection that poses a risk for the entire body. Most senior pets require a dental cleaning every six months to ensure optimum dental health and catch any problems as early as possible.

Senior Citizen Card

Your pet will receive his Senior Citizen Card when he is 7 years old or older. This card lists six tests and procedures that are important for your pet's health. All tests are performed within the clinic and can be done at the same visit or divided into multiple visits. Doing the tests at the same time is usually less stressful than it may seem for your pet. Three of the six tests are blood tests that can be performed with just one simple needle stick, rather than returning three different times. Once all the recommended tests are done, you will receive a gift certificate for a free 8 x 10 pet portrait!

The following are the general senior screening tests that are on the senior citizen card and what each one tests for. Based on these tests results or individual problems your pet may be experiencing, Dr. Flanary may recommend different or additional tests as well as a treatment protocol if there are any abnormal results.

General Health Profile (GHP). This panel identifies problems with the kidneys, liver, and gall bladder. Levels with these organs can begin to elevate before the pet starts to show signs of illness, which is the ideal time to take action with treatment. It also checks glucose levels to help detect diabetes and checks several protein levels in the blood. This test is performed by drawing blood.

Complete Blood Count (CBC). The CBC tests for anemia, infection, inflammation and overall health of the blood cells. It evaluates the number of each type of cells, such

as white blood cells and red blood cells, in circulation. It can also detect clotting disorders. It can also detect some forms of cancer in the bloodstream. This test is performed by drawing blood.

Electrocardiogram (EKG). This test for the heart can detect abnormalities in the heart’s pumping cycle. It can give more information than listening to the heart with a stethoscope.

Urinalysis. This assesses the health of the urinary system. It can help detect kidney problems, diabetes and bladder stones or infections. Bladder cancer is also a possibility in senior pets.

Radiograph. X-rays are an internal picture of your senior pet. This can check the size of the heart, see some bladder stones, and check severity of arthritis or degenerating bones. Sometimes masses and cancer can be found with radiographs.

Thyroid Test. A thyroid test can be useful in diagnosing malfunctions of the thyroid gland. Hypothyroidism (too little thyroid hormone) is common in dogs; whereas Hyperthyroidism (too much thyroid hormone) is common in older cats. A problem with the thyroid gland can lead to several other serious problems. This test is performed by drawing blood.

Use this chart to determine your pet’s “true” age.

