

Senior Pets





When is a pet classed as senior?

Our pets age faster than we do. If you look at the traditional explanation, our pets age 5-7 years for every human year.

Of course aging this quickly means that the body develops faster. They leave their parents care by 8 weeks of age, are ready to breed at just 6 months and will be fully grown by 18 months of age. They will have the potential to develop geriatric diseases and conditions from 6 years old, and they will die in most cases between 12 and 18 years of age.

Cats usually live longer than dogs with the average cat living 16 to 18 years. Smaller dogs live longer than the large breeds with some toy breeds living up to 20 years! Giant breeds may only make it to 8 years of age.

As our pets age, they start to become susceptible to body changes and diseases associated with aging. As each breed has their own potential disease problems and characteristics, this discussion will only be general.

See our table below to match up your pet's age to the human equivalent. If your pet is in the purple section they are Senior and if in the red section they are Geriatric.

| Age | Canine Years | | | | Age | Feline Years |
|-----|--------------|---------|---------|-------|-----|--------------|
| | Weight | | | | | Weight |
| | 0-10kg | 10-25kg | 25-40kg | >40kg | | 0-10kg |
| 1 | 7 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 1 | 7 |
| 2 | 13 | 14 | 16 | 18 | 2 | 13 |
| 3 | 20 | 21 | 24 | 26 | 3 | 20 |
| 4 | 26 | 27 | 31 | 34 | 4 | 26 |
| 5 | 35 | 34 | 38 | 41 | 5 | 33 |
| 6 | 40 | 42 | 45 | 49 | 6 | 40 |
| 7 | 44 | 47 | 50 | 56 | 7 | 44 |
| 8 | 48 | 51 | 55 | 64 | 8 | 48 |
| 9 | 52 | 56 | 61 | 71 | 9 | 52 |
| 10 | 56 | 60 | 66 | 78 | 10 | 56 |
| 11 | 60 | 65 | 72 | 86 | 11 | 60 |
| 12 | 64 | 69 | 77 | 93 | 12 | 64 |
| 13 | 68 | 74 | 82 | 101 | 13 | 68 |
| 14 | 72 | 78 | 88 | 108 | 14 | 72 |
| 15 | 76 | 87 | 93 | 115 | 15 | 76 |
| 16 | 80 | 92 | 99 | 123 | 16 | 80 |
| 17 | 84 | 96 | 104 | 131 | 17 | 84 |
| 18 | 88 | 101 | 115 | 139 | 18 | 88 |
| 19 | 92 | 105 | 120 | | 19 | 92 |
| 20 | 96 | 109 | 126 | | 20 | 96 |
| 21 | 100 | 113 | 130 | | 21 | 100 |
| 22 | 104 | 117 | | | 22 | 104 |
| | | | | | 23 | 108 |
| | | | | | 24 | 112 |
| | | | | | 25 | 116 |

Colour Key

Adult
 Senior
 Geriatric



PREVENTION

It is always preferable to prevent disease rather than treat. In our senior pets, we have a range of equipment and tests available to ensure our pets are in optimal health and can pick up early warning signals of potential problems. This allows us to take preventative measures to ensure our pets live a long and healthy, pain free life.

Most pets are brought to the veterinary clinic for a yearly vaccination. At this appointment we usually perform a full physical examination, ask lots of questions to obtain a history from you, the owner, and may suggest ancillary tests.

After pets reach the age of approximately 7 years, we suggest the animal is examined every 6 months to try to pick up any aging changes that now are occurring faster than when the pet was young.

Testing can take the form of physical examinations, urine testing, blood testing and radiographs. We will be able to tell you the most appropriate test for your pet's current

age. Some tests will be perfect and we will use these as a baseline for any future test results. Other tests may indicate that we have a pet who is starting to have some degeneration in a certain body system.

This would allow us to start some preemptive changes in the pet's lifestyle to prevent the problem developing. Examples of this may be a dietary change that adds in more fibre, reduces salt intake, adds in **g l u c o s a m i n e** or **chondroitin** for arthritis or reduces protein for better kidney function.

Other changes may involve the addition of **s u p p l e m e n t a l** medication to reduce pain or inflammation, reduce protein loss in the urine, control diabetes or reduce the workload on the heart.





KIDNEY DISEASE

“A pet can lose up to 75% of kidney function before they show any clinical signs”

Kidney function is very important in dogs and cats. Aging can cause the individual kidney cells (named nephrons) to deteriorate. It is possible to live with only half of one functioning kidney and this is the reason that you can donate a kidney for transplants.

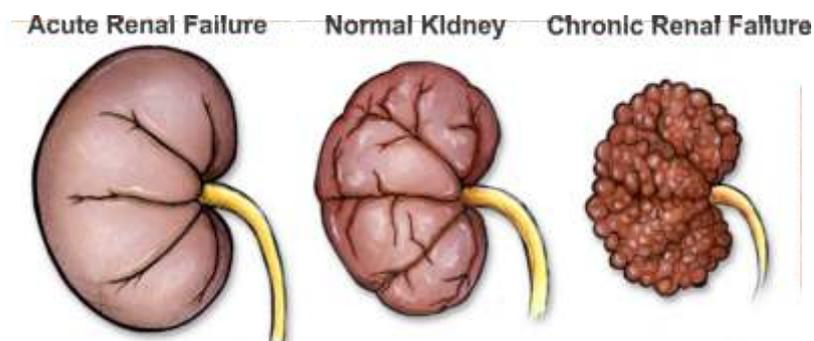
Once an animal has less than the half a kidney of functioning nephrons, the body is unable to properly detoxify and process certain chemicals and proteins. This causes many further metabolic problems in the animal such as weight loss, heart disease and further kidney damage.

Managing kidney function in old age is very important and must be considered with any diet, surgical procedure or medication.

Even though pets may appear to be healthy and active, many clinical signs of disease do not develop until late in the disease. Pets cannot tell us when they don't feel well and because of their instinct to protect themselves, many animals will hide illness.

Patients may be afflicted with kidney disease for months to years before developing signs of disease because a pet can lose up to 75% of kidney function before they show any clinical signs.

Performing regular blood tests will detect early changes in kidney enzymes and allow us to manage the disease which will allow the pet to live a longer and healthier life.





ARTHRITIC CHANGES

“Arthritis can now be managed well and older pets can live without pain”

Yes this is almost a given, but wouldn't you prefer your older pet to live without pain and arthritis if it could be managed?

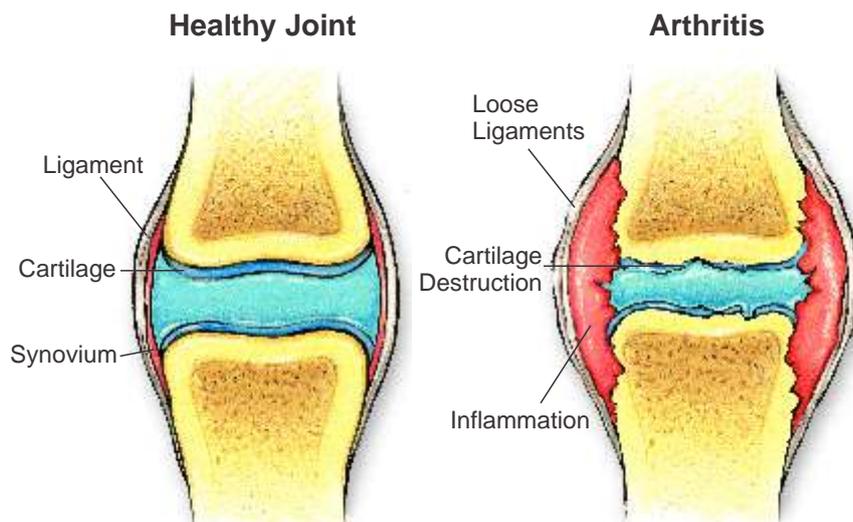
With age comes degeneration of joints and bones. Some of this degeneration can be prevented by adopting a few measures earlier in life. Genetics is important for certain degenerative joint disease such as hip and elbow dysplasia, and OCD. Breeding of genetic lines of animals that have minimal dysplasia can only help.

Control of diet and exercise when young and growing is another factor in minimizing these problems. Once at an older age, management of the degeneration of the joints can reduce actual inflammation and further changes to

the joints. This can be done naturally with nutraceuticals such as glucosamine and chondroitin.

Continued exercise of some form in older age is also important to reduce muscle wastage and hence reduce the workload on the bones and joints. Of course once the arthritic changes have occurred the last thing we want is an animal in pain. Managing pain has become more important to both vets and owners in the last decade and we now have a larger arsenal of medications available to aid in the care of our older pets.

Speak to us at the clinic for further advice on what we can do to alleviate any pain in your pet.





OBESITY

“As our pets age, their nutritional requirements change”

As the body ages, the internal metabolic rate slows and as such its requirement for energy or calories reduces.

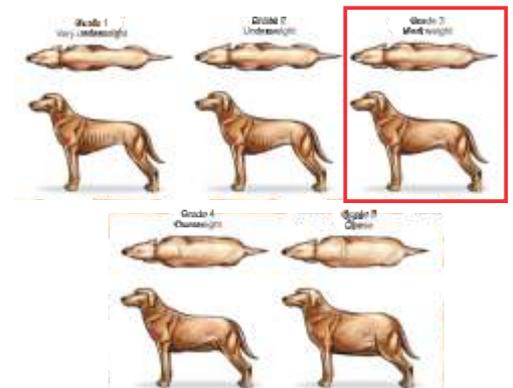
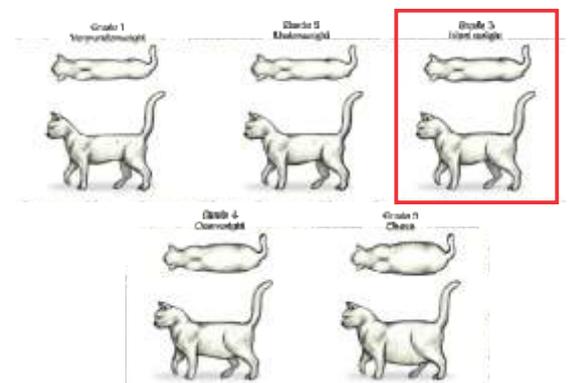
If our older animals receive the same number of calories in old age they are naturally going to put on weight. If they suffer from arthritic conditions, heart problems, or just become lazy, they are not going to burn the same number of calories as when they were young and hence the weight will continue to pile on.

Managing the diet becomes of prime importance to our aging pets. Obesity can lead to further medical problems, some of which are;

- Heart disease
- Diabetes
- Kidney disease
- Arthritis



Where does your pet fit on our weight scale?





DIABETES

Diabetes is typical of overweight animals on an uncontrolled diet. Diabetes is an inability of the animal's natural insulin supply to control the glucose level in the blood.

This results in glucose being passed out in the urine and water following. Water loss leads to dehydration and further medical conditions. Diet components must be monitored, water intake controlled and often replacement insulin given by injection.

CANCERS

Now maybe cancer has become more prolific in the last 20 years or so or maybe it is just that we are better equipped to diagnose it.

Older animals tend to develop more cancers than younger animals. Sometimes it is related to the breed of the animal and sometimes it seems like a random event.

Many cancers are benign and just cause ugly looking masses or sit in uncomfortable positions. Others may be malignant and can spread to other areas of the body. We believe all lumps should be investigated at least by a fine needle aspirate to determine if they are innocuous or if they need excision and analysis at a laboratory.

Early intervention is always better with any lump. It may be excised before it has the

chance to spread or enlarge to a size that is inoperable. It's best to get all lumps checked as soon as you notice them appear.

HEART DISEASE

Age brings with it a natural degeneration of organ systems. One of the hardest and most constantly working systems in our pets is the cardiovascular system. Predisposition by various factors can increase the risk of the heart degenerating early.

The animal heart is set up similarly to ours with its 4 chambers and valves between each chamber. The left side receiving highly oxygenated blood from the lungs to pump out to the body for muscle action. The right side receives oxygen poor blood back from the body and pumps it to the lungs to become re-oxygenated. The valves between the chambers allow maximum force to be used to push the blood out.

When the heart muscle wall does not work efficiently, the valves leak or the pacemaker becomes irregular, blood is not pumped efficiently and heart failure can occur.

We may be able to pick up signs of heart disease during a normal consultation. Medications are now available for pets to help manage certain heart conditions.



THYROID PROBLEMS

This endocrine organ helps the body maintain its natural rhythm. The thyroid gland located in the neck can be either over or under active.

Clinical signs of a thyroid problem are often quite vague or non-descript but can include;

- Weight loss or gain,
- Under or over activity,
- Hair loss,
- Vomiting
- Over drinking and urinating.

This is a major problem in older cats. Senior blood testing can help identify thyroid problems and treatment is often very effective.

TEETH PROBLEMS

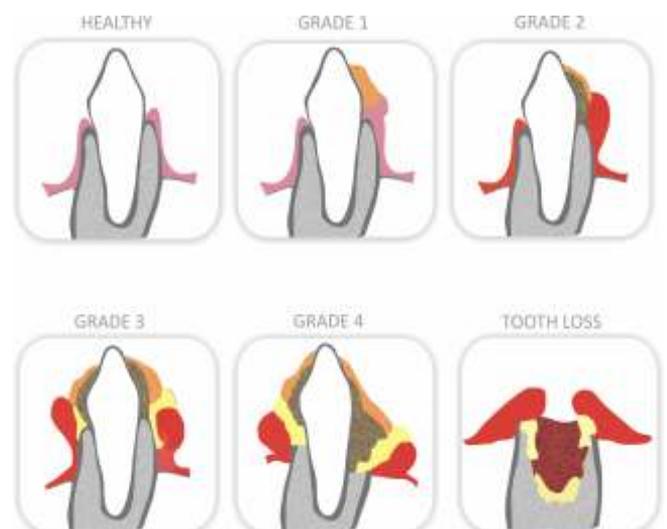
Tooth decay, tartar build up, gingivitis and smelly breath are all signs of mouth disease. Many owners do not know what their pets' teeth look like, and may have only really just have seen the front teeth, assuming if they are ok then so are the back teeth. This is usually not the case.

The premolars and molars are hidden away and may not be getting any use if your pet just hovers down their food. Unless effective chewing is performed, the teeth do not clean themselves. Plaque, saliva and bacteria will then build up along the tooth and gumline, producing the hard yellow/brown material known as tartar. Tartar then allows

degradation and inflammation to occur – forming gingivitis. Bacteria occurs under the gum line causing infection and a smelly breath.

Tooth disease can then lead to the bacteria and toxins heading via the blood stream to the kidneys and forming renal disease, or to the heart and infecting the heart valves.

We can prevent these processes from occurring in the mouth by regular brushing, dental diets, raw bones or by ultrasonic scaling and polishing as needed. Antibiotics may be prescribed for infected mouths too. During your visits, we will check your pet's teeth and advise you on a dental plan.





PANCREATITIS

What goes in the mouth, be it purpose fed food or scavenged food, has the potential to cause an inflammatory problem in the accessory organs of digestion in the gut.

Some medical conditions can also predispose our pets to this disease of the pancreas. High levels of fat typically are the cause of pancreatitis, but a sudden change in diet can initiate pancreatitis as well.

Remember that our pets are only a 10th or 20th of our body weight and as such, their requirements for fat, protein and carbohydrates are very small compared to us. So feeding a diet high in one of these elements can predispose them to pancreatitis. Sudden changes in type or amount will cause this.

Prevention involves feeding a consistent diet more than anything. Feeding scraps, the Christmas ham bone, bacon, chocolate, lollies and many types of human type food should be avoided.

If their diet is to be changed, always do so over a period of at least one week, slowly increasing the amount of the new type of food.

VISION AND HEARING LOSS

This is a problem that may not have a solution for many of our pets, though an understanding of the process can help us to accommodate for the loss and allow our pets to remain comfortable as they age.

Degeneration in hearing does occur in our pets and is similar to the process that occurs in people.





How often should I visit the vet with my senior pet?

As you can see from reading this book, senior pets are at a much greater risk of health problems due to the aging process. It is therefore imperative that they get regular check ups.

A lot of people visit the vet less frequently when their pet ages, putting down some of their behaviour changes to 'just getting old'. This is the worst thing you can do. Like you and I, when we get old, pain can come into play and while we visit our own doctor to receive some relief, our pets deserve the same. A lot of problems, if detected early, can be effectively managed.

For pets over the age of 7 years, we recommend an annual blood test as part of their check up. This blood test will evaluate the function of many internal organs. Abnormalities can indicate problems such as;

- Diabetes
- Kidney disease
- Liver disease
- Thyroid level

During this health check we will also check;

- Eyes and ears
- Skin
- Teeth
- Lumps and growths
- Joints for arthritis
- Heart

Please don't dismiss physical or behavioural changes in your senior pet. There could be something going on that we can manage, giving them a better quality of life. Always contact us if you notice any changes with your senior pet.