

Senior Pets

When is a cat or dog considered senior?

Animals are considered to be middle aged once they reach the age of 7 years for dogs, and 11 years for cats. As a general rule large dogs age faster than smaller dogs, and cats age more slowly than dogs. After this time many pets may start to show signs of aging. To see your pet's age in equivalent human's years see this calculator at

<http://www.hillspet.com.au/en-au/seniors/pet-years-in-human-years.html>

What problems affect senior animals?

As animals age they are at an increased risk of many diseases. Studies have demonstrated that arthritis affects 80% of dogs over 8 years, and up to 90% of cats over 12 years. Kidney failure affects as many as 1 in 3 cats over 10 years of age. 10% of older cats have thyroid disease.

Some of the disease processes that are more common in older animals include:

- Heart disease
- Liver disease
- Kidney disease
- Thyroid disease
- Diabetes Mellitus
- Osteoarthritis
- Hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Some eye conditions
- Brain aging/dementia
- Dental disease
- Bronchitis
- Various cancers.

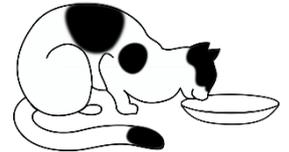


All Creatures On Hoddle

What signs should I watch out for in my senior animal?

Common symptoms of some of the above diseases include:

- Increased Thirst – animals which drink more, especially without a change in diet could have many causes.
- Increased Urination - either increased volumes of urine or increased frequency. In extreme cases these animals cannot go all night without needing to go to the toilet.
- Lumps and bumps - while some lumps are nothing to worry about, some can become nasty, and all lumps should be checked.
- Unexpected weight loss
- Bad breath - this may be an indication of periodontal disease.
- Vomiting - either new vomiting or increased frequency.
- Changes in stool consistency or colour
- Stiffness, limping or "slowing down". In cats we may see that they sleep more, or do not jump as well or as high as previously.
- Coughing
- Reduced activity. Unable or unwilling to do previously normal activities. "Tires" or "sleeps a lot"
- Weight gain – obesity will particularly exacerbate osteoarthritis
- Changes in skin and coat
- Poor vision – bumping into things
- Loss of hearing
- Loss of muscle mass



What will the vet do if my pet has these signs?

The first step is through check-up. Some of these symptoms are non-specific and could apply to many diseases. Others may lead to a diagnosis at the time of the check-up.

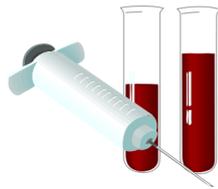
Depending on the problem, the vet may recommend medications, blood tests or x-rays.

For some problems such as arthritis, we may decide to treat with medications. We will often run blood tests at the same time to help decide which medications are the safest for your animal.

How often does my senior animal need a check-up?

Senior animals should have a general health check every 6 months. This enables us to detect aging changes early in the disease process.

Why do blood and urine tests for my senior animal?



Many symptoms of disease in older animals are subtle. Signs may go unnoticed until the disease has progressed a long way. These signs may not be noticed in animals that spend a lot of time outdoors.

Kidney disease is a good example. The first symptom is increased thirst and urination. By the time this is detectable, the kidney function has reduced by 70%. By running periodic blood tests we can detect these diseases at an early stage. The early we detect a problem, the sooner we can treat the disease. This will lead to a longer, and better quality of life for your animal.

Animals on long term medications or with specific diseases, may need blood tests repeated every 6 months. For older animals without ongoing medication illness, every 12-18 months may be recommended.

I am bringing my older animal for a check-up. What do I need to prepare?

Make a list of any concerns you have. Often with older animals people have many questions. Writing them down will make sure nothing is missed.

If possible, it is helpful to bring in a sample of urine that has been collected that morning.

What will happen during my senior check?

The vet will give your animal a thorough clinical exam. We will ask vary questions that may prompt us to worry about particular problems. At this time we can answer any questions you may have.

We can quickly check its concentration during your consultation. If this sample is dilute we will likely recommend blood tests. Dilute urine is an early symptom of many disease processes.

The vet will also check your pet's blood pressure. High blood pressure can occur with many senior animal diseases. If your animal has high blood pressure during his or her check-up, then we would recommend a day stay with several checks. The stress or excitement of being at the vet can increase blood pressure. Rechecking a high reading when the animal has had a few hours in hospital to settle in, will ensure this is a consistent finding, prior to starting medication.



What else can I do for my senior animal?

Diet

As animals age, so do their digestive tracts. Diets designed for senior animals are more easily digestible, with the highest quality protein in moderate amounts (high protein is not ideal for aging kidneys).

These food also have restricted calories. Older animals are prone to weight gain as their metabolism slows down, and lower calorie foods help prevent this change.

Some senior food contain other benefits such as added Omega 3 & 6 for aging hearts, brains and joints, as well as other supplements such as glucosamine and chondroitin.

Many older animals have specific medical conditions that may benefit from a specific diet. You vet will discuss these options with you.