



Senior health

Just like in people, our pets go through aging stages in their lives, and just like us health problems change as they age. Humans are considered middle-aged from around 42-45 years old, which is when most senior health screening programmes start, but are not considered senior until 56-60 years old.

Dogs and cats are generally considered to start their senior years at around 8 years of age, when physiological changes of aging can be detected in brain function, liver function, and other areas. In very large breeds of dog, this can start at 1-2 years younger.

As animals age, it is important that they have more frequent and more extensive examinations, combined with regular testing (blood, urine, xray, ECG etc).

Clinical screening with tests is designed to provide a baseline assessment for future comparison, and to detect subtle abnormalities at a time when preventative and therapeutic intervention is likely to have most benefit. Laboratory testing is important, but even more so is a complete medical history and clinical examination.

There is a wealth of information you as the pet owner can provide us with that is very useful in detecting early health problems. How much does she drink? Has this changed recently? Are there any changes in toileting habits? Weight change? Reluctance to get into or out of a vehicle? These are all extremely important, sometimes very subtle, changes that we will not pick up during a physical examination.

We can check physical features such as heart rate, temperature, weight at the time of presentation (which may be going up, down or be static when we measure it), coat changes, and dental health. But we really appreciate the more detailed information you can provide about your pet.

Regular (at least annual) laboratory testing is recommended for all senior pets. This includes blood testing for diabetes, liver failure and kidney failure, all of which may go unnoticed for a long time. Urine tests for early kidney failure or infections are also recommended. Regular tests are commonly recommended whenever a patient is on long term prescription medication.

In some patients we might recommend additional tests, such as a test of tear production in certain breeds, or blood pressure in senior cats.

Other tests might be recommended as a result of clues revealed in the history, or findings on the clinical examination. For example, a history of stiffness getting out of a vehicle might indicate elbow arthritis, and xray

examination would be the best step. Or an irregular heart rhythm detected on clinical examination would mean an ECG and chest xray would be required.

Senior health checks allow us to discuss with you other aspects of care for your pet. Dental health and cleaning the teeth, proper nutrition for an older pet, weight control, parasite control, mobility, vaccination requirements, mental health and discussion of brain aging, housing considerations, and potential reproductive disease such as breast cancer.

There are a vast array of medical problems that affect animals just as there are in people. And just as in people, early detection gives by far the best chance of successful management of most conditions. Only by regular, detailed examination and history taking, combined with appropriate laboratory tests, can we detect most conditions early.

Our goal is to keep your pets healthy for as long as possible, enjoying a good quality of life free from fear and discomfort. We can do this best by working with you to detect health issues early, then recommending treatment and preventative options to either remove the problem or manage it.

Senior health care delivered via regular consultation with your vet is the best you can do to increase the time available for you and aging pet to spend together.

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