

# ASK OUR VETERINARIANS

## What should I do to keep my senior pet healthy?

Pets have much shorter life spans than we do but, as they age, pets can have health problems similar to those seen in aging humans. Regular examinations and screening tests are the best way to keep your older pet healthy and with you for as long as possible.

Cats and dogs are considered to be senior citizens when they are approximately seven years old. Since they cannot talk to us, and often hide signs of illness, serious underlying problems may go unnoticed until they are advanced. As a result, they may be more difficult to treat.

As humans grow older, physicians recommend screening tests such as cholesterol checks, colon cancer screening, thyroid blood levels and other tests to detect early signs of illness and keep ourselves healthy. As veterinarians, we recommend that pets have yearly blood tests too.

All pets should be examined at least once a year by your veterinarian. Older pets should ideally be seen twice a year. A physical exam can often reveal many changes such as appearance of lumps or bumps on the skin, dental disease, changes to the eyes, heart murmurs and changes in the pet's weight.

Many owners do not realize their pets may be experiencing chronic pain associated with arthritis. Most pets will not cry or show that they are in pain, so arthritis often goes unnoticed even though a large percentage (up to 80%) of senior patients experience discomfort from arthritis. Slowing down, difficulty rising or no longer doing normal activity can be signs of arthritis or other illness. Joint disease can be managed in pets to improve their quality of life.

However, there are many things that the physical exam cannot reveal, and this is why screening tests are so important in our senior pets. Yearly blood tests that check liver and kidney function, electrolytes, thyroid levels, complete blood counts and other parameters are so helpful in making sure your older cat or dog is healthy inside and out. Other tests that may be recommended based on any abnormal physical exam findings or risks include: urinalysis, x-rays, blood pressure measurement and others. If early changes are found, progression of many diseases can often be slowed or prevented.

We all want our pets to live long healthy lives and be a part of our families for as long as possible. Please make sure to discuss an early detection screen for your pet today.

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