

Senior Wellness Guide

Designed and written by

The Staff of

The Animal Hospital of Clinton-Perryville

Client Continuing Education provided by the Receptionists, Technicians and Management of the Animal Hospital of Clinton/Perryville.

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Senior Wellness Plan for Dogs and Cats

The Golden Years

Thanks to advances in veterinary medicine, pets are living longer than ever before. Our goal is to ensure your dog or cat lives longer, and enjoys a quality life as he or she ages.

Our senior patients are very important to us and deserve a little extra attention. They have given us a lifetime of love and loyalty and we have to take some extra precautions in their golden years in order to safeguard their health - thus helping them live a longer and happier life.

While age itself is not a disease, it brings with it the wear and tear that time produces. Just as in human healthcare, the healthcare of our pets changes as they age and there are many things that we can do together.

Many pet owners assume that the decline of their pet's health or quality of life is inevitable and is simply a fact of "old age". There is a certain amount of deterioration; there are also many things you can do to make your pet's old age more comfortable and to delay the onset of disease.

Do not underestimate your power of observation. Be aware of any changes and report them to the doctor as soon as possible to diagnose a problem and treat it promptly.

Early detection of changes in your pets' body will allow us to make adjustments in the medical and nutritional care of your pet to correct or delay disease.

The Senior Exam

During a **Senior Wellness Exam** our doctors will be evaluating the following:

- Eyes
- Ears
- Mouth
- Teeth and gums
- Skin and coat condition
- Lymph nodes
- Musculoskeletal condition
- Heart
- Respiratory system
- Abdomen
- Digestive tract
- Urogenital system
- Neurological system
- Body condition (weight)
- Behavior

Potential Senior Problems:

Below is a list of some common age-related problems - **many of which are treatable:**

- Kidney disease
- Liver disease
- Heart disease
- Thyroid disease
- Cancer
- Vision or hearing loss
- Urinary incontinence
- Arthritis
- Dental disease
- Senility

We suggest an annual Senior Exam for young adults and younger seniors, and our older senior pets may benefit from twice-yearly exams. A wellness exam and blood work can be helpful to keep an eye on any problems your pet may already have and catch anything new that may develop.

Nutrition and Exercise

As our pets get older their nutrition and exercise requirements change. We strongly recommend feeding them senior foods. They contain higher levels of vitamin E and other anti-oxidants. Some senior foods contain low levels of glucosamine and chondroitin (see section on this supplement). There are also specific foods for specific health problems. Many of these senior foods are available over-the-counter, while others are prescription foods which must be purchased from a veterinarian.

Available over-the-counter:

- Science Diet Senior
- Eukanuba Senior Plus
- Iams Active Maturity
- Purina Dog Chow Senior
- Purina One Senior Protection Formula
- Nutro Max Senior

Check your pet's favorite brand and see if they have a senior food available!

Prescription foods available from veterinarians only:

- JM (Joint Mobility) from Purina
- J/D (Joint Diet) Prescription Diet from Hill's
- B/D(Brain Diet - for senility) Prescription Diet from Hill's
- G/D(Geriatric Diet) Prescription Diet from Hill's

There are a number of other prescription pet foods blended to treat specific health problems in dogs and cats. These foods would be prescribed by our doctors and can be purchased at our hospital. While we do keep some prescription foods in stock, many of them need to be special ordered. We recommend that you call us in advance to ensure that we have it available for you.

Keeping your pet at a **healthy weight** is always recommended. Additional weight can make your pet age prematurely (see Pet Age Chart). Now that he or she is a senior citizen, you may also need to adjust the amount of food you feed them as they become less active in order to avoid any weight problems. Being overweight isn't good for anyone!

Also be aware of the amount and kind of treats you offer them. Too many high calorie treats in a less active animal can quickly lead to an overweight pet!

If your pet has a hearty appetite and is already tipping the scales, you should talk to one of our doctors before embarking on a weight reduction program. We can help you choose the type of food and feeding schedule that will enable your pet to lose weight safely.

Exercise is another important issue for the senior pet. You should definitely keep them going as they get older. Lack of exercise will cause their bodies to deteriorate more quickly. You may have to tailor the amount or type of exercise you give your pet as they age, particularly if they have certain health issues (like arthritis). Try taking shorter and more frequent walks, or swimming, or a less strenuous agility course. But do keep them moving!

Keep your pet **mentally active**. Try to incorporate play that will challenge them mentally to keep them sharp. Review obedience commands, play hide-and-seek, or find-the-treat..... Exercising their body and mind will help them stay healthy mentally and physically.

Signs of potential problems:

- Increased drinking / urination
- A sudden weight loss or gain
- Change in appetite
- Repeated or recurrent vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Difficulty urinating or defecating
- Lameness
- Urine or bowel movement accidents in the house
- Change in vision
- Foul mouth odor or drooling
- Increasing size of the abdomen
- Hair loss
- Inability to chew dry food
- Blood in stool or urine
- Sudden collapse or bout of weakness
- A seizure
- Persistent coughing or gagging
- Breathing heavily or rapidly at rest, or excessive panting
- Lumps and bumps

Senior Wellness Plan

Laboratory Testing

Laboratory testing is an important aspect of **The Senior Wellness Exam**. These tests give the doctor vital information about your pet’s health.

The Senior Wellness Plans are tests we recommend as our patients age. We offer three different plans that we call Good, Better, Best so you have a choice based on the health of your pet and your own preferences. These tests would be in addition to your regular annual exams, fecal and heartworm tests and are recommended to be done at the time of your pet’s annual exam. Recommendations may change based on the age and condition of your pet.

Test:	Screens for:	Good	Better	Best
Laboratory-In House Chem Screen	Initial screening for liver and kidney disease and diabetes	✓		
Urinalysis	Urinary tract infections, crystals, kidney disease, liver disease, and diabetes	✓		
X-rays Chest	Heart and lung abnormalities		✓	
Laboratory – Mini Chem Screen	Initial screening for liver and kidney disease, diabetes and electrolytes		✓	
CBC	Anemia, infection, clotting, some cancers of the blood		✓	✓
Thyroid Blood Test	Dogs – low thyroid / Cats – high thyroid		✓	✓
Laboratory – Full Chem Screen	Detailed evaluation of liver, kidneys, electrolyte imbalance, endocrine disease			✓
Twice-a-year Exam	All body systems with a concentration on age-related problems			✓
X-Rays Chest and Abdomen	Heart and lung abnormalities Abnormalities of the internal organs such as liver, kidneys, spleen and G.I. tract			✓
EKG	Congestive heart failure and abnormal heart rhythms			✓
Glaucoma Exam	To prevent blindness-certain breeds are at a higher risk			✓
Blood pressure	Hypertension			✓

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Dog and Cat Age Chart

	Cats and Small Dog	Medium Dog	Large Dog	Giant Breed Dog
Pet's Age in Years	0 to 20 pounds	21 to 50 pounds	51 to 90 pounds	Over 90 pounds
5	36	37	40	42
6	40	42	45	49
7	44	47	50	56
8	48	51	55	64
9	52	56	61	71
10	56	60	66	78
11	60	65	72	86
12	64	69	77	93
13	68	74	82	101
14	72	78	88	108
15	76	83	93	115
16	80	87	99	123
17	84	92	104	
18	88	96	109	
19	92	101	115	
20	96	105	120	

Relative age in human years

ADULT <45 yrs	SENIOR 45-65 yrs	GERIATRIC 65 +
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Example: If your Labrador retriever is 10 years old and weighs 75 lbs, he's 66 years old. If he weighs over 90 lbs, he's the equivalent of 78 years old.

Arthritis

Definition:

Healthy Joints have cartilage covering the ends of the bones which provides cushioning to allow mobility without pain. In Arthritic Joints, cartilage is damaged by inflammation or abnormal calcium deposits. Arthritis is the most common cause of chronic pain in dogs and cats. (Yes – cats can get arthritis too!) This disease is progressive and results in mobility problems, stiffness, and pain. But no pet should have to suffer in silence. We have many options available today to prevent and treat arthritis and its aches and pains. With treatment, we can help your pet live a longer and more comfortable life.

Signs:

Unlike people, who like to complain when we ache, animals with chronic pain do not cry, whine, moan, or otherwise complain vocally when they have trouble getting up from their beds or doing stairs. Instead they alter their behavior, and it is up to us to notice. Has your pet stopped jumping up on the counter to steal food? (do you really think at age 12, he suddenly learned not to?) Or is your dog not as eager to go on his daily walk? These may be signs of arthritis, as are many of these:

- Reluctance to go up or down stairs
- Difficulty jumping
- Reluctance to play
- Slow to rise from a resting position
- Increased stiffness-especially after resting
- Limping or moving with an altered gait
- Constant licking of a joint or leg
- Loss of appetite
- Shaking or trembling
- Cracking sounds during joint movement
- Tires easily
- Difficulty squatting to urinate or defecate
- Lethargy
- Uncharacteristic hiding
- Aggressive or defensive reaction to touch

Animals at Greater Risk for arthritis:

- Over age 5
- Inactive or overweight
- Large breeds of dogs
- Animals who have suffered joint injuries or trauma
- Animals with hip or elbow dysplasia

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Prevention:

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Regular exercise appropriate for your dog's size and breed – consult with us . (Agility is not for every dog.)
- Appropriate and balanced nutrition for the size of your dog.
- Supplementation with minerals and vitamins ONLY when directed by a veterinarian

Treatments

There are many options available to ease the pain, eliminate the inflammation, and most important, slow the progression of the disease. In some specific cases, surgery may also be an option.

Supportive Home Care for Arthritic Pets:

- Feed a senior food or food that is specifically designed to help treat arthritis (see Food Section)
- Extra thick padding on bed
- Therapeutic pet beds (such as thick egg crate foam)
- Raised dog dishes – to enable your pet to eat without lowering his neck so far.
- Ramps for cars and stairs or to help your pet gain access to his favorite couch
- Rubber mats or carpet on slippery floors
- Routine toenail clipping
- Sweaters or coats for short haired breeds when outside in cold weather
- Provide a litterbox with lower sides
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Mild exercise appropriate for your pet's physical condition (discuss this with us as well)

Supplements

These supplements can be used in both dogs and cats and can be combined with NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs).

Supplements available are:

- Glucosamine and chondroitin
- Omega -3 fatty acids – Fish Oil or Flaxseed Oil capsules

Glucosamine and Chondroitin

This is a nutritional supplement which helps to maintain the structure of cartilage by inhibiting the enzymes that would break it down. It is safe for almost all animals with very few side effects ever reported. It may take 6-8 weeks before you see improvement, and it doesn't work for all pets. If the joints are already badly damaged, it may not be able to help.

Glucosamine and chondroitin is classified as a dietary supplement by the FDA, not as a drug. As such it is not as tightly regulated and some products on the market may not contain the full amount of ingredients listed on the label. We recommend products manufactured by major pharmaceutical companies, or if you have access to Consumer Reports, they did analyze several brands and you can check their website for their results. We also sell a doggy-chewable version and a sprinkle-on powder form for cats. If you buy the human form, dose your pet according to his weight as compared with the weight of an adult human.

Omega -3 Fatty Acids:

These have been found to have anti-inflammatory properties in pets as well as in people. Initially used for the treatment of itchy skin in dogs, they can also help relieve the inflammation of arthritis. While there are no toxicity issues to be concerned with, these products require at least one month of use to build to adequate levels. Effects are not usually dramatic, but can help.

Non-Steroidal Anti-inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs):

These drugs were developed as an improvement upon aspirin and similar human drugs which can have serious side effects in dogs and cats. For example, Tylenol is poisonous to cats, and ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) can cause bleeding stomach ulcers even at very low doses in dogs. Dogs need to use NSAIDs developed specifically for them, not those meant for humans. These NSAIDs reduce inflammation and help eliminate pain. They have also been found to have a protective effect on cartilage which prevents further damage.

Aspirin is an over the counter NSAID which relieves pain due to inflammation, but it does not protect cartilage from further damage and can cause stomach upsets and internal bleeding. It also deactivates platelets which slows down clotting and can increase the risk of bleeding should surgery or trauma occur. ***Do Not give aspirin to your pet without discussing it with our veterinarians.***

Blood testing is recommended prior to long-term use of NSAIDs and every 6-12 months after. NSAIDs may not be suitable for dogs with a history of elevated liver enzymes, liver disease, kidney disease, Cushing's disease, or who use phenobarbital. These dogs may need closer monitoring if we decide to use these medications.

Do not combine 2 or more NSAIDs or use with cortisone or over-the counter drugs such as Tylenol or aspirin.

Unfortunately at this time, there are no NSAIDs approved for use in cats. You may be able to use aspirin, but you must give **only ½ baby aspirin every 3 days. And Please call us first, to be sure it is safe for your cat.**

NSAIDS Available:

- Rimadyl – tablets and chewables
- Previcox – chewables
- Deramax – chewables
- Metacam – liquid
- Zubrin – Tablet that dissolves in mouth

Alternative Treatments:

- Acupuncture
- Shockwave Therapy

We can refer you to a specialist if you are interested.

Cortisone (i.e prednisone and other steroids):

These drugs are strong anti-inflammatory agents but with chronic use can lead to suppression of the immune system, excessive weight gain, and impaired cartilage healing. These drugs are considered a last resort in most cases, but may be used in pets who cannot take NSAIDs due to other serious diseases.

You can see there are many things we can do to make our senior friends comfortable. Please feel free to ask any of our staff members for advice specific to your pet – don't let them suffer in silence.

Finally.....

Enjoy your senior pet. This is a special time in your relationship. Yes, they are changing physically and mentally, they may be slowing down, but their love and loyalty never falters. We must appreciate their years of devotion and attentiveness, and now be extra attentive to them. They may require a little extra care, but haven't they earned it?