

# paw PRINTS

Fall Edition



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## Focus on SENIOR PETS

Our team here at Baywood Animal Hospital is dedicated to the health and well being of your pet. The prevention and early detection of disease gives us the opportunity to significantly improve your pet's quality of life and longevity.

It can be difficult to watch your pet age, but some of the signs once thought of as simply "old age" may actually be signs of a treatable medical condition. Beginning around age 7, your pet enters his or her senior years. Often, pets begin to develop diseases as they age, such as diabetes, heart disease, endocrine diseases and cancer. Pets often "hide" clinical signs of underlying disease and may not show signs of illness until the disease is well advanced. Early detection can help in disease prevention and can minimize suffering.

Wellness testing will help us determine if your pet is suf-

fering from many age-related diseases. Testing blood and urine allows us to:

- Establish baseline blood-work
- Identify existing health problems
- Monitor progress during treatment

Together, we can help your pet enjoy a lifetime of good health. You know your pet better than anyone else and can alert us to any changes in your pet before they become serious. We can give you the chance to brighten and extend your pet's "golden years". With a little well deserved extra care and attention, your pet can live a fuller, happier life, and make your good times together more than just a memory.

Please ask our veterinary team for more information on how we can help your pet enjoy a lifetime of good health.

### HOW OLD IS YOUR PET IN HUMAN YEARS?

AGE	HUMAN EQUIVALENT		
	SM	MED	LG
1	15	15	15
2	24	24	24
3	28	28	28
4	32	32	32
5	36	36	36
6	40	42	45
7	44	47	50
8	48	51	55
9	52	56	61
10	56	60	66
11	60	65	72
12	64	69	77
13	68	74	82
14	72	78	88
15	76	83	93
16	80	87	100+
17	84	92	
18	88	96	
19	92	100+	
20	100+		

## Does your Pet have Bad Breath?

Older pets, like older people, often have increased dental disease. The hard enamel surface of teeth will wear with age. Progressive gum disease over the years can lead to tooth root exposure and increased risk of periodontal disease. Bacteria associated with dental disease will pass into the blood stream and can affect the heart, kidneys and liver— causing life threatening problems.

Senior pets may require more frequent dental scaling

and polishing, and regular at-home dental care.

It is never too late to start a dental care program for your pet. Your first step should be a complete oral examination by your veterinarian. Older cats are susceptible not only to tooth loss, but also to painful oral lesions. Once the immediate problems are resolved, a commitment to dental care will protect those valuable teeth for life.



The health of your pet can change rapidly as they age, and changes can go unnoticed.

## KEEP EXERCISING!!

Exercise is yet another aspect of preventive senior care for your pets. Keep them going as they get older— if they are cooped up or kept lying down, their bodies will deteriorate much more quickly.

You may want to ease up a bit on the exercise with an arthritic or debilitated pet. Otherwise, you should keep

them as active— mentally and physically— as possible in order to keep them sharp.

A short walk every day, paired with interactive play will keep your best friend fit and happy through his golden years.

It's up to you to be sure your senior pet is healthy and in shape for the activity you've chosen.

## DID YOU KNOW...

- ◆ Spending time with your dog or cat can lower your level of anxiety
- ◆ Stroking your dog or cat will reduce your heart rate and blood pressure
- ◆ Owning a dog can reduce your cholesterol
- ◆ Pet owners have fewer health problems
- ◆ Pet owners have better psychological well-being



## What can I do to make my senior cat happy?

Most cats age gracefully and require few changes to their regimen. Since older cats do not generally respond well to change, it is important that any changes are introduced slowly.

Elderly cats should have easy access to a warm bed, situated where the cat can sleep

safely without fear of disturbance.

It is strongly recommended that you feed your older cat a premium brand senior diet, such as Hills or Science Diet.

They should always have easy access to fresh drinking water.

As cats age, some will experience a reduced

ability to control urination and defecation. To reduce the risk of “accidents”, it may be necessary to allow access to multiple litter boxes.

Senior cats should have regular health checks with their veterinarian every 6 months.

## The Effects of Age-Sensory Changes

With the senior years comes a general “slowing down” in pets. As their major senses (sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell) dull, you may find that your pet has a slower response to general external stimuli. This loss of sensory perception is often a slow, progressive process, and it may even escape your notice. The best remedy for gradual sensory reduction is to keep your pet active—playing and training are excellent ways to keep their senses alert.

Pets may also be affected mentally as they age. Just as aging humans begin to forget things and are more susceptible to mental conditions, your aging animals may also begin to confront age-related cognitive and behavior changes. Most of these changes are rather subtle and can be addressed in a proactive manner. Regular senior health exams can help catch and treat these problems before they control your pet's life.

Cats and dogs age 4-5 times the rate of people. Having an annual blood test for a cat or dog is equivalent to a blood test taken every 5 years for a person.

## Why perform routine blood tests on senior pets?

- ◆ Many diseases afflicting senior pets can be treated more successfully if caught earlier— even before pets are noticeably sick
- ◆ Older pets are more often on medications which may affect liver or kidneys
- ◆ Older pets are more likely to be afflicted by certain diseases

## Physical Changes

The physical changes your pets experience are generally easier to spot than the sensory changes. As the body ages, its ability to respond to infection is reduced, and the healing process takes longer. Therefore, it is crucial to consult your veterinarian if you notice a significant change in behavior or the physical condition of your pet.

Many of the signs indicating that animals are

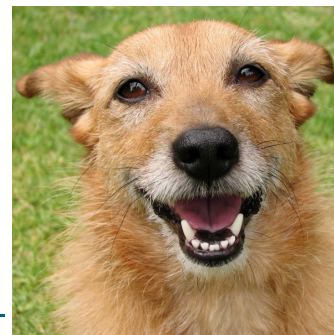
approaching senior citizenship are the same for both cats and dogs, but they can indicate a variety of different problems.

A very common and frustrating problem for aging pets is inappropriate elimination. The kidneys are one of the most common organ systems to wear out on a cat or dog, and as kidney function changes, your once well behaved pet may have trouble controlling his bathroom habits. If

you are away all day, he may simply not be able to hold it any longer, or urine may dribble out while he sleeps at night. In addition, excessive urination or incontinence may be indicative of diabetes or kidney failure, both of which are treatable if caught early enough.

Please speak to your veterinarian about what we can do to detect the early onset of kidney and other age related disease.

Early intervention leads to a lifetime of good health.



## Obesity a Common Problem in Senior Pets

Obesity is a common health problem for pets, and seniors are more likely than younger pets to be overweight due to decreased activity and reduced daily energy needs.

The ideal weight is when you can easily feel your dog's ribs, with about 1/8 inch of fat covering them. Your pet's weight is an important area of concern because obesity increases the risk of serious diseases and health problems, such as diabetes, ar-

thritis, and heart and lung disorders.

Though some medical conditions can cause obesity, overfeeding is generally the culprit. As a senior dog or cat's metabolism slows, caloric needs decline. If you don't adjust the food intake of your older pet, weight gain is likely. Weight loss treatment steps for your senior pet include:

⇒ limiting the number of calories consumed

⇒ Feeding 2 or 3 small meals daily, rather than one large meal

⇒ Increasing exercise to burn more calories

⇒ Modifying behavior to prevent regaining lost weight

⇒ Choosing the proper senior pet food that provides the proper balance of protein, fat, calories, vitamins and minerals for seniors

"If your dog is too fat, you aren't getting enough exercise"

## Wellness Testing for your Pets

A healthy appearing senior pet (over 7 years of age) could be hiding symptoms of a disease that may not be detectable during a physical exam. Wellness testing is recommended as routine screening against many health problems. Wellness tests are recommended every few years for adult pets, and every year for senior pets. Wellness

testing can be done with bloodwork, a urinalysis, or both.

**FACT:** Cats can lose up to 75% of their Kidney function before showing any visible signs of illness!



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“In order to keep a true perspective of one’s importance, everyone should have a dog that will worship him and a cat that will ignore him”



## Watch for These Common Symptoms in Your Senior Pets

- NOT ACTING LIKE HIMSELF/HERSELF
- INTERACTING LESS WITH FAMILY
- RESPONDING LESS OFTEN OR LESS ENTHUSIASTICALLY
- SHOWING CHANGES IN BEHAVIOR/ACTIVITY LEVEL
- HAVING DIFFICULTY CLIMBING STAIRS
- HAVING DIFFICULTY JUMPING
- EXHIBITING INCREASED STIFFNESS OR LIMPING
- DRINKING AND URINATING MORE OFTEN
- CHANGING EATING PATTERNS
- NOTICEABLY GAINING OR LOSING WEIGHT
- LOSING HOUSING TRAINING HABITS
- CHANGING SLEEPING PATTERNS
- BECOMING CONFUSED OR DISORIENTED
- CHANGING HAIR COAT, SKIN, OR NEW LUMPS OR BUMPS
- SCRATCHING MORE OFTEN
- EXHIBITING BAD BREATH/RED OR SWOLLEN GUMS
- SHOWING TREMORS OR SHAKING

### Nutrition Corner

Senior pets have different dietary requirements than do their younger counterparts. Older pets do not need as much energy or fat, as they are not as active. A restricted protein level in food reduces the strain on kidneys (which are often not functioning as well in older years), and decreased phosphate reduces risk of kidney disease.

Certain nutrients such as glucosamine and chondroitin can help re-



duce arthritis in older pets.

We recommend Hills Prescription Diet G/D or Hills Prescription Diet T/D (dental diet) food for dogs and cats over 7 years of age, and large and giant breeds of dogs over 5 years of age.

Dogs with arthritis can benefit from improved nutrition with Hills Prescription Diet J/D (joint diet), with omega fatty acids, antioxidants and glucosamine.