

Senior Pets Special

When is my dog senior?

Unfortunately there is no fixed age for a pet to be called senior. It all depends on the species, breed and condition of your pet. In general, veterinarians call a pet senior when he or she is in the last third of their normal life expectancy. This means that for instance a poodle (normally lives to be 15 years of age) will be called senior at the age of 10 but for instance a Great Dane will be called senior as young as five years old since their normal life expectancy is approximately 7 years.



When is my cat senior?

The common belief that every "cat year" is worth seven "human years" is not entirely true. In reality, a one-year-old cat is physiologically similar to a 16-year-old human, and a two-year-old cat is like a person of 21. For every year thereafter, each cat year is worth about four human years. Using this formula, a ten-year-old cat is similar age wise to a 53-year-old person, a 12-year-old cat to a 61-year-old person, and a 15-year-old cat to a person of 73. This means that in general a cat is considered senior at the age of 12/13.



Physical and sensory changes in your senior pet

When your pet ages he/she will go through some (major) changes. These changes can be physical as well as sensory. Sensory changes in your pet's senior years show 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 often is a slow, progressive process, and it may even escape your notice. 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 pets 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. Remember sometimes it is easier to spot those changes for someone who does not see the pet daily and the vet has a trained eye to acknowledge disease precursors at an early start.

The physical changes your pet experiences are generally easier to spot than the sensory changes. As the body wears out, its ability to respond to infection is reduced, and the healing process takes longer. Therefore, it is crucial to consult a 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. Do not think they are age related and therefore you will just have to learn to live with them, for most problems there are useful treatments and explanations that make the situation or problems more livable.

Nutrition for senior pets

Older pets have different food requirements. There are specialized senior foods available at the clinic for your pet. These senior foods are lower in calories and protein than regular foods to keep your pet's weight balanced and reduce consumption of nutrients that are risk factors for the development of diseases, as well as organ- or age-related changes. Some foods also contain glucosamine and chondroitin for joint mobility. Please approach our staff for all food-related advice.

Avoid obesity

With a decrease in activity and a slower metabolism in older pets, obesity can become a serious problem. Not only is excess weight bad for your animal's heart and lungs, but it can also add extra stress to joints and bones. Special diet and senior food formulas are a good option, but for really heavy/overweight pets you also have to reduce portion size.



Comfort for old joints

To protect your pet's older bones and to make him/her much more comfortable, you can provide your aging pet with a specifically designed orthopedic bed. There are special beds with "medical-grade" orthopedic foam to distribute weight evenly and reduce pressure on joints, available via our clinic. These beds also help your pet to get out of bed in the morning because it reduces stiffness significantly. If you would like to read more about these orthopedic beds, please [click here](#).

Another option to protect his joints is to use so-called joint lubricators like glucosamine and chondroitin. This can be given to your dog as a food supplement. For more information you can contact the clinic at 04-3408601

Exercise

Exercise is important at every stage in your pet's life; however, with senior pets you need to adjust the frequency and intensity. Rather than taking your pet out for a walk of one hour, take him/her for 5-6 times daily for only 10-15 minutes. This lubricates the joints without wearing out the lubrication due to excessive work out. Therefore no further damage will be done to the joints and the process of degeneration will be slowed down.

By offering short workouts your pet doesn't lose muscle mass, tone, and will stay more alert and tuned in. Shorter, more frequent walks or swims can help keep your pet sharp, in shape, and his/her weight under control.

If your pet has arthritis or is stiff and sore, giving him access to a ramp to get up and down from higher areas - vehicles or furniture - will make it much easier on his joints, and allow him to maintain some of the adventure he enjoyed as a youngster.

