

LIVING WITH AN OLDER PET



To improve or maintain the quality of your older pet's life, it's important to recognize "aging" problems early. Here are just a few ways you can help your pet cope with them.

AN INCREASE IN BODY FAT - Older pets have a tendency to gain weight and become obese which can be quite hard on their joints, heart and lungs. An obese pet can also have a higher anesthetic risk as well as a shorter life span. Older obese cats are more likely to develop diabetes.

What can you do?

1. Think about what you are feeding your pet. Just reducing your pet's regular diet may not be enough. Depending on your pet's nutritional needs he may require a low calorie high fiber food. A high quality diet with enough protein, fatty acids, vitamins and minerals will help keep him healthy.
2. Treats are o.k. but...too many can cause a significant change in their weight. There are many low calorie treats out there some even with additives for their skin and coat as well as their aging joints. If your pet receives a few more treats then he should throughout the day think about reducing his supper buy a small amount.
3. Daily activities such as leash walks or a game of hide and seek can be an enjoyable way for your dog and you to burn off a few extra calories!



DECLINING VISION AND HEARING LOSS

Eye changes often begin around 7-8 years of life; senile or age-related cataract formation is common in pets older than 12 years. Hearing loss is also quite common and tends to be very gradual in the aging animal.

How can you help?

1. It's important to have your senior pet's eyes examined at least yearly. Eye changes may be a clue to diseases elsewhere in the body.
2. Make sure older pets are leash-walked and not allowed to roam free. Poor vision increases their risk of being injured by a car or another animal.
3. Have their eyes checked if you notice squinting, discharge from the eye(s), redness or pain on petting the animal's head or face.
4. Older dogs may bite if startled (they can't see or hear as well). This doesn't mean they are aggressive but children should be warned not to go near sleeping dogs. Make sure to give them lots of space and warning with your approach.

BEHAVIOR CHANGES



Aging in both people and pets may cause changes within the brain. There is an actual drop in the weight of the brain and the way it processes information. Older pets may seem confused or disoriented. They may sleep more, lose houstraining, and become disinterested in their environment and sometimes their owner.

Things to help them cope...

1. Be patient with your older pet.
2. If you are concerned about your pet's behavior, see your veterinarian. There are medications that can help.
3. Keep them as active as possible, try taking your pet on walks through different trails. This is very enjoyable for your dog and they love all the different smells. This may even bring out the explorer in them!
4. Hide treats or toys around the yard to trick them into exercising, this also keeps their brain active.
5. It can help to have a radio or leave a light on where your pet sleeps.

HEAT AND COLD INTOLERANCE



As your pets age, they become more susceptible to extremes in temperature. They "feel" the cold more so than a younger pet and they may have a decreased tolerance to heat. This is because they produce less of the hormones needed to maintain normal body temperature.

How can you help?

1. Your pet may appreciate a coat in the winter and your brisk walks may need to be a little shorter.
2. Your outside dog may need extra shelter from the sun as well as lots of water. Older pets are much more prone to becoming dehydrated.
3. Never leave your older pet in a vehicle during the summer (this should be the rule at any age)!
4. Maybe think about bringing your outside dog inside during those frosty evenings. Keeping their joints warm will help with those morning aches and pains.



KIDNEY PROBLEMS

The first sign of kidney problems may be a pet that drinks more and urinates more. He may lose his appetite, vomit or become sluggish. Older animals have more problems with urinary tract infection and some older female dogs develop urinary incontinence.

Things you can do.

1. It is critical that your older pet drinks well. This may mean providing canned food instead of just dry to increase their water intake.
2. Remember, loss of smell can play a big role in your older pet's appetite. This is especially a concern in cats, where their sense of smell is critical to enjoying a meal. Try warming their canned food to release more flavor.
3. If you notice any change in your pet's drinking and urinating behavior, talk to your veterinarian, who may recommend checking your pet's blood and urine for kidney disease or diabetes. A special diet may be recommended.
4. If your pet bed wets, medications can help, this could be caused by a decrease in hormones or due to an infection.