

## Changes in eating habits

Oral hygiene should be an important consideration at all ages and you need to attend to your pet's **dental health**. If you notice a reluctance to eat, or discomfort while eating, your pet may have tooth and/or gum problems.

A change in **weight** may occur in older pets. Older pets may not be as active as they once were and their metabolism may have changed, so they have a tendency to gain weight. If you notice that your dog or cat has been losing or gaining weight, take him/her to the veterinarian immediately for a checkup. Sometimes it may be difficult to notice weight changes so regular weight checks (at home or at the vets) may help identify any problems.

## **General care**

Older pets don't cope as well with changes in **temperature** and so in winter make sure they have warm comfortable bedding and you could even consider putting a jersey on them. Keep up with your **tick and flea control** regimen and remember to keep **de-worming** as older pets can be more susceptible to parasites

## **Easing into those golden years**

To help keep your pet healthy for as long as possible it's important that your pet receive **regular veterinary care** and **annual vaccinations** and that he/she is eating a good quality, well-balanced **diet**. Nutrition is extremely important to your pet's over

all health. Make sure his/her diet is correct for size, breed, age and habits. If your pet begins experiencing medical problems he/she may be recommended a specially formulated diet. Always discuss any dietary changes you might make with your veterinarian first.

## **The final decision**

Now, for the hardest decision of all - having the grace, courage and kindness to help your pet die peacefully and pain-free. **Euthanasia** is an act of love towards a pet which is no longer able to enjoy life and if, during his life, your pet has been a cherished member of your family, this is the last, and often most compassionate, duty you can perform for him/her. Spend time discussing this decision with your vet so that you can recognise when it is kinder for your pet to be euthanased to prevent suffering. Also speak to your vet before bringing your pet in to find out what to expect when the procedure is done.

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## Hilton Veterinary Hospital

## Geriatrics



# Pet Parenting a Geriatric

Like people, pets age and although you should continue to provide play, exercise and training - adjustments may have to be made as older pets may have trouble with normal, everyday habits. Many problems arise during the aging process that can and must be properly addressed and managed to ensure a comfortable life for your pet in his/her golden years.

## Understanding the age of your pet

The average lifespan of a dog is 8 to 15 years. Cats may live up to 21 years. Generally the larger the dog, the shorter the lifespan. For example, a large dog breed, such as a Great Dane, is considered to be an old dog by the age of 6. Smaller dogs, such as Poodles, may not show signs of aging until they reach 11 or 12 years old. Importantly, though, we must consider our pets as "senior" once they turn **7 years** and adjust their diets appropriately and you need to be on the look out for the signs of aging that are described below and bring them to the attention of your vet.

## Changes in hearing

A sign that your pet's hearing is impaired could be that there is little or no response when you call for them. This may be confused with a pet not wanting or not being

able to respond, such as a dog suffering from arthritis, or a sick pet. Or you may find that he/she starts barking for no apparent reason and an underlying reason could be reduced hearing ability. Speak to your vet if you are concerned.

## Poor eyesight

Your pet's eyesight may become poorer as they get older, due to age-related changes in the eye itself and in the processing of visual images centrally. The most common ocular aging change of all, lenticular sclerosis, in which the pupil of the eye appears grayish, does not significantly affect vision at all. Cataracts, however, which are also more common in elderly dogs, do impair vision. A pet with poor eyesight may bump into doors or furniture and have reduced activity. In time, your pet should be able to adapt to his/her poor eyesight by learning the position of furniture and how to get by in the house or outdoors.

## Painful joint problems

Older pets are often handicapped by arthritis or other painful joint problems. If you notice a reluctance to get up, stiffness when walking, a reluctance to jump, or something more subtle like a reduced activity level then your pet may need help. Analgesics, nutritional supplements or prescription food, soft bedding and gentle exercise can bring many pets relief and help manage their discomfort.

## Changes in house-training habits

Excessive thirst and frequent or seemingly uncontrolled urination may be a sign of kidney problems, heart problems or diabetes in an older pet. If your old pet starts messing in usual places, he/she may be incontinent or, again, they may be too sore or weak to walk outside and squat because of painful arthritis or illness. Regular checkups are important to check for conditions which may lead to inappropriate elimination. Loss of house training could also be a sign of degenerative brain disease which is associated with aging.

## Changes in behaviour

Behaviour problems can sometimes be attributed to age-related degeneration within the brain known as **Canine Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (CDS)** in dogs, but similar problems can arise when changes occur in the household or environment to which it may be difficult for senior pets to adapt. Signs to watch out for are: disorientation (you may notice aimless wandering, monotonous barking or panic attacks), decreased social interaction with humans (delayed recognition or a lack of response to people he/she knows), changes in sleeping patterns, and/or a loss of

