



The Aging Pet: What You Can Do

Pets age faster than people. We have all heard that pets age 7 years for every 1 human year. However, many factors influence the rate your pet ages including:

- Breed
- Adult size
- Nutrition and lifestyle.

Comparative Ages of Dogs and Humans				
Dog Years	0-20 lbs	21-50 lbs	51-90 lbs	>90 lbs
5	36	37	40	42
6	40	42	45	49
7	44	47	50	56
10	56	60	66	78
12	64	69	77	93
15	76	83	93	115
20	96	105	120	

Comparative Ages of Cats and Humans	
Cat Years	Human Years
1	15
2	24
5	36
7	45
12	64
15	76
18	88
21	100

In general, it can be said that pets are "older" when they reach 6 to 7 years of age and after this age we may begin to detect subtle changes in organ function. This is why we, as veterinarians, begin to recommend *certain tests, diets, supplements, and other measures* to insure your pet may live as long and pain free as possible. In fact, the general pet population is living longer because of improved health care. **Parasite prevention, diet, vaccines, exercise, and weight** should be considered from birth.

It is important to know that many changes you notice in your pet that you attribute to "old age" may in fact be preventable or reversible. For example, an **arthritic** animal may become less active but with **proper diet, exercise and treatment** may begin to "act like a puppy or kitten" again.

Diseases are more easily treated if they are detected early in the disease process before significant organ function has been lost.

- More frequent and more extensive physical exams can help detect changes in your pet's physical condition. **Enlarged lymph nodes, skin and abdominal masses, heart murmurs, and respiratory difficulty** are all things that can be detected on physical exams, and are all things that need early attention.
- Laboratory tests on your pet's blood, urine, and feces can often reveal a problem before your pet begins to show outward signs of disease. Our routine "geriatric profile" screens for **liver function, kidney function, diabetes, infection, anemia, thyroid function, dehydration, intestinal parasites**, and other signs of metabolic disease.
- Your own careful **observations** of your pet at home can also provide clues to his / her overall health. Changes in activity level, attitude, appetite, water intake, urination, bowel movements, or body weight can all be important.

Dental care becomes increasingly important as your pet ages. When routine dental care is neglected, **gingivitis, painful chewing, tooth loss, periodontal disease and even heart disease** can all become serious problems. 70% of older cats and 80% of older dogs have some form of dental disease. Routine dental care has been shown to increase the length your pet's life by minimizing the bacteria that are the cause of these serious problems.

Feeding your dog or cat an appropriate diet also becomes more critical as he/she gets older. Age, body condition, weight, degenerative joint disease, and organ insufficiencies can all influence his/her dietary needs. We recommend Hills Science Diet ® Mature Adult and Prescription Diets appropriate for your pet's specific condition.

Geriatric (senior) wellness programs are typically tailored to the individual. Factors such as your pet's age, previous illness, overall health status, medications your pet may be taking, and your degree of commitment to your pet's wellness influence the frequency of visits and the type of screening tests run. **For your pet's health, plan on implementing a geriatric health program for your senior pet.**