

Celebrating Seniors!

Living longer,

Living better,

Starting at age 7

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Senior Dog Care Brochure

Together, we can help your pet enjoy a lifetime of good health.

Thanks to advances in Veterinary medicine, pets are living longer than ever before. However with this increased lifespan comes an increase in the types of ailments that can afflict senior pets. As pets reach the golden years, there are a variety of conditions and diseases that they can face, including weight and mobility changes; osteoarthritis; kidney, heart, and liver disease; tumours and cancers; hormone disorders such as diabetes and thyroid imbalance; and many others. Just as the health care needs of humans change as we age, the same applies to pets. It's critical for pet owners to work closely with their veterinarian to devise a health plan that is best for their senior pet.

Together, we can help your Canine Companion. You know your pet better than anyone else and

can alert us to any changes in your pet before they become serious.

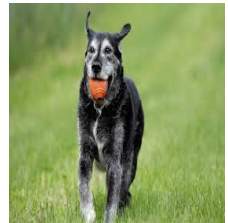
To assist you in providing optimal care for your senior dog(s), we have developed a set of Senior Care Guidelines for Dogs. These guidelines provide a framework for us to provide optimal care for all senior pets. Major highlights of these guidelines are covered in this brief brochure.

When Does ‘Senior’ Start?

So when is your dog considered a senior? Generally, smaller breeds of dogs live longer than larger breeds, and cats live longer than dogs.

Beyond that, the life span will vary with each individual, and we will be able to help you determine what stage of life your furry friend

is in. Keep in mind that some small dog breeds may be considered senior at 10-13 years, while giant breeds are classified as seniors at ages as young as five. We are your best source for more information to determine when your pet reaches the golden years.



Senior Health Exams

Scheduling regular Veterinary examinations is one of the most important steps you can take to keep your pets in tip-top shape. When dogs enter their senior years, these health examinations are more important than ever. Senior care, which starts with the regular Veterinary examination by our Team, is needed to catch and delay the onset or progress of disease and for the early detection of problems such as organ failure and osteoarthritis.

Remember – early diagnosis results in earlier treatment and (generally) better patient outcomes. Most Veterinarians recommend that healthy senior dogs visit the Veterinarian every six months for a complete exam and laboratory testing. This is our belief as well.

Keep in mind that every year for a dog is equivalent to 5–7 human years of ageing. In order to stay current with your senior pet's health care, twice-a-year exams are a must. During the senior health exam, we will ask you a series of questions regarding any changes in

The health of your pet can change rapidly as he or she ages and changes can go unnoticed.

your pet's habits, behaviour as well as many other things like eating, drinking, urination and levels of activity.

We will also conduct a complete physical examination of all of your pet's body systems (heart, lungs, skin, eyes, ears, musculoskeletal, lymphatic, teeth, mouth and much more).

Client education and laboratory testing are also key components of the senior exam and wellness profile.

Laboratory Testing

Just like your doctor, we (Veterinarians) depend a lot on laboratory results to help us understand the status of your dog's health.

When your pet is healthy, laboratory tests provide a means to determine his/her 'baseline' values. Then when your pet is sick, we can more easily determine whether or not your pet's lab values are abnormal by comparing the baseline values to the current values.

Subtle changes in these laboratory test results, even in the outwardly healthy animal, may signal the presence of an underlying disease.

We recommend that dogs at middle age undergo laboratory tests at least annually.

Early intervention leads to a lifetime of good health.

During the senior years, laboratory tests are recommended every six months even for healthy dogs. At a minimum, the following tests are recommended:

Complete Blood Count This common test measures the number of red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets in a given sample of blood. The numbers and types of these cells give us the information needed to help diagnose anaemia, infections and leukaemia. A complete blood count also helps monitor your pet's response to some treatments.

Urinalysis Laboratory analysis of urine is a tool used to detect the presence of one or more specific substances that normally do not appear

in urine, such as protein, sugar, white blood cells or blood. A measurement of the dilution or concentration of urine is also helpful in diagnosing diseases. Urinalysis can assist in the diagnosis of urinary-tract infections, diabetes, dehydration, kidney problems and many other conditions.

Blood-Chemistry Panel Blood-chemistry panels measure electrolytes, enzymes and chemical elements such as calcium and phosphorous. This information helps determine how various organs, such as the kidneys, pancreas, and liver, are currently functioning. The results of these tests help your veterinarian formulate an accurate diagnosis, prescribe proper therapy, and monitor the response to treatment. Further testing may be recommended based on the results of these tests.

Parasite Evaluation Microscopic examination of your pet's faeces can provide information about many different kinds of diseases, such as difficulties with digestion, internal bleeding, and disorders of the pancreas. Most importantly, though, this test confirms the presence of

intestinal parasites, such as roundworm, hookworm, whipworm, tapeworm and giardia.

Additionally, depending on your individual pet's condition and other factors, other tests and assessments might be recommended.

These include

- heartworm tests;
- blood pressure evaluation;
- eye pressure examination (tonometry) if glaucoma is suspected;
- urine protein evaluation;
- cultures;
- imaging such as x-rays, ultrasound, and echocardiography; electrocardiography, and
- other special ophthalmic evaluations, among others.

Additional tests become especially important in evaluating senior pets that show signs of

sickness or are being prepared for anaesthesia and surgery.

The Effects of Age

Sensory Changes

With the senior years comes general 'slowing down' in As their major senses (hearing, taste, touch and smell) dull, you may find 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.



The best remedy for gradual sensory reduction is to keep your pet active—playing and training are excellent ways to keep their senses sharp. This is just like us starting to do more crosswords and 'brain' activities as we get older – it helps to keep us younger.

Dogs may also be affected mentally as they age. Just as aging humans begin to forget

things and are more susceptible to mental conditions, your ageing Canine Companions may also begin to confront age-related cognitive and behaviour 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.

Physical Changes

The physical changes your dogs experience 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 us if you notice a significant change in behaviour or in 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 (see Signs of a Problem, below).

- A very common and frustrating problem for aging dogs especially is inappropriate elimination.

The kidneys are one of the most common organ systems to wear out on a cat or dog, and as hormone imbalance affects the function of the kidneys, your once well-behaved pet may have trouble controlling his bathroom habits. If you are away all day, s/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.

Nutrition

All older dogs benefit from specially formulated food that is designed with older bodies in mind.

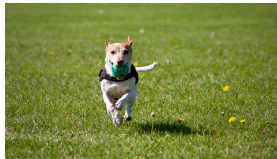


Obesity in dogs is often the result of reduced exercise and overfeeding and is a risk factor for problems such as heart disease.

- In fact there is a TWO in THREE chance that your dog is actually overweight or obese!

Because older pets often have different nutritional requirements, these special foods can help keep your pet's weight under control and reduce consumption of nutrients that are risk factors for the development of diseases, as well as organ- or age-related changes.

Exercise



- Exercise is yet another aspect of preventive geriatric care for your senior canine companions.

You should definitely 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 cat or dog. Otherwise, you should keep them as active—mentally and physically—as possible in order to keep them sharp.

Surgery for the Older Dog In the event we are considering surgery or any other procedure in which anaesthesia is needed, special considerations are taken to help ensure the safety of your senior pet.

- We recommend all senior dogs undergo the laboratory testing mentioned above, ideally within two weeks of any anesthetized procedure.
- A blood pressure evaluation and additional tests might also be recommended, depending on your individual pet.
- These screening tools can provide critical information to the health care team to help determine the proper anaesthesia and drug protocol for your pet, as well as make you aware of any special risk factors that might be encountered.

Pain Management

Pets experience pain just like humans do, and we take steps to identify, prevent, and minimize pain in all senior dogs.

Our guidelines use pain assessment as the fourth vital sign (along with temperature, pulse and respiration).

The different types of pain include;

- acute pain, which comes on suddenly as a result of an injury, surgery, or an infection, and
- chronic pain, which is long lasting and usually develops slowly (such as arthritis and back pain).

You can play a key role in monitoring your pet to determine whether s/he suffers from pain.

For more information, see our article on [Pain Management for Pets](#).

To help ensure your pet lives comfortably during the senior life stage, it's critical to work together (you and us), to tailor a senior wellness plan that is best for your dog. Be sure to monitor behaviour and physical conditions and report anything unusual so that we can help your pet head into the twilight years with ease.

Signs of

Speak up for your pet!

Tell us about any changes you've observed.

- Sudden weight loss or gain
- Significant decrease in appetite or failure to eat for more than two days
- Significant increase in appetite
- Repeated vomiting
- Diarrhoea lasting over three days
- Difficulty in passing stool or urine
- Change in housetraining habits

- Lameness lasting more than five days or lameness in more than one leg
- Noticeable decrease in vision
- Open sores or scabs on the skin that persist for more than one week
- Foul mouth odour or drooling that lasts more than two days
- Increasing size of the abdomen
- Increasing inactivity or amount of time spent sleeping
- Hair loss, especially if accompanied by scratching or if in specific areas (as opposed to generalized)
- Excessive panting
- Inability to chew dry food
- Blood in stool or urine
- Sudden collapse or bout of weakness
- A seizure (convulsion)
- Persistent coughing or gagging

- Breathing heavily or rapidly at rest

As usual – if you have any questions at all, we are only a phone call away on [02-4872 1144](tel:02-48721144) or info@highlandsveterinaryhospital.com.au

Join The Family: Enjoy The Freedom



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