



## MANAGING THE HEALTH OF YOUR SENIOR DOG

Optimum health care can add years to the life of your pet as well as substantially decrease your cost of treating medical problems associated with aging. We would make the following recommendations:

### **Comprehensive Physical Examinations:**

Since pets age 5-7 times faster than humans, it can be estimated that one physical examination for a pet is equivalent to one exam every 5-7 years in humans. The exam should include a very detailed medical history along with a “nose to tail” physical examination. In later years, a comprehensive physical examination should be performed every 6 – 12 months depending on any specific medical problems discovered in your pet. This screening could include an ECG screening and glaucoma screening.

### **Laboratory Screening For Diseases:**

Many medical problems can be diagnosed through the use of laboratory diagnostic testing long before clinical signs of disease become evident. Specific recommendations for your pet may include:

- Disease screening for Lyme/Heartworm/Ehlichia/Anaplasma
- Urinalysis
- Complete Blood Counts
- Internal Parasite Examination
- Blood Chemistry Screening
- Thyroid Screening

### **Nutrition:**

Feed the highest quality pet food you can afford. Read labels carefully. Ideal diets for senior pets would have less sodium and fat, and more fiber than regular adult foods. Higher quality and premium foods are more digestible and result in less stool volume. If a specific medical condition is diagnosed, a specific prescription diet may be best for your pet. Vitamin supplements help keep the skin healthy and may enhance the pet’s immune system. Fatty acid supplements may be useful for skin problems, arthritis, & inflammatory bowel disease. **DO NOT** feed table scraps or snacks unless formulated for the senior pet. New pet treats are now available from the clinic that is very palatable as well as healthy for your pet.

As the pet gets older, water consumption becomes much more important. Increased thirst and water consumption is a very important in several senior pet medical problems. Be sure to notify the clinic if you see changes in water consumption.

### **Keep Your Pet Under Control:**

Letting pets run loose takes years off their life. Statistics show pets spending the majority of their life outdoors do not live as long. Be sure your pet is microchipped. Older pets lose their sense of hearing and vision; increasing the chances they will become lost.

**Vaccinations:**

Depression of the immune system occurs in older pets making them more susceptible to the common infectious diseases. Maintaining vaccinations is very important because of the potential for decreased resistance in these pets. Vaccination recommendations must be individualized for each pet based on breed, age, physical condition, diseases prevalent in the area, etc.

**Heartworm and Internal Parasite Prevention:**

Heartworms are a serious & deadly problem. All pets should be on heartworm prevention all year long along with a broad spectrum preventive for internal parasites.

**Prevent Obesity:**

Extra pounds burden the heart, kidneys, muscles, & joints, decreasing life expectancy 30-50%. Like people, obesity also promotes the development of diabetes. It is much harder to lose weight than to prevent the weight gain. If your pet is prone to weight gains, feeding diets made to maintain weight and limited access to food is important for control.

**Dental Hygiene:**

Periodontal disease is a very serious problem in senior pets. Tartar buildup is a result of bacterial infection in the mouth. Once these bacteria become attached to the teeth below the gum line, it becomes a "seed" of infection that spreads all over the body. Many respiratory, kidney, liver, and heart infections are a result of bacteria spreading from the mouth. It is important to note that the "real" problem is what you don't see (what is below the gum line) rather than what you do see (above the gum line). What you don't see can certainly be slowly killing your pet. Remember that, in people, the first sign of a dental problem is pain. Dogs are notoriously good at hiding pain. So, if you wait for dental disease to become noticeable, you can be sure that your dog has been in pain for a significant period of time leading up to this discovery. Dental exams, routine use of dental hygiene products, and dental scaling/polishing are important for a healthy mouth. Consider feeding the dental diets, such as the Hill's t/d, as treats to aid keeping teeth clean.

**Grooming & Nail Trimming:**

Maintaining healthy skin & toe nails makes your pet more comfortable, prevents odor, and makes your pet "shine." Notify the clinic if you observe excessive scratching, flaking, fleas, ticks, sores, or bald spots. Skin growths are also more common in senior pets. Early removal decreases pain, your costs, and chances of spreading.

**Flea & Tick Control:**

We now have excellent weapons in our war on fleas & ticks. We recommend the new topical flea control drops available at the clinic. DO NOT BE FOOLED! The over-the-counter "look alikes" are not the same – and in fact can be fatal to your pet.

## **Medicating Your Pet:**

**NEVER** give human medications or medications prescribed for other pets to your senior pets. The liver and or kidneys once administered must break down most drugs. There can be very serious complications if a medication is given to a pet that has compromised internal organs.

## **Maintain A Constant Environment:**

Tolerance to heat and cold decreases with age. Warmth also lessens the signs of arthritis

## **Present the pet for examination if you observe any of the following:**

- Sustained, significant increase in water consumption. (more than 1.5 cups (12 oz.) /10# body weight/day)
- Sustained, significant increase in urination. (volume and/or frequency)
- Weight loss.
- Significant decrease in appetite or failure to eat for more than 2 consecutive days.
- Significant increase in appetite.
- Repeated vomiting.
- Diarrhea that lasts over 2 days.
- Difficulty in passing stool or urine.
- Inappropriate elimination accidents in the house or general changes in bowel habits.
- Lameness that lasts more than 3 days, or lameness in more than one leg.
- Noticeable decrease in vision, especially if sudden in onset or pupils that do not constrict in bright light. Eye discharges or reddening of the white parts of the eye.
- Masses, ulcerations (open sores), or multiple scabs on the skin that persists more than 1 week.
- Foul mouth odor or drooling that lasts more than 24 hours.
- Increased size of the abdomen.
- Increasing inactivity, especially time spent sleeping.
- Persistent coughing, gagging, or panting.
- Hair loss, especially if accompanied by scratching or if in specific areas of the body.
- Episodes of sudden weakness, collapse, or fainting spells.
- Seizures (convulsions)
- Reluctance or inability to chew dry food.
- Any changes in routine behavior or personality.

**Call us any time you observe a potential problem or need additional information and advice.**

