



### How can we help your ageing pet?

**Regular health checks and vaccinations** to check general health, eyesight, weight etc

**Weight checks** – In older animals weight loss or gain can be a problem. By feeding a specific type of food, such as a senior diet, weight changes can be easier to manage

**Dental disease** can be much reduced with good dental care – ask our advice. De-scaling to initially remove any tartar that builds up followed by regular home care and appropriate feeding to minimise further accumulation of plaque can really help

**Joint support** – anti-inflammatory pain relief medication may be needed if your pet is lame or struggling to get around due to osteoarthritis. Supplements and physiotherapy can also help maintain optimum joint function.

**Modifying the environment** – if your dog is arthritic would he or she benefit from a step or ramp to help them get in to the car or places they cannot jump to? Put food bowls in easy access. Keep routines simple and unchanged.

**Medications** – If a specific problem is diagnosed it may be possible to successfully manage the condition with appropriate medication, food or surgery. This will help your pet to cope and improve their all im-



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## Senior pet care



**Our nursing team offer FREE Senior Health Consultations which include free urinalysis, blood pressure testing and mobility scoring**

*Where your animal's health is our top priority.*

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The older pet population in the UK is increasing all the time. With the advances in veterinary medicine that are now available, the increased focus on preventative healthcare and the fact that our pets are cherished members of the family, it is happy news that many of our pets are now living well into their teenage years.

With this increase in lifespan comes changes to the requirements that our pets have, including nutrition, exercise, lifestyle and veterinary care to name just a few. Tailoring each of these individually to your pet will ensure that their health is maximised and quality of life is maintained for as long as possible.

But how can we tell the difference between a 'normal ageing change' and something that requires closer attention?

Many changes will develop gradually and increase slowly over time, meaning that they may not always be noticed at first. Some tell-tale signs that may be seen are listed below:

- Inability to jump onto a favourite seat or get up stairs, difficulty in getting up after rest
- Change in behaviour
- Reduction in interest or ability to exercise
- Change in eating pattern or preference
- Drinking and/or urinating more
- Disorientation
- Changed sleep patterns and increased time sleeping
- Weight loss or gain



Medications and lifestyle changes can successfully help manage many of these changes. Early identification and intervention will help increase the success of any treatment or management programme and mean that your pet can carry on a healthy and active life for longer.

#### **What can I do if I think my pet is affected by any of these changes?**

If you are concerned about your pet's health then it is wise to bring them to the surgery for a check up. Your pet will also need to continue with their routine vaccine and parasite control so this presents an ideal time to discuss any changes you may have seen with the vet or nurse. Discussing your pets' behaviour at home is very important; we can then decide with you if we need to do anything extra for your pet to keep them in tip-top condition.

#### **What can we expect to potentially change in our older pet?**

Some changes are more common with ageing than others and are described below. This is not an exhaustive list and if you have any query about your pet's health then please contact us here at the surgery.

#### **Weight loss/ gain**

As pets age, the metabolism slows. Alongside reduced exercise, this can result in weight gain. An overweight animal increases the strain placed on joints and organs, which can accelerate or cause disease, such as osteoarthritis or to worsen and potentially make other conditions such as diabetes worse. Overactive thyroid, renal disease and diabetes can be commonly responsible for weight loss in older cats.



#### **Osteoarthritis**

Inflammation and damage within the joint can be a very painful condition. The most common reason this condition develops is due to degeneration of joints as they age. Changes within and around the joint reduce the range of movement in the joint and walking, rising and running can be painful. This may be shown as lameness or inability to get up the stairs or even reluctance to go walking as usual.

#### **Dental disease**

Build up of plaque and tartar on teeth eventually leads to gingivitis and periodontitis. This inflammation in the gums will be uncomfortable and severe dental disease (periodontitis) will allow infections and abscesses to occur and eventually teeth to be lost. Your pet may have difficulty eating or resent being handled if his mouth is sore.

#### **Organ Disease**

It is a fact that as we age, our organs often do not work as well as they once did. The body can cope with this to a degree but once past this point then signs of organ disease will start to show. If you detect any signs it is important to get your animal checked out so that the correct management is started. For example a dog with a cough may have a condition affecting his heart function or one affecting his lungs, such as bronchitis. Kidney disease can commonly affect elderly cats, free urine test is a quick and easy way to detect signs early.

Each of these conditions can be managed but require different medications and lifestyle changes, including