

**D**ue to better nutrition and veterinary care, America's pets are living longer than ever.

With the right care, your pet's golden years can be long, healthy and happy.



## Here's what you should know about older pets:

- **Senior pets need more care.**  
As your pet ages, he or she will need more frequent physical examinations and additional tests. The best kind of health care for senior pets is preventive.
- **Pets age at different rates.**  
Aging varies by breed, body size, and individual pet. Larger breeds of dogs typically age more quickly than smaller dogs.
- **Prevention is key.**  
Many diseases that older pets are susceptible to are either 100% preventable with the proper preventive care or are easily managed if detected early enough.
- **Keep them fit.**  
Proper nutrition and a regular exercise plan can help your pet live a longer, healthier life.

## Q & A

### Does my older pet still need vaccinations?

Your veterinarian will advise you what specific vaccinations are necessary based on where you live, what kind of lifestyle your older pet leads, and what his or her unique health risks are.

In general, once immunity is established, healthy senior pets should receive vaccine boosters once every 1 to 3 years depending on the vaccine.

### What can I do if my pet has arthritis?

Your veterinarian may recommend anti-inflammatory medications, joint supplements, or dietary changes to treat these conditions:

- Reluctance to get up, move, or play
- Reduced exercise tolerance
- Difficulty in getting up and down stairs
- A limping gait
- Stiffness that improves shortly after exercise
- In cats, a "bunny hopping" gait or reluctance to jump

### How can I prevent my pet from gaining weight?

There are excellent diets formulated for overweight pets that are both tasty and effective for aiding in weight reduction and control.

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## Senior Wellness

Keeping your older pet healthy



# Senior Wellness



## How to keep your best friend around as long as possible

### Bring in your senior pet twice a year

Older pets should visit their veterinarian at least twice a year. Dogs and cats age 4 to 5 times faster than we do and, as a result, health problems can progress much more rapidly.

Ironically, because pets are living longer today, they are increasingly suffering from many of the same chronic diseases that affect humans:

- Cancer
- Diabetes
- Kidney failure
- Liver and intestinal disorders
- Arthritis
- Vision problems
- Behavioral issues related to senility
- Dental disease

Fortunately, today there are many ways we can treat these conditions and improve your pet's well-being.

### Older pets need more extensive exams

In general, your pet's senior visits should include:

- **Health consultation.** Tell your veterinarian if you've noticed any recent changes in your pet's behavior or other problems, such as difficulty in getting around, a change in appetite, or any unusual lumps or bumps.
- **Hands-on physical examination.** Your veterinarian will "palpate" or feel your pet's musculoskeletal system, abdomen, and head and neck areas to spot abnormalities. A stethoscope is used to listen to your pet's heart and lungs. Your pet's eyes, ears, and mouth will also be checked for age-related problems, such as cataracts, dental problems, and ear canal disorders.
- **Diagnostic tests,** such as blood work, urinalysis, and possibly radiographs (based on what your veterinarian feels is necessary). X-rays can be essential for identifying problems that cannot be found by a physical examination.
- **Fecal examination** to check for intestinal parasites.
- **Recommendations on wellness care,** such as flea, tick, and intestinal parasite control, heartworm testing and prevention, and dental cleanings.
- **Age- and risk-appropriate vaccinations.** Just as with humans, vaccinations essentially teach your pet's immune system to recognize and destroy infectious diseases before they can make your pet sick.



### The importance of dental care

Dental disease can cause bad breath, inflamed gums, missing, loose, or broken teeth, along with persistent pain and discomfort. It can lead to systemic health problems.

Make sure you follow your veterinarian's recommendations regarding dental examinations, home care, and dental cleanings. Some signs that your pet may be having a dental problem:

- Bad breath
- Pawing at the mouth or teeth
- Drooling
- Difficulty eating
- Red, irritated, swollen, or bleeding gums

### Signs of failing health

A visit to your veterinarian is in order if you notice any of the following:

- Unexplained weight loss
- Excessive drinking and/or urination
- Loss of appetite or lethargy
- Behavior changes
- Diarrhea or vomiting
- Skin lumps, bumps, or irritation
- Bad breath, plaque on teeth, or bleeding gums
- Ear odors, redness, scratching, or head shaking
- Lameness

### VCA Pet Tips:

- 1 Catching problems early before they become serious often means they will be easier and less expensive to treat.
- 2 As pets age, regular, gentle exercise is essential to maintaining body condition.