

Fall 2009 newsletter

The Senior Years

It is inevitable our best furry friends will at one point reach their senior years. Cats and dogs age much quicker than people. By the time a pet reaches the age of two they are already into adulthood.

Fact: 1 year of a pet's life is equal to 4 years of a person's once adulthood is reached for the pet.

Each pet ages differently with several influencing factors:

- **Size and Breed** — smaller dogs usually live longer
- **Environmental Factors** — outdoor pets are more susceptible to injury or disease
- **Body Condition/Proper Nutrition** — obese animals have higher health risks
- **Medical Conditions** — such as kidney or liver disease

As devoted pet owners we all wish to preserve the longevity and quality of our pets' lives. Recognizing the signs of aging we can help manage our furry friends through their golden years.

Signs of aging in our pets:

1. **Declining activity level** — you might notice your pet sleeps more, exercises less. Potentially leading to obesity. Obese animals are at risk for developing diabetes, heart and lung problems, joint problems, and constipation.
2. **Vision loss** — you may notice your pet bumping into objects such as furniture and walls. Changes to your pet's vision usually start to occur around 7-8 years of age.
3. **Heart and Lung Disease** — sometimes characterized by shortness of breath after exercise, coughing, wheezing, increase in panting.
4. **Kidney Disease** — can be indicated by an increase in drinking and urinating, loss of appetite, vomiting, and lethargy.
5. **Dental Disease** — swelling and pain of the gums can make an animal eat small meals, chew sideways, drop food but rarely go off food. Tartar build up and gum disease also leads to bad breath, and infection.
6. **Confusion/Disorientation** — older pets seem to “forget”, they may vocalize more, seem disinterested in their surroundings or owners, and may sleep more.
7. **Arthritis/Joint Pain** — shown by decreased mobility, limping, abnormal gait, pain, and sleeping a lot.
8. **Hearing Loss** — this is usually a gradual change, your pet may easily be startled or hard to rouse.

At Peterborough West Animal Hospital we recommend a wellness program best tailored to the needs of your pet. Regular examinations will help ensure detection of age related disease. **The earlier the diagnosis and treatment for your pet, the better the outcome.**

Geriatric Wellness Profile

Our special wellness program for geriatric patients include a thorough physical exam and assessment of your pets' eyes, ears, mouth, heart and lungs, internal organs, nervous and endocrine system, and skin. Dr.Sargent and Dr. Grayston will discuss what to expect and what to watch for as your pet gets older. As well as helping you find a nutritional diet best suited to your pets needs.

Our geriatric blood and urine profile allow us to see what changes are occurring inside the body, for a full diagnostic report of your pet.

Recommended Tests: Complete Blood Count (CBC) — examines red and white blood cells, and platelets.

Biochemistry Profile — assesses liver, kidney, pancreas, muscle, and bone function, as well as electrolytes and thyroid function.

Complete Urinalysis — this evaluates kidney function, as well as checks for infection, urinary crystals, and neoplasia.

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What is Heartworm Disease?

Heartworm is spread through mosquitoes. Heartworms are long slender spaghetti type worms. They can grow up to 15-30 cm. As adults they live in the right side of the dog's heart. Heartworm affects dogs of all ages, from puppies to seniors.

Mosquitoes will bite an infected dog or coyote sucking up the small baby worms (microfilaria) from the blood. The carrier mosquito will then bite another dog injecting the microfilaria into that dog's tissue. The microfilarias migrate to the heart where they feed and grow into adults. The microfilaria can live up to 2 years within the host dog in whom they were born. The adult worms will then produce new larva that circulate through the dogs blood waiting to be picked up by the next biting mosquito, and thus the cycle continues.



Heartworms removed from a dog on autopsy

In the early stages of infection heartworm infected dogs show little or no symptoms. Heartworm disease is usually detected after the disease has progressed and damage has been done to the dog's heart and lungs.

Prevention is key. Heart worm testing should be done on every dog that was exposed to mosquitoes over the previous heartworm season before starting a preventative program.

Testing for heartworm should be done in the spring (late March – May) before the hot weather and mosquito season arrives. Testing involves taking a small blood sample to check for the presence of heartworm disease. Once the result has come back negative for the disease, than a heartworm prevention schedule recommended by Dr. Sargent can be started.

Treatments are once monthly usually started on June 1 and continued throughout the summer until November. It is mandatory to give your dog the required medication each month. Missing a month of medication can leave your dog susceptible to becoming infected by the disease. Yearly testing each spring is recommended to ensure the safety of your dog.

Remember it only takes one mosquito bite to infect a dog with heartworm.

Medical Care for Older Pets

At Peterborough West Animal Hospital, we recommend a wellness program that is best suited to the age, breed and special needs of your pet. A thorough examination of your animal gives us the opportunity to assess his/her health before we would expect the onset of age-related diseases. We recognize that the earlier in a disease process we can make a diagnosis and begin a treatment, the better the outcome.

For animals that have been reasonably healthy, we advise they receive their initial geriatric exam as they approach their middle to senior years (approximately 6 or 7 years for dogs and 12 to 15 for cats). If your pet has a pre-existing condition (such as kidney or liver disease, heart disease, seizure disorder, diabetes etc), Dr. Sargent will decide with you when to best initiate geriatric monitoring.

Wellness Program for Geriatric Pets

HoDr Sargent has developed a special wellness program for geriatric patients. This includes an extended physical exam and assessment of your pets' eyes, ears, teeth and gums, heart, lungs, internal organs, muscles, bones, nervous and endocrine systems and skin.

Dr. Sargent will take extra time to discuss what to expect, and what to watch for in each of these areas as your pet gets older. Dr. Sargent will also discuss nutritional requirements of aging and behavioral changes.

Recommended tests

Complete Blood Count (CBC):

Examines Red and White Blood cells and Platelets

Biochemistry Profile:

A variety of blood tests designed to assess Liver function, Kidneys, Pancreas, Muscle and Bone, Electrolytes and Thyroid Function.

Complete Urinalysis:

Evaluates kidney function and checks for infection, crystals and neoplasia.