

Young at Heart 5 Tips for a Happy Senior Pet

Sometimes, we as pet owners struggle to face the fact that our pets are getting older. Often, it seems to happen overnight. One day we are throwing a ball with a lively, energetic pup, and the next day we are greeted at the door by a sleepy eyed, gray-faced senior. Thankfully, with improvement in the veterinary field and diet, pets are now living longer than ever. Our veterinarians are dedicated to ensuring that your older pets receive medical care specifically tailored to meet their changing needs. Pets as young as seven years of age are considered to be seniors and they do require specialized senior wellness care. *“Age is not a disease. With advancements in veterinary diagnostic capabilities, we are able to provide an excellent quality of life for so much longer,”* says Marie Kay, Certified Veterinary Technician and Lead Surgical Technician at The Animal Medical Center.

1. **Veterinary Exams**

A lot can happen in between vet visits, and that’s why we follow the guidelines of The American Animal Hospital Association with the recommendation of semi-annual senior examinations. Early detection of common senior diseases and ailments can significantly improve your senior pets quality of life. During your pet’s senior exam, a complete history of your pet’s health will be taken. The veterinarian should ask questions about your pet’s day-to-day activities and habits, including water consumption and appetite, activity level and play, vocalizing, and sleep patterns. With the physical exam, we will pick up on any murmurs, lumps or bumps, and oral health. These twice-yearly visits are essential to the health of our senior patients, which age at a much more rapid pace as compared to younger pets. This is the equivalent to you only visiting your family doctor every 3-4 years.

2. **Bloodwork**

Bloodwork could quite possibly be the best tip for your pet’s Senior Wellness Care. Not only can it help us diagnose diseases early, it saves clients money in the long run. One year in your pet’s life is the equivalent to multiple years in a person’s life. This is why yearly bloodwork is so important for monitoring your pet’s health. Early bloodwork helps us try to find any health problems at the earliest possible phase. Bloodwork is like a window into the pet, giving us the ability to see common senior ailments, including diabetes, liver and kidney disease, as well as thyroid function. When caught early, we can treat more effectively and can make all the difference in your senior pet’s quality of life. *“Early detection of metabolic disease enables treatment at an earlier stage with a more favorable outcome,”* states Dr. Pam Mettley, 1985 graduate of Louisiana State University. Dr. Pam’s special interests include feline and geriatric medicine and preventative care.

3. Pain Management/Supplements

As our pets gets older, we can sometimes pick up on subtle changes in their movement; a slower paced walk, decreased ability to climb stairs, or to get up and down. These can be the first signs of arthritis. *“Many people think that their senior pet is ‘just getting old’ or ‘slowing down’, when actually they may have painful arthritis that can be addressed with many different treatment options,”* per Dr. Whitney Whitford, practice owner at Animal Medical Center of Lehigh Acres. Dr Whitney graduated with honors from University of Florida in 1995. She is also on Wink News Pet Connection every Tuesday morning, featuring an available adoptee from The Gulf Coast Humane Society. When caught early, supplements like glucosamine, chondroitin, and omega 3 fatty acids can help the overall health of your senior. These supplements can provide your pet's joints with building materials to help protect their cartilage and decrease the inflammation. We must remember though, supplements are not an overnight fix. They generally take 4-6 weeks to notice an improvement. A holistic approach can even be taken at home with massages, heat therapy (think warm blankets and towels), and gentle range of motion exercises that your veterinarian can demonstrate. Your veterinarian may prescribe medication for your senior pet to help with pain or discomfort.

4. Dental Care

Heart disease, diabetes, cognitive dysfunction, and other senior ailments can sometimes over shadow your senior pet's oral care and periodontal disease. But dental disease is extremely painful, and if left untreated, can intensify these diseases and lead to a shortened life for your pet. *“Periodontal disease is the most common disease diagnosed in our senior pets. Many clients think their pet is too old to safely have their teeth cleaned. The opposite is true. Not treating periodontal disease can lead to heart, liver, and kidney disease.”* states Dr. Charles Whitford, practice owner of The AMC. Dr. Charley has been practicing veterinary medicine for almost 20 years, and has special interest in preventative medicine and orthopedic surgery. If you notice bad breath, frequent pawing at the face, or reluctance to eat hard foods, you'll want to bring your senior in for a full dental examination. Routine dental care makes a huge difference in your senior pets overall health and comfort.

5. Diet/Exercise

“Obesity is one of the most common problems senior pets suffer from. Their quality of life can be greatly improved by simply changing their lifestyle and eating habits”, states Dr. Whitney. The first step in an exercise plan is to consult with your veterinarian. They can evaluate your pet for any heart, lung, or health problems that may require a more gentle approach. Most senior pets have physical limitations. For example, a pet with inflamed joints or ligaments will need a lower impact exercise plan. Good nutrition is very important, especially for a senior pet. Low calorie pet food may be a good option, as senior pets tend to

gain weight easier than their younger counterparts. There are diets specifically formulated for the senior pet, rich in vitamin E, Beta-Carotene, and protein. However, if your pet has diabetes, kidney, liver, or urinary problems, your vet may recommend a special prescription diet.

Our goal is to make your senior pet age as gracefully as possible. Just as the health care needs of humans change as we age, so do the needs of our aging pets. Regular examinations, bloodwork, pain management, routine dental care, diet, and exercise are all important steps to keeping your senior pet comfortable, happy, and young at heart.

The Animal Medical Center of Lehigh Acres is an AAHA Accredited Animal Hospital, proudly serving Lehigh Acres since 1986. Our commitment to excellence keeps us on the leading edge of veterinary medicine. The AMC focuses on continuous improvement and education to assure we can offer the quality and range of service you expect and deserve for your pet.

*(239) 369-0555
2920 Lee Boulevard
Lehigh Acres, Florida*