

Preventative care

Taking care of a senior pet can be difficult, but there are many things you can do to make the process a manageable one. Below are a few preventative tips to help manage the aging process.

Annual visits to the veterinarian for protection from distemper, hepatitis, leptospirosis, parvovirus and kennel cough. Annual heartworm and intestinal parasite checks are also important.

Good nutrition is critical to good health at all ages, so be sure your pet is on a proper diet.

For dogs, exercise is imperative to keeping them in good shape. Exercise can mean adding years on to a dog's life.

Other steps a pet owner can take to delay the onset of aging in their pets include: **teeth cleaning** to prevent gum disease; **grooming** to keep the skin and coat healthy and to be aware of any problems such as dry skin, thin or brittle coat, thin coat, body odor, or sore spots; and **checking the ears** for odor or gunk produced by infecting organisms.

Signs of aging

The first sign of aging is a **general decrease in activity level**, including lethargy, a tendency to sleep longer, a waning of enthusiasm for long walks and fun activities such as catch. These symptoms could also be indicative of an illness and may warrant a trip to the veterinarian.

Extremes in temperature and changes in surroundings can affect aging pets.

Hearing loss is a common consequence of aging, as is some deterioration of sight.

Skin and coat can also change as the skin loses pliability and the capacity of the oil-producing sebaceous glands diminishes. Wounds heal more slowly, allergies often worsen, non-malignant tumors may appear in the mouth or on or under the skin, and infestations of intestinal parasite may occur.

As aging advances, heart, liver, and kidneys lose their efficiency, and the immune system is less able to fight off attacks by bacteria and viruses. Bladder control may be affected, and muscles decrease in size and function.

Tips to keep your pet comfortable

If your pet is stiff, let them walk it out; don't rush them to get up. Be aware of when they last went to the bathroom and remind them when they need to go out.

Make sure your pet has a rug or bed. A comfortable place to lie makes a big difference in an older pet's life.

If your pet's coat and skin dry out, brush them more frequently to stimulate the production of natural oils and ask your veterinarian for shampoo and skin care recommendations.



Check your pet for fleas and ticks. Fleas can carry tapeworms and cause allergies; ticks can carry Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and Lyme Disease. Older pets are more prone to these diseases since they have a decreased ability to fight off parasites.

Reduce calorie intake, if necessary, to prevent your pet from becoming overweight. Ask your veterinarian about a special diet if your pet needs to lose weight.

Use a baby gate to keep your pet away from the stairs or carpeted areas to avoid bathroom accidents and/or injury.

Most importantly, be aware of your pet's increased special requirements as an aging animal. Your pet may not remember to go to the bathroom outside or to eat, so you may need to remind them. And above all, be patient. With these simple tips, your pet may live years longer and better enjoy his/her time with the family.