

INTERNAL MEDICINE:
Geriatrics

The aging pet

Like the American population, the number of aging cats and dogs is on the rise. The population of cats and dogs age 6 years of age and older has increased considerably between 2001 and 2007, according to the most recent American Veterinary Medical Association's survey on companion animal demographics.

There are numerous interpretations of what constitutes old age in dogs and cats. One method equates cat and dog age with human age, but a simpler method considers the species, breed, and size of the patient to estimate life expectancy. Generally speaking, small dogs and cats live longer than large breed dogs. Using the simplified approach, cats and dogs are considered to be "senior" when they approach the last 25% of their expected life span, however, preventive measures and close monitoring of clinical and laboratory data should be started during "middle age", or when the patient has reached 50% of expected life span.

Veterinarians and staff can work with clients in implementing an individualized disease prevention program for each senior patient. Implementing senior wellness programs may increase client loyalty and improve the patient's quality of life and longevity.

Common senior diseases

Common geriatric disease seen in dogs and cat include chronic renal disease, diabetes, osteoarthritis, neoplasia and related paraneoplastic syndromes, hepatopathies, periodontal disease, inflammatory intestinal diseases, and idiopathic behavior changes. It is also important to note that the most common endocrinopathy in older cats is hyperthyroidism. All of these disorders are chronic and progressive, and early detection will minimize patient discomfort and slow disease progression. Senior wellness programs are based on detecting disease while it is in a subclinical state.

We must first rule out all possible medical causes of behavioral changes before attributing them to cognitive dysfunction (senility). Common behaviors reported by owners of aging cats and dogs include excessive vocalization, wandering, disorientation, lack of social interaction, and disturbance of the wake-sleep cycle.

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Guidelines for senior care

The American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) and American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) have set guidelines for senior care in dogs and cats. These guidelines can be viewed on the Internet at the following addresses:

AAHA Guidelines:

http://www.aahanet.org/PublicDocuments/Senior_Care_final.pdf

AAFP Guidelines:

http://www.aafponline.org/resources/guidelines/senior/FelineSeniorCareGuidelines_27pages.pdf.

The consensus reached by the experts who served on the panels is that middle-age dogs and cats should have semi-yearly veterinary exams. These exams should be thorough, and include obtaining a detailed history, and performing complete physical, ocular, and rectal (dogs) exams, as well as measuring blood pressure.

If the patient is clinically normal, laboratory work should be performed annually at an outside reference lab. Using an outside reference lab allows for consistency when performing serial monitoring, and results in more reliable results. Minimum laboratory work should include a CBC, chemistry panel, urinalysis, and thyroxine (cats). For those patients with signs of disease, laboratory work should be performed twice yearly. Additional diagnostics, such as imaging, electrocardiography, or echocardiogram, should be performed when indicated.

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MVS offers full-time internal medicine service at BOTH HOSPITALS and our internists serve as an extension of your practice. Internal medicine service is offered at Auburn Hills Tues.-Fri. and in Southfield Mon.-Fri. Our clinicians have years of specialized training and experience. Please let us know how we can help you and your clients.

Questions?

Our internists are available for questions and consultations on medical conditions. They are also on-call for in-house consultation on medicine cases seen through the emergency service. Our internists review critical medical cases.

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