



Caring for your senior dog

There are many changes associated with age and therefore our senior companions require some special attention.

- Stiff joints are probably the most common problem noted in older dogs. Sometimes lameness can be due to non-painful joints that are just too stiff to move (a mechanical lameness) but more often lameness is a sign of pain and should not be ignored just because the dog is not voicing this discomfort. Whilst pain killers are often necessary there are other options to make your pet's joints more comfortable e.g. hydrotherapy, acupuncture, massage, joint supplements. Exercise should be consistent throughout the week – older dogs are less tolerant of an extra long walk at the weekend and would benefit from shorter, more frequent walks throughout the week to keep joints moving but prevent over exertion.
- Teeth problems are also common especially in small breeds
- Reduced vision and hearing can result in an easily startled dog. High blood pressure, although not as common in dogs as cats, may be the cause of sudden deterioration in sight
- Deterioration in bowel function can lead to reduced absorption of nutrients and weight loss. A senior food can be easier to digest.
- There is often an increased water requirement due to reduced kidney function so loss of appetite may put elderly dogs at risk of dehydration. It is essential to have easy access to water bowls. If your dog is diagnosed with kidney disease then a prescription kidney food will be the best way of maintaining kidney function.

Dogs are generally regarded as "senior" from 7 years old, although this can vary with breed (small breeds may age more slowly and giant breeds more quickly). We should be monitoring them carefully for any signs of deteriorating health so that we can identify any problems and try to prevent or minimise further deterioration.

Common health problems associated with increasing age are: dental disease, arthritis, chronic kidney disease, high blood pressure, cancer and diabetes. Symptoms can include excessive thirst, reduced or increased appetite, weight loss, vomiting, diarrhoea and poor coat condition. Often there are multiple problems which can complicate diagnosis so early recognition of signs and prompt treatment could make a big difference to the quality and length of your dog's life.

Our current recommendations for routine health monitoring:

For dogs 7-10 years old

we recommend an annual vet examination (usually done as part of your dog's routine vaccination), blood pressure measurement and analysis of a urine sample as a quick check of kidney function, urinary tract infection and diabetes

For dogs 10-14 years old

we recommend a urine test and blood pressure measurement every 6 months and would discuss whether a senior blood profile is advisable at the annual examination.

Park Veterinary Centre



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Subsidised senior health check consultations

When?:

Wednesday and Thursday mornings at the main surgery at Cassiobury, and on Tuesday afternoons at our branch surgery at Katherine Place, Leavesden

What's included?:

an examination by a vet, urine tests and a blood pressure measurement

In addition:

senior blood screen at reduced cost (vet will discuss whether blood test appropriate depending on the examination and/or any changes in appetite, thirst, weight etc. If considering booking a consultation you may wish to bring a urine sample with you and you might consider not feeding your dog on the morning of the appointment if you think a blood test may be suggested.

Please ask at reception for any further information you may require.

