

The Older Pet

Like humans, dogs and cats are now living to a more advanced age mainly due to improvements in nutrition and veterinary care.

Although it is possible to detect ageing changes in pets as young as seven years old, many vets regard ten years as being the beginning of a pet's old age.

It is important to realise that many of the common problems faced by older pets can be managed if not cured by early veterinary treatment. For example, the most common diseases that affect older dogs and cats are cancer and kidney failure respectively, and early diagnosis and treatment can be vital. Nowadays there is a huge range of diagnostic methods available to investigate diseases, with an equally large number of treatments available.

Many owners have an unjustified fear of general anaesthetics in the older pet, but pre-anaesthetic blood tests and modern anaesthetics and monitoring mean that risks are often not much higher than for younger animals. All pets seen at blue house receive a physical check to ensure there are no obvious risks with anaesthesia. blue house is also able to offer a comprehensive range of blood and urine tests, sometimes with results available in a couple of hours, that can assess a pet's suitability for general anaesthetic.

When treating older pets the vet and owner often have to decide what treatments are justified to ensure a good quality of life. In many situations relatively simple alterations to a pet's home combined with veterinary treatment can radically improve the situation.

Arthritis is common in older pets. Many of the newer anti-inflammatory drugs are very effective and safe and can literally give a new lease of life. Also elevating food and water bowls to head level can improve appetite. The use of ramps up stairs and steps, non-slip mats on vinyl flooring and thicker padding on beds can also help. Probably the single most important measure is to control the pet's bodyweight, to reduce the strain on already diseased joints.

Soiling in the house can be managed with the use of absorbent pads or plastic sheeting. Often loss of house training is associated with other behavioural changes that can be regarded as similar to senile changes in humans. There are several medicines now available that aim to improve this and other aspects of behaviour, and there is often a noticeable improvement after a few weeks' treatment.

Dental problems may need treatment with softer food, but don't forget that oral cleaning is important- brushing is generally regarded as the most effective method of cleaning the teeth.

Pets often compensate for poorer vision by using their sense of smell and an amount of familiarity with their surroundings. Rearranging the furniture can lead to problems with disorientation. Clapping hands and stamping the feet can get the attention of partially deaf dogs.

Many of the common problems in older pets can be managed with relatively simple treatment, and without subjecting the pet to drastic medical or surgical procedures. It is genuinely worth contacting us to see what we may be able to do to improve your and your older pet's quality of life.