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Senior Pets-Age Is Not a Disease

Pets are living longer, happier lives due to advances in veterinary medicine and preventative care. Due to this fact, pet owners are now faced with caring for their beloved companions in their senior years. Senior status varies by breed, but in general is when a pet reaches 7 years of age. Larger breeds such as Great Danes tend to age faster and smaller dog breeds and cats tend to age slightly slower. The following website allows you to put in your pet's age and compare it to human years: www.npwm.com/petagecalculator.htm. Many diseases that owners may attribute to 'old age' are actually very treatable. When a pet reaches senior status veterinary care is more important than ever. Many senior pets can live a longer happier life when given proper veterinary care. Described below are common disorders of senior pets:

Osteoarthritis:

Arthritis commonly occurs in all senior pets for many reasons. It may be due to past injuries, developmental abnormalities such as hip dysplasia, or insults from diseases such as Lyme. Arthritis can manifest in many ways, but all signs indicate the pet has some level of pain. Signs include, trouble getting up and down stairs, slow to get up and lay down, standing to urinate instead of squatting, limping among others. Many treatments are available to make your pet more comfortable. Treatments might include: glucosamine supplements, oral fatty acids, special diets, anti-inflammatory medications and others. Do not initiate any therapy without first consulting with your veterinarian. Some seemingly benign medications can have severe effects on pets' liver, kidneys and stomach. One important factor that is often overlooked is a senior pet's weight. A few extra pounds can make signs of arthritis even worse and cause it to progress quicker. With smaller skeletal structures a few extra ounces can be a big burden on a pet.

Hypothyroidism:

Hypothyroidism is a natural deficiency of thyroid hormone. This disorder is common in middle and older age dogs. This can be caused by atrophy of the gland or when a dog's own immune system attacks the thyroid gland. Some common signs of hypothyroidism includes: skin abnormalities, hair loss, skin infections, obesity and listless attitude. Common breeds affected include Doberman Pinscher, Golden Retriever, Irish Setter, Great Dane, Boxer, and Daschund. A simple blood test can detect low thyroid levels. Treatment is daily thyroid replacement in the form of pills. The treatment is usually for the lifetime of the pet but the medication is fairly inexpensive.

Hyperthyroidism:

Hyperthyroidism is an excess of thyroid hormone. This is usually caused by a growth on the thyroid gland that overproduces the hormone. This disorder is very common in older cats. The most common sign is weight loss with increased appetite. Hyperthyroid cats frequently experience reduced quality of life through weight loss, muscle deterioration, chronic vomiting or chronic diarrhea. Depending on the severity of the disease cats may show very few signs until the disease is fairly progressed. A simple blood test can detect high thyroid levels. There are three main treatments including, daily oral medication, radiotherapy and surgery.

Lumps and Bumps:

Senior pets are prone to cancer internally and externally. Often if masses are removed when they are small the more serious systemic effects can be avoided. Any mass, especially if it is in the mammary region or growing quickly, should be sampled by your veterinarian to determine if it is malignant (cancerous) or benign (will not spread).

Your pet's senior years can be the best and most memorable years. With a little extra care and help from your veterinarian, those senior years can last longer and be more comfortable.

Disclaimer: This written content is meant to be educational and is not medical advice. Always consult a veterinarian about medical advice for your pet.