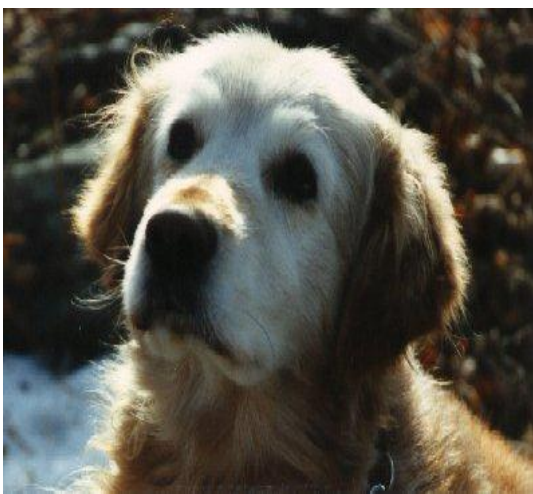


Senior Wellness: Your Pet's Golden Years

There is no set age when your pet officially becomes a "senior." Aging is influenced by breed, genetics, metabolism, veterinary care, nutrition, exercise, and whether they are indoor or outdoor pets. As a general rule of thumb, large breeds (Great Danes, Retrievers, Shepherds, etc.) age faster than smaller breeds (Dachshunds, Poodles, Cats, etc.). See the chart below to determine your pet's approximate age.



What to expect during your pet's senior years

Normal aging changes include: sleeping more, graying coat (especially around the muzzle), hearing and vision deterioration, arthritis, muscle shrinkage and weakness, decreased skin elasticity.

As your pet ages, the risk of several diseases and disorders increase. These include: **liver disease, kidney disease, diabetes, obesity, thyroid disease, cancer, and periodontal disease**, to name a few. A good healthcare plan will help in prevention and early detection of these diseases, so they can be reversed or controlled.

Important steps you can take for your senior

We recommend regular twice-yearly physicals for pets 7 and older. In addition, we advise performing lab work to check for early diseases and/or establish normal baseline values for your pet. These tests can include: complete blood count, serum chemistry panel, electrolyte analysis, urinalysis, and/or thyroid hormone analysis.

A recent study showed that more than 22% of senior dogs and 17% of senior cats that appear healthy on physical examination have been found to have significant sub-clinical disease (based on results from tests such as those listed above). It is also good to consider having thoracic and abdominal radiographs taken. Most of these tests and procedures can be done right here at BVH.

How old is your pet in dog (or cat) years?					
Pet's age in years	Cats	Dogs			
		0-20 lbs.	21-50 lbs.	51-90 lbs.	>90 lbs.
1	24	15	15	14	12
2	28	24	24	22	20
3	32	28	29	29	28
4	34	32	34	34	35
5	36	36	37	40	42
6	40	40	42	45	49
7	44	44	47	50	56
8	48	48	51	55	64
9	52	52	56	61	71
10	56	56	60	66	78
11	60	60	65	72	86
12	64	64	69	77	93
13	68	68	74	82	101
14	72	72	78	88	108
15	76	76	83	93	115

Lab Work Descriptions:

- **Complete Blood Count (CBC)** – used to diagnose and manage disease conditions such as anemia, infection, inflammation, leukemia, and clotting abnormalities
- **Thyroid Hormone** – essential in regulation of metabolism
- **Serum Chemistry Profile** – provides information about organ system function (e.g. liver, kidneys, pancreas)
- **Urinalysis** – assists in diagnosis of diabetes, urinary-tract infections, kidney and liver disease, and many other conditions

Balanced Nutrition for Older Pets

As your pet ages, his nutritional needs will change. The intestines will not absorb nutrients as well and the liver and kidneys will not process those nutrients and metabolites as efficiently. In addition, dental disease becomes more problematic, allowing bacteria to enter the blood stream and deposit in organs such as the heart, kidneys and liver (which may already be diseased).

You should consider switching your senior to a senior pet food, such as Hills Science Diet Mature Adult. If needed, prescription diets are available to target certain conditions, such as diabetes, obesity, arthritis, kidney disease, liver disease, and dental disease.



Common Diseases of Senior Pets and Their Symptoms

- **DIABETES** – common in overweight animals; sudden drop in weight; increased drinking and urination
- **HYPOTHYROIDISM** – almost always in dogs; weight gain; skin infections; hair loss
- **HYPERTHYROIDISM** – almost always in cats; increased activity level and appetite; weight loss
- **ARTHRITIS** – stiffness; lameness; decreased activity level; difficulty rising after lying down; difficulty climbing stairs; decreased range of motion; pain when touched
- **KIDNEY DISEASE** – the first stage of kidney disease is NOT DETECTIBLE WITHOUT BLOOD TESTING; in advanced stages: vomiting, lethargy, decreased appetite, weight loss, increased drinking and/or urination; very common in older cats!
- **CUSHING'S DISEASE** – hair loss; increased drinking and urination; pot-bellied appearance; skin problems
- **CANCER** – for lumps that appear – get them checked in the clinic; watch for increased size and ulceration; pay close attention to mammary chain in unspayed females; intact males are at high risk for prostate cancer, so they should have their prostate gland checked yearly
- **DENTAL DISEASE** – bad breath; tartar buildup; swollen/red gum line; difficulty chewing food; decrease in appetite; pay special attention to MOLARS
- **HEART DISEASE** – coughing; decreased stamina; decreased ability to complete walks that once were routine; low heat tolerance; KEEP ALL DOGS ON A MONTHLY HEARTWORM PREVENTATIVE – this is one of the most important things you can do to prevent heart disease in your pet! Texas is the heartworm capital of the world. Dogs are highly susceptible. It is not as common in cats, but if it occurs, it causes breathing problems or death and is untreatable.
- **LIVER DISEASE** – early stages are only detectible with blood testing; in late stages: vomiting, decreased appetite; yellow gums



OTHER SYMPTOMS TO WATCH FOR – constipation, irritability, change in sleeping habits, decrease in vision or hearing, diarrhea