



Care of a Senior Pet

Senior pets have a less active lifestyle, which impacts on their health. In addition, certain diseases tend to be more common in older pets. Many of these can be managed with early detection and diagnosis. These are just some of the things that can concern your pet and will be checked in our [Senior Pet Check](#).

Teeth

With age, tooth decay and gum disease become more prevalent. Bad breath is often the first sign owners notice. Gum and tooth disease is painful, but it also poses a health risk as bacteria in the mouth can enter the bloodstream and spread to the heart, liver and kidneys. It is important to maintain good dental health right throughout a pet's life.

Lumps and Bumps

You should always get our vets to investigate lumps on an older pet. In some cases these prove to be harmless and of cosmetic concern only, but for those that aren't, the sooner they are diagnosed and removed the better the outlook.

Liver and Kidney Disease

Diseases of these organs are very common in older pets, as they deteriorate with age. A simple in-house blood and urine test helps the vets assess the state of these organs and to formulate a plan to ensure maximal quality of life.



Heart Disease

Problems with the heart are common in older dogs and can cause reduced enjoyment of activities like walking and play. Later on, coughing can occur or your pet may develop a "pot belly" as fluid gathers. Cats commonly suffer from excessive blood pressure, which can be damaging to the major organs. Fortunately, there are good medications available to your pet once these concerns are diagnosed.

Diabetes and Thyroid Disease

These two hormonal diseases can start with very subtle, undetectable changes but they can be devastating to overall health if not diagnosed and managed. For instance, hyperthyroidism (seen in older cats) results in high blood pressure which damages the heart and kidneys. Both these problems are easily detectable with a screening test and can be managed with medications and diet.

Osteoarthritis

This is very common in older animals, with more than one in five pets suffering from it. (Both cats and dogs) Osteoarthritis is associated with chronic pain, which can significantly lower your pet's quality of life. Common signs are stiffness, limping, slow to rise and reluctance to exercise (in dogs) and reluctance to jump up or grumpiness when picked up or touched (in cats).

Senility

Age related changes in a pet's behaviour can include disorientation, incontinence (loss of house training), decreased interaction with other members of the family and sleeping more, to name but a few. A number of medications can help your pet cope far better with many of these changes, ensuring a good quality of life. The veterinarian will be happy to discuss these with you.

Nurses

Chewing:

Chewing is an instinctive behaviour which can become a behavioural problem. The problem can often cause owners to re-home their pets or to have them euthanased. Understanding your pet can help to prevent this.

Why do animals chew?



1. Boredom
2. Investigation
3. Anxiety

Boredom - This is very common in young animals that often spend time on their own. Chewing anything they have access to seems like a great way to whittle away those lonely hours until their owners return. It is important that dogs are exercised in the morning and cats have plenty of running room or climbing objects. Rabbits and rats also need plenty of room to run, hide, and toys to chew.

When animals are learning they are likely to chew things, so remove anything you love and swap them for toys. If you think about it, all zoos have enrichment programmes to prevent behavioural problems so why wouldn't we do the same for our pets! Here are some suggestions.

Dogs - Food toys are also a great way to keep them occupied. Make one with a 2 Ltr soft drink bottle, remove labels and caps, place a few biscuits inside and set down. Guaranteed entertainment, they will roll these around until they work out that biscuits will fall out, you have managed to leave the house undetected and they are occupied.

Cats - love toys they can pick up and throw so this is where the catnip mice are great. Ping pong balls are also exciting.

Rabbits - Hang carrots from the roof of the cage.

Rats & Mice - Different levels with tubes to run through.



Corner

Investigation - It is important to remember that animals use their mouths (along with their nose) to investigate everything. They sniff it, then often put it into their mouths. It is because of this behaviour that they often get into trouble. For example; tasting rat bait, chewing slug bait boxes, eating random objects that then cause obstructions.

Therefore, it is vital we keep things out of reach. Often by having good obedience and commands to drop things can help animals learn what they can and cannot have. Use aghhhhhhh!, then saying LEAVE, can help. Always be sure to reward them with a pat when they do as they are told to reinforce the good behaviour.

Anxiety - This occurs in cats and dogs, more commonly in the later. High levels of stress can be caused by various factors such as, waiting for owners to return (separation anxiety), or changes such as, babies, new furniture or even a simple coat of paint on the walls can cause some animals to go into an anxious frenzy.

“So why do they chew?” A chemical called endorphin is released when they chew, which in turn gives them a calming effect making them feel good. It is the same chemical that is released when humans exercise and makes us feel good afterwards too. So it becomes a vicious cycle, the animal becomes anxious and now instinctively they start to chew things. These tend to be the very destructive cases. I have seen videos of dogs pulling chunks of plaster of the wall as they are in such an anxious state. It is important if you have an animal that you think may be suffering from this please contact us for an appointment.

Don't forget, I offer behavioural consults to help you get back on track with your pet.

Donna



Why is that coming out of my dog?

This was the concern presented to us by Kharma's owner one Sunday morning. Kharma, a 1 year old female Rottweiler had seemed normal until her owner noticed what looked like blood coming from her vulva.

On closer inspection, the vet noted what looked like “bloody-pus” and there was a lot of it. Kharma wasn't bleeding to death, but she did have a life threatening condition.

The discharge was very suggestive of **Pyometra**, a relatively common condition, which occurs when the uterus fills up with pus. Because the uterus is so large, it effectively forms a big bag of toxic waste sitting inside the abdomen. This toxic waste gets onto the blood stream making the bitch very sick.

Typical signs include; lethargy, off food, drinking a lot and vomiting. Pus may or may not be seen depending on whether the cervix has stayed open or become closed. Kharma was lucky because her owner had acted so quickly on seeing the pus and she hadn't got to the point of feeling sick yet.

But why did this happen?

There is a risk that pyometra can occur after every normal heat. It seems to be related to the changes in the lining of the uterus in response to hormones. It turns out that Kharma had been on heat recently. But more significantly, she had had a suspected mating, so she had been given the mismatch injection to prevent unwanted pups. Although this is still a common thing to do, the risk of pyometra is significantly increased with a mismatch injection. This is because we are giving additional hormones which alter the uterine lining further still.

The pyometra occurred about 4 weeks after the injection, which is very typical.

Because her owner acted so quickly, Kharma had a good chance of recovering from the pyometra. But this required removal of the entire uterus to take out all of the “toxic waste” caught inside. This is generally the only way to ensure a full recovery and if she were able to keep her uterus she would be unlikely to be able to have puppies after having this condition anyway.

Kharma was placed immediately in intensive care, and she had a fully successful surgery and recovery. We are thrilled to be able to say that she has gone on as if nothing had ever happened.

Take home points:

1. Prevention is better than cure. If your bitch is on heat make sure she is locked away to avoid unwanted matings.
2. Don't take the mismatch injection lightly. It can have serious consequences, including pyometra and permanent loss of breeding ability.
3. Watch out for signs of this condition in any entire bitch especially 4-6 weeks after a heat.
4. Act early if you suspect this condition.
5. Choose to have bitches spayed if they are not needed for breeding. An emergency pyometra surgery is more risky and about 4-5 times more expensive than a routine spay.





Chronic Renal Failure

What do my cat's kidneys do?

Kidneys have many functions; they remove waste products from the blood stream, maintain essential nutrients at the correct level, maintain hydration and produce urine.

What is chronic renal failure?

The kidneys have a large amount of spare capacity so outward signs may not be seen until at least 70% of the kidney function is lost. These changes may happen over a number of months to years. In addition, as chronic renal failure (CRF) is most commonly seen in old cats, early signs of the disease such as weight loss and poor coat quality are often put down to normal ageing. Some clients may notice their pets urinating more (and hence drinking more) in the early stages.



What are the causes of CRF?

As for all cells, there is deterioration with age, but this can be hastened by a large number of different diseases including; bacterial and viral infections, excessive blood pressure and tumours.

How is the disease diagnosed?

Kidney disease is usually diagnosed by a simple blood test which looks at the level of two waste products in the blood stream, blood urea (BUN) and creatinine. Urine tests may also be useful. Tests to measure the blood levels of other substances e.g. potassium, phosphorus and calcium as well as the red and white blood cell counts may be added to help the diagnosis and determine the best course of treatment.

How does CRF affect my cat?

Because the kidneys perform a variety of different functions, the clinical signs of renal failure can be somewhat variable. The most common changes seen are; weight loss, poor fur quality, bad breath, variable appetite which may be associated with mouth ulcers, lethargy and depression. Less commonly cats can

be seen to drink and urinate more and some will have vomiting and diarrhoea. Rarely renal failure can cause sudden onset blindness.

What treatments are available?

Depending on the results of blood tests your vet may be faced with several problems which require different treatments. Don't worry if the list below seems so long that you will never be able to administer all medication, the majority of cats can be effectively managed with diet change and one or two other treatments.

1. Dietary therapy. Low protein diets can assist to lower waste products in blood and increase well being. These high quality and reduced quantity diets such as Hills k/d are available from vet clinics in dry and wet forms. (a 1.8kg bag costing \$33.50, would last about a month or \$1 a day). The palatability of reduced protein diets is usually not as high as normal cat food, so you may have to persevere for a while to get your cat eating it well.
2. Other modifications to nutrient levels such as sodium, phosphate, calcium, and potassium can be made through diet changes and medications. Assessment of this would be on case by case basis and may improve their quality of life.
3. Vitamins B and C - these vitamins are wasted by the kidney and need supplementation.
4. Treatment for concurrent hyperthyroidism and/or high blood pressure.
5. Fluids and intensive care as necessary.
6. Other treatments may be necessary depending on cats severity of disease and clinical signs.

It is very important that fresh water is available at all times as cats with renal failure tend to dehydrate rapidly.

Victoria

Competition Winners

Congratulations to **Christine Temperton** who won \$300 worth of goods and services through our Revolution competition.



Congratulations to **Beverley Burns** who won our Romantic Package Deal. This sends Beverley and her husband off to Ormlie Lodge for dinner, one night stay and breakfast. Have a lovely time.



Until one has loved an animal, a part of one's soul remains unawakened.

Anatole France
(1844-1924)

