

# Pawsitive Press

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## The Golden Years

By: Heather Manfredi, D.V.M.

### At what age is my pet considered a senior?

We are all familiar with the term “senior” to describe an older pet, but the actual age when a pet is considered a senior may vary between species and breeds. On average a pet is considered to be a senior around seven years old, but this can vary by breed and size (for example: large-breed dogs may be considered senior earlier than seven). As your pet enters its senior years, more frequent examinations and diagnostic tests are recommended. This is so that we are able to fully monitor your pet’s health and address your pet’s needs, ideally before an impending medical crisis presents itself. As your family veterinarian, we can assess your pet and its lifestyle and monitor physical changes, as well as develop a management plan if indicated, so that you will be prepared for those “golden years.”

**My pet seems fine to me and has never had a problem. Why do I need**



### to do “senior” exams and bloodwork?

We recommend establishing baseline lab-work on your senior pet, ideally in a time of good health. This can be of use for future comparison if an illness does develop. More importantly, we may detect abnormalities your pet may not be outwardly expressing symptoms of. Subtle changes we note in laboratory test results may indicate the presence of underlying disease. Often when diseases are discovered early they can be managed more easily, adding quality to your pet’s later years. To determine the most informative clinical assessment, your veterinarian will perform a complete and comprehensive physical exam and take a thorough history. These two tools are the most valuable when formulating a diagnostic/treatment plan for healthy and sick senior pets.

### What are some of the things I should look for at home with my senior pet?

Any changes, however seemingly small, should be brought to your veterinarian’s attention.

Examples include:

- ❖ frequency or quantity of water drinking
- ❖ change in urination habits
- ❖ change in appetite
- ❖ vomiting or diarrhea
- ❖ change in energy level
- ❖ weight loss or gain
- ❖ change in voice/bark or development of cough

These particular symptoms either individually or combined, can indicate a variety of different diseases, such as kidney failure, diabetes, cardiac disease, thyroid disease, nutritional problems, parasites, cancer, etc. It is important that you see your family veterinarian if you feel that there are changes to your pet’s behavior or health. As an owner your observations and information are critical to helping your veterinarian formulate a diagnostic plan to treat your senior pet.

**Golden Years Cont'd**

A few common scenarios in older pets that may need to be addressed with the help of your veterinarian are:

- ❖ mobility issues
- ❖ senility or confusion
- ❖ anxiety
- ❖ incontinence

Mobility issues may require x-rays in addition to a physical exam. Arthritis is very common; however there may be more serious causes for difficulty and lack of movement. Changes in behavior, such as increased vocalization, increased wandering, repetitive behavior or activities, and even house soiling may require additional tests to rule out medical causes. If all medical causes for such changes are ruled out then there may be a chance your pet is becoming senile. Senility in animals is also known as Cognitive Dysfunction; and, while we are aware of this syndrome, there are not specific tests for brain function and many times this diagnosis is made by ruling out other causes for the symptoms your pet is experiencing.

At The Animal Hospital of Dunedin we hope to help make aging as graceful and painless as possible for your pet. Once again, early detection can be a big part of that. So even if you pet feels well at home, we still advise having our staff get some baseline information that may be of assistance sooner rather than later.

age	feline		canine		
	weight (lb)				
	0-20	0-20	20-50	50-90	>90
1	7	7	7	8	9
2	13	13	14	16	18
3	20	20	21	24	26
4	26	26	27	31	34
5	33	33	34	38	41
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
16	80	80	87	99	123
17	84	84	92	104	131
18	88	88	96	109	139
19	92	92	101	115	
20	96	96	105	120	

Table courtesy of Fred L. Metzger, DVM, DABVP

**COLOR KEY**  adult  senior  geriatric

## What are these tests and what do they look for?



A **complete blood count** examines your pet's white blood cells, red blood cells, and platelets.

- White blood cells (WBCs) are part of the body's immune system. There are several types of white blood cells: neutrophils, monocytes, lymphocytes, eosinophils, and basophils. Each type of white blood cell reacts in a specific way to a threat to the immune system. A CBC counts not only the total number of white blood cells but also each individual type of white blood cell in the blood sample.
- Red blood cells (RBCs) are the cells in the blood stream that are responsible for carrying oxygen to the different tissues in the body. A CBC measures the total number of RBCs as well as measuring their capacity to carry oxygen based on hemoglobin levels in the blood. (Hemoglobin is the protein responsible for transporting oxygen.)
- Platelets are necessary for blood clotting. Without adequate numbers of platelets, your pet's blood will not clot properly and your pet will be susceptible to abnormal bleeding. A CBC measures the number of platelets in your pet's blood.

A CBC also examines the individual cells in your pet's blood for evidence of structural abnormalities that might be an indication of abnormal function or disease.

A **blood chemistry profile** measures the various chemical compounds found in your pet's blood stream. There are several chemicals that are commonly measured.

- Blood urea nitrogen and creatinine are measured to evaluate kidney function. They may be elevated due to damage to the kidneys themselves or elevations may indicate other abnormalities in the renal system that impact the kidneys, such as urethral or ureteral obstructions or dehydration.
- Chemical compounds used to evaluate liver function include alkaline phosphatase (ALP), alanine aminotransferase (ALT), aspartate aminotransferase (AST), and bilirubin. Any or all of these values may be elevated in cases of liver disease, depending on the type of disease. Abnormalities in other organ systems can also cause changes in these values. For instance, adrenal disease can affect some of these values also.
- Electrolytes are often included in a blood chemistry profile also. Abnormalities in electrolytes such as calcium, chloride, potassium, sodium, and phosphorus can be associated with many different disease conditions. Abnormalities in kidney function, gastrointestinal disease, seizures, and many other illnesses and/or symptoms can cause or be caused by abnormal electrolyte levels in the blood.
- Blood protein levels are also often measured in a chemical analysis. Blood proteins serve many functions in the body. Globulins, a specific type of protein, play a role in immune function. Albumins, another type of protein, help stop fluid from leaking out of the blood vessels and help transport specific molecules to areas where they are required. Other proteins aid in clotting and help regulate gene expression. Typically, a blood chemistry profile will measure total protein levels, globulin levels, and albumin levels.

The **measuring of thyroid hormones (usually T4)** is performed when thyroid disease is suspected.

Hyperthyroidism/Hypothyroidism is a common disease, especially in middle aged and senior pets. It results in elevated thyroid hormone levels circulating in the blood stream.

A **feline/canine heartworm** test is performed to rule out heartworm infection in both cats and dogs.

A **urine microalbumin** test is a test to detect very small levels of a blood protein (albumin) in your pet's urine. A microalbumin test is used to detect early signs of kidney damage in pets.

**Testing for feline leukemia and feline AIDS** are often part of a basic blood screen as well. These diseases are both caused by retroviruses, although the feline leukemia virus is different from the feline AIDS virus. Testing for these viruses may be recommended if your cat has never been tested before, if your cat has been exposed to another cat that is positive for one of these viruses, if your cat is at high risk of exposure to either virus, or if your cat is ill. More specialized blood testing may be indicated based on the results of these basic blood tests. However, these are the tests that are most commonly recommended as part of a routine blood screen to evaluate your cat's overall health.

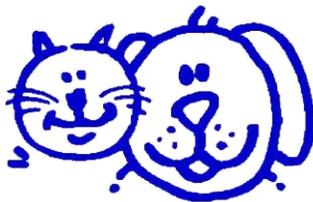


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**\$1**

## First Exam - New Patient

(\$49-\$80 Savings)

Includes comprehensive physical exam and one vaccine. Does not include 3yr Rabies vaccine. Must be presented at the time of purchase. Coupon may not be combined with any other offer. NL



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**\$110**

## Senior Wellness Screen

(\$50.32 savings)

Senior Wellness Screen includes the following: chemistry, cbc, heartworm test, thyroid level, urinalysis, and microalbuminuria ( for cats also includes leukemia and fiv test). Call the office today to schedule your pets visit. May not be combined with any other offer. Coupon must be presented at the time of purchase.

Expires 10/31/15 NL



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**-10%**

## 10% Off Dental Cleaning

( Call for an appointment today 727-733-9351)

Discount applies to anesthesia, prophylaxis, and any other dental radiographs or extractions that might be needed. Offer excludes required pre-dental labwork. May not be combined with any other coupons or discounts. Must be presented at the time of purchase.

Expires 10/31/15 NL