

# As time goes by...

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*Was your dog there when Noah built the arc?? Then read on...*

The term 'senior' really depends on the individual animal, as there are many different breeds and sizes of dogs. Although there is no formal definition the following is a guideline of when to consider your dog to be 'senior'.

For large and giant breed dogs it ranges between 7-10 years of age while for smaller breeds it might only be between 12-14 years of age.

One way to determine if your dog is becoming a senior is to look for physical signs of aging...

Does your dog have grey or white hair around the muzzle?

Does your dog seem less playful or have trouble seeing or hearing?

These are only a few questions that may indicate advancing age in your dog.

As dogs age it is important to go for yearly check-ups, because just like in humans, things tend to start going wrong!!

A lot of diseases are more common in older dogs and progresses rapidly... Recognizing these health problems early on could make a huge difference in the prognosis and life expectancy of your beloved pet.

Here are a few diseases that occur quite commonly in older animals for which an early diagnosis and treatment could make a huge difference.

**Renal problems:** Most renal problems due to old age would manifest very slowly and symptoms will only appear after a prolonged period during which the body compensates for reduced renal function. This means that by the time clinical symptoms of renal failure is seen, the animal is already in the terminal stages of kidney failure and more than 70% of renal function is lost.

This chronic renal failure can be diagnosed much earlier by doing a urinalysis which is a series of, simple, non-invasive urine tests, as well as checking for increased enzymes (urea and creatinine) in the blood.

Treatment at an early stage will not stop renal failure, but will improve and support renal function which will improve and prolong your pet's life.

**Diabetes:** This is also a disease affecting mainly older animals above 6 years of age. This debilitating disease causes an inability to utilize energy sources in the body due to an insulin deficiency. If not recognized early enough, your pet could go into a 'ketoacidosis

state', which is the body's response to starvation... This has a very poor prognosis and most animals will die. A simple urinalysis can also be used to detect this disease early on.

**Cardio-vascular problems:** Debilitating valvular disease is often found in older animals which will lead to congestive heart failure. Early detection will improve your pet's quality of life and correct treatment will improve cardiac function and prolong life expectancy.

**Arthritis and joint problems:** Many large breeds are predisposed to problems such as hip or elbow dysplasia, but even small breeds can get arthritis. A lot of owners think it is just old age causing their precious companion to walk slower, struggle to get up and rather wait for someone to carry them upstairs than climb it themselves. Unfortunately this could be arthritis which is a very painful disease. Diagnosing this via x-rays and giving supportive treatment will greatly enhance your pet's quality of life.

These are just a few diseases that can be diagnosed by doing a few extra tests. There are still many not mentioned here. As every animal is an individual with different problems specific tests might be indicated to diagnose something in your specific pet.

*For this reason we have formulated a senior and geriatric profile to help diagnose and prevent diseases early on in your senior pet which includes:*

**Physical Exam:**

General check-up which includes listening for cardio-vascular problems, doing an oral and dental check, rectal exam - to check the colon and/or the prostate if your pet is a male dog.

Ophthalmic exam, to check for glaucoma, cataracts and 'dry eye'

Hair and coat condition

Ear health

Ecto- and endoparasite checks which might include a faecal exam

During this time we will also discuss body conditioning, as well as make recommendations about food, supplements, etc. that your pet might need.

**Urinalysis:**

This can provide a wealth of information regarding kidney function, bladder infections, etc. and is an important tool to diagnose incontinence.

**Bloodsmear:**

A blood smear can give a lot of information regarding the cellular portion of blood. Different types of blood cells are evaluated and can give indications of inflammation and infections (bacterial, viral and parasitic). It could also point us toward various problems that might need further work-up.

### ***Blood Chemistry:***

There are hundreds of chemicals, enzymes, proteins, hormones, electrolytes, etc. that can be tested to determine different problems in the body. We will focus on Urea and Creatinine - which indicates renal function - as well as globulins - which if raised, indicate chronic inflammation, etc. and will support the need for further work-up.

Depending on all the above your veterinarian might suggest other chemistry tests, x-rays, ultrasound, etc. to further evaluate a specific problem that was found in your pet and address everyone's individual needs.

*Don't wait any longer to bring 'Fluffy', 'Rex', 'Mr Twinkles' and all your 'senior' pets to try and make their last days' worth living...*