

# The Importance of Senior Wellness Exams



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From the moment you first met, you and your dog have shared many happy experiences and sentimental moments. Throughout their lives wellness exams are important, and as they age, senior exams can help veterinarians identify ways to give your dog a better and longer quality of life. As your dog approaches seven years of age, things start to change. Suddenly, stairs may seem too high. Jumping into a car requires more effort, and sometimes it seems that your dog doesn't hear as well.

It's true that dogs age faster than humans. The dog to human age ratio is dependent on the size of the dog, but by age seven, all dogs are becoming seniors. Like people, dogs are more prone to developing certain health problems once they've reached their senior years. Early diagnosis of these problems allows earlier treatment, which

can prevent disease progression and relieve discomfort — so it is important that every dog owner knows the value of preventive care. Here are a few suggestions that may help when caring for a senior dog:

**Daily:** Monitor appetite changes, thirst and bathroom habits.

**Weekly:** Monitor any changes in appearance, activity level, behavior and interactions with other animals and people.

**Monthly:** Monitor fluctuations in weight.

**Every Six Months:** See your family veterinarian for a wellness exam. Report and discuss any changes. Have dental cleaning done if recommended

**Yearly:** Blood work, urinalysis and dental cleaning (blood work will reveal abnormalities in bone marrow function, underlying infections, liver and kidney diseases, endocrine disorders and electrolyte imbalances. A urinalysis will allow screening for early kidney failure, crystals, urinary tract infections or diabetes.)

Here are a few ailments that can be treated through early detection by your veterinarian:

## Arthritis

If your dog is slow to rise, reluctant to

go up and down stairs, unable to jump in and out of the car, or if you notice a change in stance or gait, it may be due to arthritis. A physical exam will determine whether x-rays are needed. You can help by ensuring that your dog has regular exercise to maintain muscle mass and a healthy body weight and by using joint health supplements recommended by your veterinarian. Your vet may also prescribe medication to help cope with discomfort.

## Dental Disease

You may notice bad breath, an unwillingness to eat, tartar build-up, or gingivitis. Although it is uncommon for dogs to develop cavities like people, dogs have a very high incidence of gum disease and problems under the gum line (periodontal disease). Regular oral exams to check gum health and dental cleanings will help prevent early loss of teeth, infection, heart disease and bad breath due to severe disease. Your vet will also want regular dental x-rays to evaluate root health. You can help by brushing your dog's teeth daily using pet specific toothpaste to maintain proper dental care.

## Tumors or Skin Masses

As with all masses, these are best caught early. You are the best person to find and observe masses. When you pet or groom your dog, it is the perfect time to feel for skin growths or lumps and bumps under the skin. Even if they are benign, your vet may recommend surgical removal if they hinder normal activity.

You can help care for your beloved friend by asking your veterinarian if you need to change your dog's diet or activity level. Your veterinarian may recommend several lifestyle changes to help your pet maintain good health and well-being.

Senior pets are usually less active and have a lower energy requirement so they require fewer calories, but their aging bodies require higher nutrition levels. Many food companies now create diets that contain the additional anti-oxidants, joint supplements, fatty acids and fiber that are so important to an older dog. Talk to your veterinarian to ensure you are selecting the right food.

Senior pets can hurt themselves during high intensity activities. Regular,

controlled exercise such as leash walking is a great form of exercise for older dogs. Lower stress, longer lasting activities will be better than shorter, more intense workouts.

Keep it interesting! Teaching your dog new commands and giving them a chance to socialize with other animals and people will keep their minds engaged, even as their bodies become less active.

No one knows your dog better than you do and with regular check-ups with your veterinarian, you will be able to help your pet maintain the highest possible quality of life for the longest period of time. Through preventive care, early diagnosis and proper treatment, we can all work together to give your dog as many more years as possible. 🐾

Please keep your dog away from these Holiday Hazards:

- Candles
- Chocolate
- Holly Berries
- Macadamia Nuts
- Mistletoe
- Ornaments
- Poinsettias
- Raisins
- Sappy Tree Water
- Tinsel
- Unstable Trees

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