

## Twilight years



Age eventually catches up with us all, including our pets, and although I am sure most of us age gracefully, sometimes problems can become apparent as our twilight years approach. These age-related problems can sometimes be ignored when owners feel their pets are just 'getting old' when actually, there is a lot we can do to keep our pets comfortable and happy long into retirement!

Some general checks that you can do at home are discussed below.

### **Coat changes**

As animals get older they often become less adept at grooming themselves. This can be due to a lack of interest or to difficulty with reaching areas of their coat due to arthritic changes in the joints and reduced flexibility.

Our nurses can help with advice on grooming and coat care at home. Sometimes an animal's coat can become very matted, which is very uncomfortable and can require shaving entirely (a de-matt ? this sometimes requires sedation) which we can arrange, alongside guidance to help prevent the same happening again in the future.

If arthritis appears to be the problem, our vets can advise on the most effective treatment for your individual pet.

### **Nails**

As dogs, and particularly cats, get older and less energetic, their nails do not wear down in the same way and can need a trim. Older cats in particular can get very thickened nails, which if left too long can grow into the pad causing painful infections.

All animals, but especially older cats, should have their nails checked regularly at home, and if any concerns, be booked in with a nurse or vet to have them trimmed. Did you know that nail clipping is free with a nurse on our 365 Healthcare Plan?

### **Mobility**

Mobility can decrease

as an animal gets older, often due to arthritic changes within the joints, which can both physically change the ability to bend and straighten their joints, and also make it painful to move around. Both of these result in reduced activity levels.

You may notice your dog no longer wants to walk as far, or is unable to jump onto the sofa or into the car. Or your cat may not jump up to surfaces as they used to or choose a sleeping place that is lower down. All these can be signs of arthritis.

If you feel that your pet appears stiff and less mobile, please book in with one of our vets and we will be able to examine, assess and discuss the various treatments available.

### **Diet and weight**

Older pets, like older people, can have marked changes to their weight. Some older animals can become more greedy, and in combination with exercising less, can quickly become overweight ? predisposing them to arthritis, diabetes and heart disease to name a few.

Other animals may lose weight as they get older, either due to lack of interest in their food, a reduction in their sense of smell, or an underlying health issue.

If you feel your pet's weight is changing you can book in for a free weight check with one of our veterinary nurses. They will be able to assess your pet's weight and body condition score, and advise you about the correct type and amount of diet to feed for your individual pet. If they have concerns about any underlying health issues, they will arrange an appointment with one of our vets for further discussion or investigation as needed.

### **Blood pressure**

High blood pressure is common in cats in particular, just as it can be in older people. It can be something that occurs on its own or can be a symptom of an underlying disease. If left untreated it can cause various secondary serious health problems, but until these secondary problems occur there is often very little indication there is anything wrong at home.

One of our vets or nurses can check your cat's blood pressure in a routine appointment. If you would like to book in, please contact your local branch.

### **Teeth**

Just like people, as our pets get older their teeth may not be as strong as they used to be, and they can develop tartar, cavities, abscess or gingivitis. If needed, dental treatment can be performed at any of our surgeries

to correct these problems.

If you notice signs of dental disease, which can include reluctance to eat, weight loss, smelly breath or abnormal looking teeth please book in at one of our surgeries.

### **Hearing and Sight**

As our pets get older, their sight and hearing can deteriorate. Although it is often not an easy fix to correct these issues there are many things you can do at home to help your older pet manage. A member of our nursing or veterinary team would be happy to advise you about management of these issues.

### **Preventative health care**

Elderly animals often have a weakened immune system, and so it is even more important to keep up with their preventative treatments, both anti parasite treatments (flea, worm and tick) and vaccinations to keep them healthy.

It is also a time in their life where they would benefit from regular examinations, so a yearly vaccination check can be invaluable in detecting abnormalities before they cause serious illness. And in geriatric animals it is can be beneficial to increase the frequency of these checks to 6 monthly.

If you would like to book in for a health check, or if you would like to find out about our 365 Healthcare Plan which includes your animals' preventative care and twice yearly health checks, please ring the surgery.

If you would like more detail about some of the medical conditions that can affect elderly cats in particular, read our other article on 'senior cat care' which focuses on illnesses found commonly in senior cats. There is more information about the first signs of these problems and also an explanation of these conditions if your pet has been diagnosed with one of them.