
Age is Not a Disease

SYMPTOMS NEED INVESTIGATION

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We have all thought it, “Pickles isn’t eating as much, but he’s older and so it is to be expected.” Right? Well, the answer may not always be age related. Some behavioral changes may be early warning signs of something more serious in our older pets.

Our pet population is living longer than ever – which in part is due to the preventative care and specialized care that veterinarians are able to provide. With this increase in age, we are seeing chronic problems such as liver disease, kidney disease and even intestinal issues that don’t typically affect younger population of pets. As owners it is often easy to attribute changes in weight, urination or even eating to age – but age is not a disease.

When pets begin eating less or losing weight, this is often a sign that something is not right. It is important to have your pet seen so that your veterinarian can evaluate for dental disease which can be painful and uncomfortable. In addition, a physical examination may lead to clues as to what is going on with your pet. Routine blood work and a urinalysis will check kidney health, liver health and make sure that there are no abnormalities with the white blood cells that fight infection or the red blood cells that carry oxygen. If these tests do not show a reason for your pet to be eating less or losing weight, additional testing may be needed. X-rays allow your veterinarian to evaluate the size and shape of the organs and help make sure that everything is in the right place

and not being “pushed” out of the way by abnormal growths or masses. An abdominal ultrasound may also be considered if a closer look at the architecture of the organs is needed. Ultrasound gives your veterinarian much better detail about how the organs look, but don’t always tell us the



same information as x-rays. X-rays and ultrasounds are often used together to give your veterinarian the most ideal picture of what is going on with your pet.

If it is determined that your pet has a problem, treatment and prognosis will depend on the final diagnosis. However there are treatment options available for most conditions and your veterinarian will help you make the best choice for your pet. If the kidneys are not working well, treatment may involve fluids that you may administer under the skin to help keep the kidneys flushed out. In addition, medications such as antacids, anti-nausea medications and appetite stimulants can be used to treat the symptoms of kidney disease. Liver disease can often be managed with antibiotics, anti-nausea

medications and in some instances steroids if deemed appropriate by your veterinarian. With any chronic disease, follow up care and monitoring with your veterinarian will help improve the success of your pet’s treatment.

If the diagnosis returns as cancer, there are still options available for your pet. A veterinary oncologist can talk to you about the type of cancer your pet has, treatment options available and what the expected response to treatment would be for your pet. Chemotherapy is not as intense in pets as it is for people, however chemotherapy is not without potential side effects. The most typical side effects are vomiting, diarrhea and transient bone marrow suppression. We do not typically see the weakness and hair loss that can be seen in people. Often, our goal with cancer care in pets is not to completely cure the cancer, but to slow it down to the point where the pet’s quality of life is dramatically improved.

All of the success in managing these conditions however rests in the hands of one person – YOU, the pet owner. Your pet counts on you to have them seen by a veterinarian if things “just aren’t right” instead of chalking it up to old age. Make sure your senior pet is evaluated by your family veterinarian at least once or twice a year and that lab work is done to make sure everything is working well. It is easier to treat problems when caught early instead of treating them later once things are more severe.

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