

# YOUR CAT'S GOLDEN YEARS



**Congratulations on your success at caring for your pet for all these years!**

Your friend is getting older, but the care you give throughout its lifetime can minimize and prevent disease as he or she ages. Proper care includes periodic checkups, routine vaccinations, parasite control, dental examinations, regular exercise, and a good diet. The average indoor cat has a life expectancy of 15-18 years, and many live into their twenties nowadays. With time will come the inevitable changes of aging.

As pets age, two types of changes occur: age related changes and pathological changes. Age related changes, such as vision and hearing loss, are normal, and develop in most animals. These changes cannot be prevented, but we can help you and your pet to adapt to these changes.

Many pathological changes or diseases can, on the other hand, be prevented or successfully treated. With good care to promote health and prevent disease in senior pets, your pet can remain healthy and active well into its twilight years.

Your veterinarian can help you to determine what foods, medications and procedures will improve the length and quality of your pet's life. Your help is needed to carry out any treatment recommended.

**Nutrient Excesses** are far more damaging to today's pets than deficiencies. Those cheap grocery store brands of food won't cause your pet to die from malnutrition. They will, however, increase stress on the liver, kidneys and heart and contribute to a number of different diseases by delivering excessive amounts of sodium (salt), fat, phosphorus, magnesium, protein and calories.

Premium pet food companies such as Eagle Pack Foods, Iams and Science Diet carefully control the amounts of nutrients contained in their foods, so that nutrients are supplied in the correct amount – neither too much nor too little.

## **New Advances in Senior Care**

Millions more pets are living into their teens nowadays, and some even into their twenties. Better vaccines, nutrition, and dental care have extended many of these pets' lives.

Pets' importance in our lives and the quality of care sought by pet owners today are also significant influences on life expectancy. Dogs and cats used to be kept outdoors. Then they moved indoors but slept in the kitchen. Now they share our beds, our cars and our leisure time activities, accompany us to nursing homes and children's hospital wards, and share a bond with their owners that was unheard of fifty years ago.

Pet owners today want the same level of health care and nutrition that they themselves enjoy, and they count on veterinarians to help preserve the precious bond they have with their pets, who often substitute for the extended families that used to be the norm in a more rural society.

Because of these changes, the growth of senior care products and services and the advances in senior medicine for pets has been astonishing. We now screen 80% of the older pets we see for early signs of common diseases. Catching problems early allows us to do more to preserve the length and quality of a pet's life. Chances are good we'll be talking about this with you and your pet, and chances are you'll be letting us do this

**The earlier Arthritis** is treated the longer joint function will be preserved. Yes, cats get arthritis, too.

Keeping your pet at the proper body weight will minimize wear and tear on the joints and spine over time. Start watching calories and providing a nutritional supplement such as glucosamine early, with the onset of middle age, and begin anti-inflammatory medication as soon as the first signs of stiffness appear.

Early intervention has been found to greatly slow the progression of arthritis in both people and pets. Almost all dogs and cats over the age of twelve – 90% - will be suffering from some degree of arthritis.

testing because your pet is more important to you than ever before.

So what are we looking for? Heart disease and cancer are the leading killers in man, but pets suffer much more often from kidney and liver disease than heart problems. Although mitral valve disease (heart murmurs) and cardiomyopathy (enlarged or thickened heart muscle) are both serious and not uncommon heart diseases in dogs and cats, arteriosclerosis, strokes and heart attacks are not usually problems seen in pets.

Modern heart medications and dental care have also made congestive heart failure, once a common disease of older dogs caused by valve deterioration,

much less significant. So these days cancer, kidney disease and liver disease are the leading causes of death. Diabetes, thyroid diseases, adrenal hormone dysfunction and arthritis are also common problems in elderly pets.

### **The three D's are the keys to care for senior pets:**

#### **-Diet, Dental care and Diagnostic tests.**

Good nutrition throughout a pet's life will greatly increase lifespan and comfort. Dental care can prevent heart, kidney and liver disease from occurring, by eliminating chronic infection of the teeth and gums. Blood and urine testing picks up kidney, liver and hormonal diseases in their beginning stages, so we can intervene early and greatly extend life expectancy with proper therapy.

Senior care really begins at birth. The earlier you begin to think about the three D's, and the more you invest in them throughout your pet's life, the longer your pet is likely to live. Better nutrition is now available because of ongoing research in this field. There are essential nutrients being delivered in today's pet foods that weren't even discovered fifteen years ago. New anesthetics and the availability of in house lab equipment have made anesthesia for dentistry safer and diagnosing diseases faster than ever. We'll be talking to you about these topics with each annual exam visit to the hospital because these things are the keys to a long and happy life for your pet.

#### **New research into Kidney Disease in Cats**

shows that almost all cats with declining kidney function are deficient in the mineral potassium. Poorly functioning kidneys release too much potassium into the urine. Low potassium reduces kidney function even more, which causes the loss of even more potassium. Not only does this vicious cycle cause a faster deterioration of the kidneys, but eventually the low potassium levels affect appetite, weight and muscle function. All cats with declining kidney function should be on a potassium supplement.

## Other interesting facts and important information . . .

**Fifteen years ago the recommendations for treating Chronic Renal (Kidney) Failure** in pets were simple – feed a low protein diet. Now we monitor and treat high blood pressure, which can accompany kidney disease; provide nutritional and fluid supplementation; use hormonal therapy to improve appetite, anemia and muscle strength; and keep dental disease to a minimum with regular cleaning and polishing of the teeth. For cats, even kidney transplantation is available. These treatments can keep chronic renal failure at bay for a long time, sometimes many years.

- Do you know why you are asked to produce a urine specimen each time you visit your physician for a checkup? It is because a urinalysis is one of the least expensive but most valuable laboratory tests around. Kidney disease is one of the most common problems of pets over age ten and shows up on a urine test before it will be evident with blood testing. Bladder cancer, urinary tract infections, diabetes, liver disease and hormonal problems also can be detected with a urine sample.

- All the common age-related diseases of pets are treatable, including periodontal disease, osteoarthritis, Cushing's Disease, heart, kidney and liver diseases, diabetes mellitus, thyroid disease and many forms of cancer. Early diagnosis and treatment are vital.

- Older pets have a greater need for attention and nurturing. A daily massage, more frequent brushing and gentler but more frequent walks or playtimes help older bodies to function and feel better. Give your senior pet some extra loving care!

- Only 43% of pet owners polled believed their pet's quality of life could be improved. Yet most arthritic pets are under-medicated for pain and millions go without dental care and regular veterinary check -ups. Ask us how we can help your pet live a longer, healthier life!

**Many people would never consider treating their pet for cancer,** though they would readily provide care for other progressive diseases such as kidney, heart or liver failure. Yet many cancers of pets are becoming more treatable diseases.

You may have images of the horrors of cancer care because of experiences with human friends or family members. Treating pets with cancer is often very different, especially since pets don't have the added stress of living with the knowledge that they have the disease.

In fact, you would have a very hard time picking out a dog receiving chemotherapy from any other dog trotting down the street. Chemotherapy, radiation and surgical methods are all used in cancer treatment for pets, often with great success and good quality of life.

Consider this level of care for your pets. We think you'll be surprised and pleased.