

VETERINARY ASSOCIATES OF CAPE COD

WHEN IS MY DOG CONSIDERED A SENIOR?

A touch of gray on the chin or around the muzzle. Once-clear eyes becoming a little cloudy. A slight stiffness in what used to be a frisky gait. Any of these can be telltale signs that your furry friend is entering the “golden” years.


Generally speaking, a dog 7 years of age or older qualifies as a senior. This varies, however, with the size and breed of the dog. For instance, smaller dogs tend to have longer life spans than giant-breed pets. A giant-breed dog as young as five years of age may be considered a “senior,” while a small-breed dog may not reach senior status until 10 to 13 years of age. Other factors affecting how individual dogs age include body weight, nutrition, environment, and overall health.

The old adage that every year in a dog’s life is equivalent to seven “human” years isn’t quite accurate. Pets mature more rapidly during the first two years of life, and then again during the final third of their life span. Use the chart at right to determine your dog’s age in human years.

Why is it important to know your dog’s true age? Pets are living longer than ever, thanks to advances in veterinary care and improved nutrition, providing their owners with many more years of love and faithful companionship. The trade-off, however, is that senior pets, just like their aging human companions, become more vulnerable to multiple health problems and diseases such as weight gain and decreased mobility; heart, kidney, and liver diseases; diabetes; dental problems and periodontal disease; behavioral problems and cancer. The good news is that many of these health problems can be prevented, controlled, or treated if detected in the early stages.

Once your dog has reached senior status, twice-a-year senior wellness exams are recommended as the standard of care by the American Animal Hospital Association. Ask us how our S’Paw Gold and Platinum packages can make your pet’s golden years happy and healthy!

AGE	dog’s age in human years			
	0-20 lbs	20-50 lbs	50-90 lbs	>90 lbs
1	7	7	8	9
2	13	14	16	18
3	20	21	24	26
4	26	27	31	34
5	33	34	38	41
6	40	42	45	49
7	44	47	50	56
8	48	51	55	64
9	52	56	61	71
10	56	60	66	78
11	60	65	72	86
12	64	69	77	93
13	68	74	82	101
14	72	78	88	108
15	76	83	93	115
16	80	87	99	123
17	84	92	104	131
18	88	96	109	139
19	92	101	115	
20	96	105	120	
21	100	109	126	
22	104	113	130	
23	108	117		
24	112	120		
25	116	124		



color key
■ adult
■ senior
■ geriatric

CIRCLE YOUR DOGS AGE IN HUMAN YEARS ABOVE

AGING OR ILLNESS? SIGNS OF AGE-RELATED DISEASE IN SENIOR DOGS

While some signs of aging, such as a graying muzzle or slowed activity, are easy to identify in your dog, others are more subtle. Most age-related changes in how your dog looks, acts, and feels tend to be gradual. Therefore, it takes a watchful eye to recognize what may be early signs of disease or healthy problems, and routine checkups become more important than ever.

Do you know the signs of pain and illness in your dog? Following is a list of the most common changes associated with age-related diseases and compromising medical conditions. If you note any of these changes in your dog, please let us know. By working together, we can help ensure your pet enjoys the best quality of life possible throughout the senior years.

Behavioral Changes

- Decreased activity
- Less interaction with family members
- Less enthusiastic greeting behavior
- Sleeping more or sleeping during the day and staying awake at night
- Disorientation/confusion (getting “lost” in the house or yard)
- Less responsive to verbal cues or name
- Excessive barking or whimpering for no apparent reason

Metabolic Changes

- Weight gain (or loss)
- Changes in appearance (skin, coat, or muscle tone)
- Changes in eating or drinking habits
- Increased urinations
- Loss of housetraining

Physical Changes

- Limping/stiffness of gait
- Poor vision or difficulty hearing
- Dental problems (offensive breath)
- Increase in infections
- Digestive problems, such as increased episodes of vomiting or diarrhea
- New lumps or bumps

Changes in your dog’s appearance or behavior can be a sign that something is *medically* wrong, so don’t assume your pet is just suffering from “old age” and can’t be helped. Keep a close eye on your senior dog, and talk with us about any type of change, whether it

occurs suddenly or gradually.

THE SENIOR CARE WELLNESS EXAM

Scheduling regular veterinary exams is one of the most important steps you can take to keep your dog healthy and happy throughout his or her lifespan. This becomes even more important as your pet ages. Just as physicians recommend certain tests, such as cholesterol screening and blood pressure checks, when a person turns 40, the American Animal Hospital Association recommends that annual screening tests should begin when your pet reaches “middle age.” For most dogs, this ranges from 4 to 7 years of age. These tests:

- Ensure that your pet is healthy
- Establish “baseline” values for comparison with future test results
- Help your veterinarian make preventive care recommendations to delay the onset or progression of certain diseases.

As dogs enter their senior years, typically at 7 or 8 years of age, twice yearly wellness exams and laboratory tests are recommended. Remember, your dog ages more rapidly during the golden years, and the risk of developing a chronic condition or serious disease also increases. Scheduling a routine wellness visit every six months helps your veterinarian detect diseases or conditions in their early stages when they may still be treated or controlled effectively.

The senior wellness exam includes a comprehensive medical history and a complete physical exam. The physical exam includes checking your dog’s overall appearance, temperature, body weight, heart, lungs, ears, eyes, teeth and gums, thyroid gland, and skin and coat. The exam also includes age-related laboratory tests (listed below) and preventive health recommendations.

Screening Procedures for Healthy Senior Dogs

The most important screening tests for healthy senior dogs includes:

- Complete Blood Count (CBC): This test helps in the diagnosis of infection, anemia and bleeding problems, and it may provide insight into the status of your dog’s immune system.
- Serum Chemistry Profile: This test is used for assessing the status of the liver, kidneys,

pancreas, thyroid gland, and other organs and electrolytes.

- **Urinalysis:** A urine sample is checked for evidence of infection and to assess kidney function.
- **Fecal Analysis:** A fecal sample is checked for evidence of parasites and unusual bacteria and protozoa.
- **Other tests:** Your veterinarian may recommend additional testing, including radiography (x-rays), echocardiography (ultrasound of the heart), abdominal ultrasonography, adrenal gland testing, blood pressure measurement, or liver, pancreas, and small intestine function tests.

Preventative Health Recommendations

Your veterinarian will also discuss preventive health recommendations with you to help keep your senior dog healthy and happy, including information on:

- Dental and oral care
- Diet and nutrition
- Weight control
- Exercise guidelines to maintain your pet's mobility
- Parasite control
- Vaccination risk assessment
- Maintenance of your pet's mental health
- Environmental conditions for maintaining health

Your senior dog has lavished you with loyal, lifelong love and companionship. With a little extra care and attention, your veterinarian can help your dog enjoy the golden years and live a happier, fuller life.

