

# Wellness for the Older Pet

## Is my pet considered older?

Age is not simply a number. We determine age by species (cat or dog), breed, health history, lifestyle, and age groupings associated with common changes in health. There are many official life stages within in the older group: Mature 7-10 yrs, Senior 11-14 yrs, and Geriatric 15+ yrs. If your pet is 8 years or older, we consider him or her to be senior for the ease of discussion. Your pet may seem healthy well into its senior years. However, many problems common to senior pets (kidney or heart failure) may not present symptoms until your pet becomes seriously ill. Senior care recommendations help your veterinarian identify problems early enough to institute preventive healthcare measures.

## Important facts about senior testing

An aging pet's organs gradually deteriorate and may lose their ability to function properly. We use senior testing to promote early detection and treatment of disease, so we can maintain health and prevent illness during your pet's senior years. Early detection of disease often gives us more effective and less costly treatment options. In addition, senior testing helps establish normal baseline values for your pet, creating a point of comparison for the future.

## What pets should take part in senior testing?

We recommend senior testing for all senior pets as well as any pet who is exhibiting one or more of the following symptoms: weight loss or gain, increased thirst or urination, lethargy, vomiting/diarrhea, poor hair coat, coughing, seizures, unusual behavior, or overall decline in condition.

## What is senior testing?

At Frontier Village Veterinary Clinic, we have included these elements:

- **A physical exam** is the most important part of the senior care program. Your veterinarian will assess all body systems to check for any abnormalities
- **An intestinal parasite screen** allows us to detect organisms that cannot be seen by the naked eye and may compromise your pet in addition to spreading infection to other pets or humans
- **Blood chemistry tests** measure levels of various substances in the blood and diagnose diseases such as diabetes and liver and kidney disease.
- **A complete blood count (CBC)** provides a detailed look at the blood itself and helps the doctor diagnose anemia or infection
- **A urinalysis** give us information on kidney function and checks for urinary tract infections
- **The thyroid screen (T4)** helps diagnose thyroid disease, which is especially common in older cats and dogs
- **Blood pressure measurement** lets our team check for hypertension. Just as in humans, high blood pressure in pets can lead to kidney problems, heart disease, blindness, and other complications

## It seems more recommendations are being made- are they really necessary?

The answer is yes to both questions. We know more about pet health than we did before. As with humans, we now have more diagnostic tools to help us recognize illness and disease before your pet becomes seriously ill. Early diagnosis often helps us intervene so we can prevent unnecessary discomfort for your pet and avoid the increased cost associated with advanced disease and illness. Ultimately, these preventive measures allow us to share more years with the pet companions we so love.