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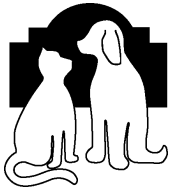
News: Senior Pet Month

October is National Senior Pet month. Senior pet month was established to increase awareness of health problems of older pets and what we can do for early detection and treatment of these diseases. This month's newsletter is devoted to our senior pets and what we can do to expand the length and quality of their lives.

Senior at seven: Is my pet a senior pet? Indoor cats and smaller dogs are considered senior at about age seven. Large and giant breed dogs are senior at age 5. Indoor cats and small breed dogs live on average to age 15 to 16, although we frequently see pets older than this. Giant breed dogs such as Great Danes usually live to 8 to 9 years of age. As our pets age, their organs begin to function less efficiently, the immune system doesn't work optimally, and they just can't move around like they used to. Our geriatric pets are the pets that are extremely old or ill. Just because your pet is older doesn't mean that they are sick, just less optimal.

Cats: As cats get older, they get susceptible to organ dysfunction. The leading disease in older cats is not cancer. In fact, cancer is uncommon in cats. Chronic kidney disease is the most common disorder of older cats. When the kidney disease gets bad enough and they show symptoms (excessive thirst, urination), then we consider them to be in kidney failure. The symptoms show when there is a loss of about 75% of the function of both kidneys. This progression can be slowed with a special kidney diet and fluid supplementation. Even cats in kidney failure can be helped with minor intervention. Another common disease is an over-active thyroid gland. This causes increased appetite, drinking, urination, weight loss, and heart problems. This condition is completely curable. Older cats can also get liver disease, intestinal disease, and pancreatic disease, all of which can cause vomiting, diarrhea, and eventually death if left untreated. Symptoms of liver disease do not show until there is a loss of about 70% of functional liver cells. Older cats, especially obese older cats are prone to diabetes. This disease is treatable with medication, weight loss and specially formulated diets and is similar to human diabetes. Cats can also get arthritis like dogs do.

Dogs: We see more cancer in dogs than we do in cats, and this is always something we look for in older dogs. Dogs can also get liver disease, kidney disease, and diabetes. They can also get hormonal diseases like Cushing's disease (too much corticosteroid production in the adrenal glands) and a low thyroid level (hypothyroidism), which is similar to that of humans. Like cats, we don't see signs of these diseases until late in the stage of the diseases. Signs of disease in our senior dogs are vomiting, diarrhea, anorexia, increased thirst and urination, increased



appetite, weight loss, and hair loss. Heart disease is very common. Dogs do not get heart attacks and strokes, but they can have severe problems leading to heart failure. Signs of heart disease include weight loss, coughing, anorexia, fainting, and exercise intolerance. If your pet has a heart problem there are special diets and medications to slow the progression and eliminate symptoms depending on the cause. The most common disease of older dogs is arthritis. This was discussed in last month's newsletter.

A senior plan

Early detection and treatment is the key for all of these diseases. It is important for you to recognize the signs so that if they start, your pet is examined early. But it is also important to realize that by the time your pet shows symptoms, the disease is already quite advanced. For the longest quality of life for your pet, we need to identify these diseases before symptoms occur. There are several good ways to do this. A twice-yearly physical examination is crucial. When humans get older, a yearly physical is recommended. If a poodle is 8 years old, that roughly translates to a 48-year-old person. A poodle at 9 years of age is equivalent to a 52-year-old person. That means that in a year, an 8-year-old poodle ages 4 human years. Larger dogs age even quicker. There can be many changes in your pet even in a six-month time frame. During the examination, your pet will be checked for heart problems, organ enlargement, dental disease, arthritis, skin tumors, and a history will be taken. This helps quite a bit to assess disease. But a physical examination cannot find early kidney disease, liver disease, urinary tract infections, and other internal diseases. To identify these diseases, a comprehensive blood and urine test needs to be performed. This should be done annually for all senior pets. All pets should have an annual fecal examination for parasites. In some cases, an ECG or chest radiographs may be indicated as well. If disease is suspected based on these tests, then further testing may be indicated.

To reiterate:

A pet is senior at 7 (5 for large dogs)

Your senior pet needs to be examined every 6 months

Your senior pet needs a blood, urine, and feces check annually

Remember that prevention of serious disease will extend the quality of your pet's life and that is our goal.