



Ten things you need to know about senior pet care

Carolyn Naun, DVM, CHPV

1. **40% of dogs and over 50% of cats suffer from arthritis**, with the likelihood increasing with age. Early signs in dogs include difficulty using stairs, getting on furniture, and jumping into the car; cats are notoriously stoic even with advanced arthritis, but one key sign is their ability to jump to high perches and surfaces such as counters and tables. Recent medical advancements have made the treatment of such chronic pain safer, more convenient, and more effective for dogs and cats.
2. **Pools can become a serious safety hazard as your dog ages.** If your dog has mobility or cognitive problems, they should not have unsupervised access to areas with an in-ground pool.
3. **Chemotherapy isn't always as awful as you might think.** Facing a cancer diagnosis is scary. Many families reject chemotherapy because they witnessed a human loved suffering through treatment. While pets can and do experience side effects, they vary by the treatment protocol and are often not as severe as you may expect. It may be worth getting a consultation with an oncologist to review your options and the risks and potential benefits in detail before you make a final decision.
4. **Giving medications does not have to be a struggle.** Many senior pets take long-term medications, but waging a daily battle to get them to take pills is detrimental to their quality of life, not to mention the bond you share. Fortunately, many medications can now be compounded into a liquid formulation or in some cases, as a cream that can be applied to the skin. This is especially helpful for cats!
5. **Changes in your pet's water intake or urinary habits should be brought to their vet's attention ASAP.** Many of the diseases older pets suffer cause these changes, and often are more manageable if they're caught early. Their doctor will probably want to start by collecting a urine and blood sample to rule out many of the major causes. Catching something early can greatly increase a pet's quality of life and longevity.
6. **Yes, dogs and cats can get dementia.** Referred to as cognitive dysfunction in animals, the signs might include new phobias, vocalizations, hiding, disruption of sleep, potty accidents, and changing interactions with other pets or people in the household (for example, aggression toward a sibling pet they previously got along fine with). Unfortunately cognitive dysfunction is not curable, but some of the symptoms, especially anxiety and nighttime restlessness, can be managed medically and with changes to the environment.

7. **Older pets don't regulate their body temperature well** and are more prone to heat stroke or hypothermia. Outdoor dogs should have access to shade and water, and on very hot days they should stay in an air conditioned room if one is available. Likewise, they should be brought indoors on chilly nights.
8. **A "grumpy old pet" may be in pain.** Dogs and cats can't straight up tell you when they're hurting - crying and whimpering, especially with chronic pain, are not common signs. If you notice your companion getting crankier with age, you should have them examined by your veterinarian to identify common causes of pain such as arthritis or dental disease.
9. **A "suddenly kittenish" cat may have a thyroid condition.** An older cat who is hungrier, more playful (sometimes running around and yowling at night), and losing weight may have hyperthyroidism. This is a hormone imbalance which is very manageable but can eventually be life threatening if left untreated.
10. **Even in the face of a terminal diagnosis you may have options for your pet's comfort.** None of us wants to hear that our beloved companion has an incurable disease. If you are facing this situation, have a conversation with your veterinarian about palliative care, which can support your pet's physical, emotional, and social well-being during this stage of their life.

Do you have questions for us? Email info@armsofaloha.com or give us a call at 808-435-3006.