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CARING FOR THE OLDER DOG

Older dogs often have special care requirements. The annual health check (usually done at the same time as vaccination) provides a good opportunity to discuss your pet's care. This fact sheet outlines some of the key areas we need to keep an eye on.

Please use the attached questionnaire in preparation for your dog's annual health check. You can email it back to us, or bring it with you to the appointment.

Mobility

Many older dogs suffer with reduced mobility, often associated with arthritis. Signs of pain can include a change in posture or temperament, vocalisation, and reduced ability to exercise or a change in gait. The older dog may struggle with laminate floors due to the risk of slipping, and may benefit from extra comfy bedding and raised food bowls. Regular, short walks are beneficial rather than occasional long hikes. Pain score questionnaires may be used to assess whether your dog is in pain and to monitor the efficacy of treatment.

Weight

Older dogs should be regularly weighed and have their body condition assessed. This can be done in our free nurse weight clinics. If your dog is overweight it can cause health problems - our nursing team will happily help come up with a plan to help with this. If your dog is losing weight a check-up with a vet is advisable and blood tests may be indicated.

Teeth

Dental disease is very common in older dogs, but they may not show any signs despite their mouth being inflamed and painful. Our nurses can check your dog's teeth and advise about tooth brushing and other dental hygiene measures. In many cases, the vet may recommend an anaesthetic to clean the teeth and remove any diseased ones.

Lumps and bumps

Lumps and bumps are common and fortunately many do not require treatment. However some lumps can be cancerous, so it is best to get any new ones checked by the vet. The vet may advise sending a sample of cells to the lab.

Dementia and loss of senses

Signs of dementia are now recognised in older dogs. You may notice changes in sleep/wake cycle, house soiling, increased agitation and altered response to stimulation. Loss of sight and hearing are also commonly reported in older pets. If you notice any changes like this, an appointment with a vet is recommended.

Other changes

Other changes that may indicate a health problem include changes to appetite, changes to the amount of water drunk and increased tiredness/reduced ability to exercise. If you notice these, or any other symptoms of illness in your dog, an appointment with the vet is advised. The vet may suggest blood or urine tests to investigate further.

Older dog questionnaire

Dog's name:

Owner's name:

Date:

Please tick the number on the scale that best describes changes in your dog's current health status compared to 12 months ago, or the last time you filled out this questionnaire.

	Yes - a lot	Yes - a little	Maybe	No change	Improved
My dog is less active					
My dog is less agile					
My dog plays less					
My dog has difficulty getting in or out the car					
My dog cries when being lifted or carried					
My dog is less able to jump up or down					
My dog shows signs of lameness or limping					
My dog is sleeping more					
My dog seems dull or depressed, not alert					
My dog appears confused					
My dog is more withdrawn from me					
My dog lies in one place					
My dog is eating less food					
I frequently have to change my dog's diet					
My dog is drinking more water					
My dog has accidents in the house					
My dog's coat smells					
My dog has diarrhoea					

Are there any other things you would like to discuss with a vet or a nurse?