

Mountainview Animal Hospital

SPRING NEWSLETTER

SENIOR PETS

The Bottom Line

It is tough to say when any of us become senior based on our chronological age. Our health and genetics can influence this a great deal. Generally it is said that our pets can be considered senior when they have reached 75 to 80% of their life expectancy. We know that cats and small breed dogs live significantly longer than large and giant breed dogs. This means that cats can be considered senior anywhere from 7 to 12 years of age, while a giant breed dog is a senior at 5 to 9 years of age.

The average life span of a cat is about 14 years and that of a dog is about 13 years. Although we see many dogs and cats live well beyond these averages.

The oldest reported cat was 37 years old and the oldest reported dog was 29.5 years - wow!

Mountainview Animal Hospital turned twelve years old last fall. This is normally a nice age for a business but for us it means that many of the young puppies and kittens that we met when we first opened are now senior citizens. With that older age comes many changes to the mind, body and health of our pets. While no one wants to focus on the negative side of aging (don't forget, I'm twelve years older too), it is through awareness that we can make the best health care decisions for the ones we love so much. In this newsletter we will summarize what to watch for as your pet ages.

How old is your pet in human years?:

Despite the tremendous variation in when a pet becomes a senior, in general, animals 7 years of age and older are considered at risk for age-related problems.

What to do?:

- Your pet should have a physical examination every year, twice a year once signs of aging have appeared.
- Blood and urine tests are an excellent way to look for early signs of infection and organ damage. They should be done every year in older animals.
- For dogs, a great time to do these test is when we are already taking a blood sample for the annual heartworm tests.

PET'S AGE	HUMAN EQUIVALENT			
	SMALL BREED	MEDIUM BREED	LARGE BREED	CAT
6 months				10 years
1 year	15 years	15 years	15 years	15
2	24	24	24	24
3	28	28	28	28
4	32	32	32	32
5	36	36	36	36
6	40	42	45	40
7	44	47	50	44
8	48	51	55	48
9	52	56	61	52
10	56	60	66	56
11	60	65	72	60
12	64	69	77	64
13	68	74	82	68
14	72	78	88	72
15	76	83	93	76
16	80	87	100	80
17	84	92		84
18	88	96		88
19	92	101		92

It is important to recognize aging problems early and to manage them before they become bigger problems.

- **Body condition:** As our pets age, their activity level and metabolism decrease. This tends to cause an increase in body fat and a decrease in lean muscle mass. These pets need a high quality, lower calorie diet. Long walks may be too difficult for older dogs, instead go for shorter more frequent walks. Don't forget to encourage older cats to play.

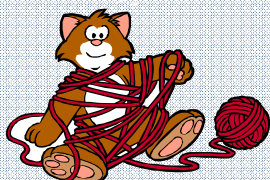
The Bottom Line

To keep up with the greener trend, we would like to start emailing our newsletter. For us to do that, we need your email address. We are bound by confidentiality regulations to keep all of your information private; rest assured your email information will not be used for any other purposes. So please check with our receptionist to make sure we have your current email address on file.

TIME WITH TUX

After Nike died John Tatham, a local artist, gave Dr. Ewing a painting of Nike, the cat that lived here before me. I hear that Dr. Ewing thought it was such a perfect likeness of Nike that she cried like a baby. Nike does look pretty hot in that painting, if she was still alive, I'd date her.

I have to admit though, I have been pretty jealous that Nike had her portrait painted and I haven't, until now. Dr. Ewing had Mr. Tatham paint one of me now too. I look pretty damn good, if I do say so myself!



- **Dehydration:** Older pets are prone to becoming dehydrated. While many of the diseases we see in old age will cause our pets to drink more water, they are unable to retain that water in the same way they used to. Make sure they have plenty of fresh water available. For cats it is wise to offer canned food that is watered down a bit. Blood and urine tests will help determine if our pets are more susceptible to dehydration.
- **Vision loss:** A certain degree of vision loss is expected in older animals. Sudden change in vision can be associated with Diabetes, Cushing's Disease and Kidney Disease. If you notice any sudden change in your pet's vision, please schedule an examination for your pet, so we can determine if there are any underlying illnesses that we need to address.
- **Hearing loss:** This tends to be very gradual. Pets that can no longer hear or see well are more prone to wandering, getting hurt or biting when startled. Take extra precautions to keep your pet safe.
- **Loss of sense of smell:** Cats that cannot smell their food may refuse to eat. Offering more canned food and warming it for a few seconds in the microwave will help bring out the aromas.
- **Skin and coat changes:** The coat often becomes dryer, the nails brittle and older pets groom themselves less. Gentle grooming and more frequent nail trimming is necessary. Higher quality senior diets will help keep the coat healthy. Also older pets become more prone to tumours. Have us examine any new or changing lumps.
- **Heart and lung disease:** Older pets can develop diseases in their chest. Call us if you notice any coughing, wheezing, panting and exercise intolerance. These pets will be more sensitive to hot days. Watch the salt content in their food.
- **Kidney disease:** This is the most common disease in older cats. The first signs of this disease is an increase in water consumption and urination. As the disease advances pets may stop eating, vomit and become lethargic. This disease is easily diagnosed with blood and urine tests. When detected early, a lot can be done to slow down the progression.
- **Dental disease:** You may notice the bad breath. Dental disease is painful and can affect the whole body. Prevention earlier in life is ideal. Pets with dental disease will need a thorough cleaning under a general anesthetic. While many pet owners are scared of the anesthetic required to treat their pets dental disease, leaving a foul smelling infection untreated in the mouth is not a safer option.
- **Constipation:** Older pets are less active, tend to be slightly dehydrated and have a loss in muscle strength and this can lead to constipation. Watch for smaller, harder stools and straining. Sometimes cats will start to defecate outside the litter box. Higher fiber diets, encouraging more water consumption and sometimes medicines can keep our pets pooping more comfortably. Arthritic pain may also contribute to constipation. Let us know if you think your old friend is having trouble.
- **Behavioural changes:** Changes in our pets personalities are not uncommon as they age. Some pets become more nervous, some less tolerant (particularly if they are in pain), some are more easily startled, and some are more forgetful. Some pets will even develop senility changes similar to Alzheimer's in people. All of these changes need to be discussed and the underlying cause treated.
- **House soiling:** There are a number of reasons that our pets may start to urinate and defecate inappropriately. Bladder infections, hormone imbalances, pain and arthritis, vision loss and senility are all possible causes and many of them are treatable. Instead of becoming frustrated with your old friend, call us, we are here to help.
- **Hormonal diseases:** Older pets are more vulnerable to developing thyroid disease, diabetes and Cushing's disease. All of these are treatable conditions, especially when diagnosed early.
- **Arthritis Pain:** This painful condition is just as common in cats as it is in dogs. Talk to us about any changes you see in your pets activity or mobility. The signs can be as subtle as less play, avoiding jumping and sleeping more. There are a lot of treatment options available. There is no reason for our older pets to suffer in silence.

The Bottom Line

Because tick bites don't hurt, dogs can be bitten by a tick without the knowledge of their families. This also means that they may have been exposed to a tick-borne disease. Testing your dog annually for Lyme disease, Anaplasmosis and Erlichiosis can be done annually with your dog's Heartworm disease blood test. If you are concerned about your dog's exposure to these diseases through ticks, ask us about the 4DX blood test.

Lyme's Disease is a very serious and potentially fatal disease. Fortunately, only about 5% of dogs exposed to Lyme Disease will get sick from it. Dog's that have been exposed to Lyme Disease should be monitored for signs of shifting leg or joint pain, swollen joints, inappetance, lethargy and evidence of kidney disease.

Ticks carrying Lyme Disease have been found in all 10 Canadian provinces and 48 continental USA states.

TICKS

Ticks are small biting insects that feed off the blood of their host. They are most commonly found in deep bush and tall grassy areas where the ground is moist. Over recent years the tick population has been growing in Southern Ontario. We have certainly seen an increase in the number of ticks we find on dogs brought in to our hospital for examinations. Because tick bites are not painful, a tick can remain on its host feeding for several days before it is engorged and falls off.

Aside from being ugly and creepy, the main concern with ticks is the potential they have of carrying a number of potentially fatal diseases. Among these are Babesiosis, Ehrlichiosis, Hepatozoonosis, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, Tick Paralysis, Cytauxzoonosis, Lyme Disease, Q Fever and Tularemia. Many of these disease can affect humans as well.

If you find a tick attached to your skin or that of your pet's remove it immediately. The longer the tick is attached, the more likely it is to transmit disease if it is a carrier. Remember, there are many different species of ticks and not all ticks carry the same diseases. Once the tick has been removed, keep it. It is important to have the tick identified and if it is the right species, tested to see if it is a carrier of disease. Ticks removed from a human should be taken to a local health unit. Ticks removed from your pet can be brought to us for testing. A blood sample taken from your dog can also be tested for tick-borne diseases. This blood test should be done six weeks after the known tick exposure to be accurate. A blood test can be combined with your dog's annual heartworm test to screen for tick-borne diseases.

How humans can avoid tick bites:

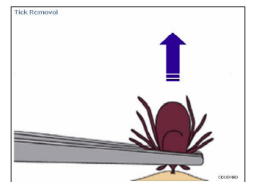
- Avoid deep bush or tall grassy areas unless you are dressed properly.
- Wear light coloured clothes, this makes it easier to see the tick as it is crawling up.
- Wear shoes that cover the entire foot and socks.
- Wear long pants and tuck the bottoms into your socks.
- Wear long sleeved tops that fit tightly around the wrist and neck.
- Use tick repellants. Clothes can be impregnated with Permethrin and DEET insect repellant should be sprayed on the skin. Follow the manufacturer's directions. Use with caution on children.
- Check yourself and others for ticks. Pay particular attention to behind the knees, groin, underarms and scalp.

How to avoid tick bites on your pets:

- Check your pet daily for ticks or hard bumps
- Use tick repellant products. We would be happy to discuss which product would work best for your pet.
- There is a vaccine against Lyme Disease in dogs. While we do not recommend this vaccine for every dog, some dogs whose lifestyle exposes them to tick infested areas may benefit from this vaccine.

How to remove a tick:

- Using tweezers, carefully grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull the tick straight out.
- Do not squeeze the tick, this may increase the potential for disease transmission from the tick into your pet.
- Check to see that the head and mouth parts have come out with the body. If you are unsure if you have completely removed the tick from your pet, call us to have him/her examined. Mouth parts that are left behind can cause an infection.
- Place the tick in a container.
- Thoroughly clean the bite area with rubbing alcohol and/or soap and water.



*** IMPORTANT SUMMERTIME REMINDERS ***

The Bottom Line

An infected dog can have over 200 heartworms in the heart and adjoining blood vessels.

The drug companies that produce the various heartworm preventative medications will guarantee your dog's protection only if you use the medication correctly and have your dog's blood tested every year.

Most boarding facilities will require your dog to have had a Kennel Cough vaccine at least five days before admission.

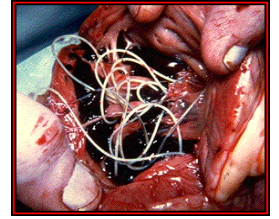
Many puppy training facilities are also strongly recommending the Kennel Cough vaccine to their clients.

Leptospirosis is a Zoonotic disease; meaning people can become infected too.

Caution! Some flea products marketed in the pet stores to dogs are extremely toxic to cats. Always read the label carefully; better yet, ask us about choosing the safest products for your pets.

Heartworm Disease

Heartworm disease is caused by a large worm which can live in a dog's heart and adjoining blood vessels. Permanent and potentially fatal damage to the heart, lungs and liver can occur long before there are any visible signs. The heartworm is spread from one dog to another by the mosquito. Treatment is available but is often costly and difficult. A long recovery time can be expected and often irreparable damage to the heart, lungs and liver has already occurred.



Fortunately, prevention is so easy. Simply give your dog the preventative medication once a month from June through November. There are various types of heartworm medication available; some will also include prevention for intestinal worms and/or fleas. Blood testing your dog prior to starting the medication is an important part of prevention and is strongly recommended. Early detection of a heartworm infection before your dog gets sick will not only increase the success of the treatment and ensure a complete recovery, but will also help reduce the spread of the disease.

Leptospirosis Vaccine

Leptospirosis is a serious and sometimes fatal disease that can afflict dogs of all ages. Dogs most commonly become infected by drinking from rivers, streams, puddles or ponds that have become contaminated by the urine of other infected animals (raccoons, rats and skunks). Leptospirosis tends to attack the liver and kidneys causing a variety of symptoms including fever, nausea, lethargy, abdominal pain and increased urination. Many dogs afflicted with Leptospirosis will die from it. If your dog has access to wildlife, roams free, or drinks from water sources that may have become contaminated, he or she should be vaccinated against Leptospirosis this spring. We would be happy to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of vaccinating your dog against this disease.

Kennel Cough Vaccine

Bordetella bronchiseptica, better known as Kennel Cough, is a bacterial infection that causes tracheobronchitis. Affected dogs will exhibit a characteristic dry, harsh, hacking cough that can last up to 3 weeks. Some dogs will cough so hard that they gag afterward. Dogs are most commonly infected in kennels, pet stores, exhibitions, grooming salons and off leash parks where they are in close contact with other dogs. Although most dogs require only supportive care to recover, young, older or otherwise weaker dogs can develop a serious pneumonia that may require them to be hospitalized. Vaccination is recommended for dogs going to boarding kennels, puppy classes, grooming facilities or off leash parks. If your dog is not vaccinated against Kennel Cough and is likely to be exposed, please call us to schedule an appointment for a vaccination against *Bordetella bronchiseptica*.

Fleas



Both cats and dogs are at risk of becoming infested with fleas during our warm summer months. Fleas are extremely irritating to your pet. Flea bites can cause itchy skin rashes and even serious allergic reactions. Left untreated, just 10 adult fleas can multiply to over 250,000 fleas in only 30 days! Your pet can come into contact with fleas on walks, at the park, or even in your backyard. Those of you who have had fleas in the past know how difficult it is to get rid of them; prevention of flea infestations is much easier, cost effective and safe. Call us to start your pet on the safest and most effective flea prevention this spring.