



Wellness For The Older Pet

IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT SENIOR WELLNESS TESTING

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

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WHAT PETS SHOULD TAKE PART IN SENIOR TESTING?

We recommend Senior Testing for all pets over 8 years old. The Senior Wellness Programme is aimed specifically at the older cat and dog who, from age 7 or 8, need a little extra care to keep them healthy.



IS MY PET A SENIOR?

If your pet is 8 years or older, we consider him or her a "senior". Your pet may seem healthy well into their senior years; however, many problems common to senior pets (e.g. heart or kidney disease) may not present symptoms until your pet becomes seriously ill. A comprehensive Senior Care programme helps your vet identify problems early enough to institute preventative healthcare measures.

WHAT IS SENIOR TESTING?

Your pet's complete senior testing programme includes these elements:

- A detailed questionnaire that you complete prior to the appointment and discuss in depth with the clinic Veterinary Nurse, on admission of your pet to the clinic for a few hours.
- A complete Physical Examination. This is extremely important and your vet will assess all body systems to check for any abnormalities. A full dental health check is included.
- Blood Chemistry tests measure levels of various substances in the blood and diagnoses diseases such as Diabetes Mellitus, liver and kidney failure.
- In cats, a Thyroid blood test is also included as an overactive thyroid is common in senior cats and can lead on to other serious issues such as high blood pressure, blood clots (deep vein thrombosis) and others.



Is your Dog or Cat over 8 years old?

If so, then it may surprise you to realise that they are now classed as Seniors! Pets age much faster than humans and obviously the greatest percentage of diseases occur in a pet's later years. One "dog year" is very roughly equivalent to about 7 human years so lot can change for a dog or cat in just one year. See if your pet is starting to show subtle signs of senior years by answering the quiz below.

	YES	NO
Has your pet become more grumpy or short tempered?		
Does he/she sleep more than they used to?		
Is your pet less keen to play and (cats) do they spend less time hunting?		
Does your pet seem less keen to go outside or on walks? Do they lag behind sometimes?		
Do they seem to see &/or hear less well?		
Have there been any changes in thirst or appetite at all?		
Do they cough or pant lots?		

If you have answered YES to one or more of the questions above then there may be subtle signs of aging or possibly an underlying medical condition. Veterinary medicine used to be about the "ambulance at the bottom of the cliff" but nowadays early detection of treatable (or at least manageable) disease is on offer to all pets.

Contact us at Vets On Alabama on 03 5786965 to book a Senior Wellness Check and Examination.

Living With A Blind Cat

Cats may become blind for several reasons but some common causes include:

- Retinal detachment (often due to high blood pressure)
- Uveitis (inflammation of the inside of the eye)
- Cataracts, lens luxation or glaucoma (all usually secondary to uveitis)
- Retinal degeneration
- Tumours that necessitate removal of the eye/eyes
- Trauma causing severe eye damage or loss



Cats are generally very independent animals, and on the whole cope well with blindness. Most blind cats will continue to lead full and happy lives and can often do nearly all the same things as when they were sighted. Cats are very good at forming mental maps of their surroundings and will use their whiskers to negotiate around obstacles. A few tips to making life easier for blind cats include the following:

- Avoid any sudden and loud noises. These can be especially frightening to blind cats
- Keep the food, water and litter tray in the same place at all times
- Avoid moving furniture as much as possible
- Leave the TV or radio on as much as possible especially when the cat is left alone for long periods. Do not move these around as the noise they emit will help blind cats orientate themselves in the environment
- Talk to them as much as possible. The sound of your voice will be reassuring and will help them place you within their mental map of the room
- If the blindness has occurred suddenly or you move to a new home consider confining the cat to a small area of the house at first. Make this the room in which they spent most of their time when

sighted. When they are comfortable negotiating this room, gradually increase access to other rooms of the house

- Play is very important for blind cats. Use toys that make a noise such as rolled up kitchen foil or balls containing bells
- Before picking up blind cats, speak and stroke them first so they aren't taken by surprise. Put them back in an area where it will be easy to re orientate themselves, such as next to the food bowl, in the litter tray or on a surface with a specific texture
- Try to keep as much of the cat's lifestyle the same as when sighted. If they were an outdoor cat then consider letting them out into an enclosed yard. However, be sure that they cannot escape.

Living With A Blind Dog

Some of the most common causes of blindness in dogs include:

- Cataracts
- Glaucoma
- Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA)
- Sudden Acquired Retinal Degeneration (SARD)
- Retinal Detachment
- Tumours (which may necessitate removal of the eye or eyes)
- Optic neuritis (inflammation of the optic nerve)



Some of these are treatable, but unfortunately some are not and may lead to sudden or gradual onset blindness. Dogs vary in how they react to becoming blind. As a general rule, older, smaller dogs often cope better with blindness than young, large and boisterous dogs. However, every dog is different, and many owners are pleasantly surprised at how well their pet copes. There are many things that you as an owner of a blind dog can do to make their adaptation to blindness easier.

Environmental factors:

Most blind dogs will form an excellent mental map of their environment and you can help this by initially restricting their access to a small area of the house and garden until they are comfortable with negotiating this, then gradually extend this area. This is particularly important if your dog has become suddenly blind or is moved to a new home.

- Do not move items of furniture around and remove potentially hazardous objects that he/she may bump into
- Leave food and water bowls in the same place
- Leave the TV or radio on when your dog is left alone (these act as an auditory cue to allow them to orientate themselves within the house)
- Place scent or tactile clues to aid orientation around the house (e.g. place mats at the entrances to rooms – they will learn to feel these under their feet so that they know where they are)
- Training Factors. Having lost sight, your blind dog needs to develop new skills and confidence and you can assist this by training. Consider contacting an experienced dog trainer or behaviourist. Important components of training blind dogs include:
 - Positive reinforcement to increase their confidence
 - Increasing their repertoire of auditory commands
 - Training aids. Concentrate on objects with different textures and smells to maximise these existing senses
 - Stimulate their other senses. This can be achieved by setting aside time (for example, each evening) for a 'cuddle' or massage.

Flea Season Is Here!

The New Zealand summer provides the ideal conditions for fleas to hatch and multiply. It's best to stop them before they become a problem with effective flea treatments Bravecto and Activyl. Fleas can be picked up by your pets while they are outside, and brought into the home environment where they can thrive.

Pets that are treated with Bravecto and Activyl kill not just the fleas present on them at the time of treatment, but also continue to kill any new fleas that land on them while their treatment is effective. So, they work like 'flea vacuum cleaners', killing the fleas in their environment.

Remember, while you may not see fleas all year round, immature stages can be found in the soft furnishings of your home waiting for ideal conditions to develop into adult fleas. Bravecto or Activyl treated pets are ready to stop newly emerging fleas, so that fleas aren't allowed the chance to become a problem in your home.



Bravecto is a chewable tablet for dogs that protects them from fleas and ticks for 12 weeks. Bravecto is a tasty chew dogs eat like a treat, so there's no worries with dogs who swim a lot. And for a limited time we have Bravecto reminder tags available, which will flash red when it's time to treat your dog again.

Activyl is spot-on treatment available for dogs and cats that provides at least 4 weeks of protection. It's available in convenient single or 4-packs.

Pain In Animals

It was thought for a long time that animals didn't feel pain, or that they felt pain differently to humans. The follow on from this was that pain associated with surgery or an injury was 'beneficial', as it would limit movement.

However, it has now been proven that dogs and cats have similar if not identical pain pathways and neurotransmitters to humans, therefore it is highly likely animals will experience pain in much the same way we do. If something would be painful for us it will be painful for them. Untreated pain decreases the quality of life of those involved and will prolong recovery from surgery, illness or injury.

Pain can have a number of negative consequences for our pets: delayed wound healing, sleep deprivation, decreased gut movements (a major issue in rabbits) and increased heart rate. In addition to this, inadequate pain management can cause changes in the brain and spinal cord which can lead to magnification of the pain and a prolonged period of pain. If bad enough we can end up with a situation where stimuli that are not normally painful can be perceived as painful.

Managing pain effectively requires recognition of the signs associated with it. Many of our patients do not show obvious signs of pain, so identifying the degree of pain can be a challenge. The most common sign of pain is a change in behaviour.

Early intervention is always the best option and not all the solutions are drug based - preventing obesity will reduce the onset and severity of arthritis, also dental care will prevent oral pain that is seen with rotting teeth. We routinely utilise at least 2 different forms of pain relief in combination for animals undergoing surgery. The first injection is given prior to surgery which also helps to reduce the dose of anaesthetic used. They get more as they are waking up from surgery and often go home with oral pain relief as well.



Consequences of Behaviour in Dogs without Adequate Play

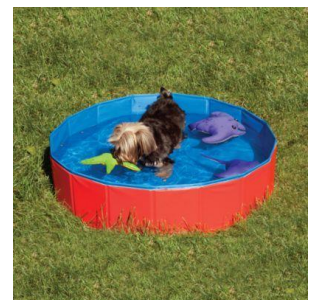
Play for dogs is essential for social development in the earlier stages of life as puppies learn the consequences of their actions and the rules of canine etiquette, but as dogs age it provides mental and physical stimulation, exercises the various muscle groups, tendons and ligaments, and releases pent up energy while relieving stress, tension and anxiety.

If a dog does not have enough play in their life, the consequences can be extreme. If a puppy is denied the chance to play, his social skills are compromised due to not having the opportunity to develop social abilities and learn the boundaries of canine etiquette and social communication. This can lead to an adult dog who doesn't know how to interact or read his own species, resulting in a shy, fearful, reserved or aggressive adult with no interactive abilities at all, let alone knowledge of *how* to play and "de stress".

Even with adequate play while young and well-developed social skills, a dog at any stage of his life denied adequate play time will simply resort to other methods to stimulate his mind and body, resulting in "behavioural issues". These could range from destructive behaviour, disobedience (such as not coming when called), excessive barking, attention seeking behaviours, aggression due to frustration, anxiety, fearful behaviour or extreme phobia's (created from an unstimulated mind becoming negatively affected), an increased prey drive, inappropriate mounting, stealing items, and generally entertaining himself. Play is also vital in the owner/dog bonding process and goes a long way in preventing many unwanted behaviours by providing appropriate outlets for inherited breed traits and general boredom.

Here are some ideas for enriching play and (your backyard) for your dog, and some tips for cooling off in the summer heat!

- Instead of food in a bowl – scatter it on the lawn. Great for dogs that need to lose a bit of weight. Also hide food and treats around the backyard or in cardboard tubes for them to tear up.
- Have a few different dog toys to rotate around and keep dogs interested. You can attach toys to a stretchy bungee type cord (remove hooks if any) and hang from tree or dog run (not washing line) so they have an interactive toy.
- Have an old sandpit that dogs can dig in. Bury treats and toys in it! Alternatively, fill it with water and throw some toys in there!
- Fill an icecream container with water and treats , freeze and give to your dog on a hot day. You can also do this with meatballs as a frozen treat, or cover a rope toy in gravy or juice from meat and freeze that.
- Stick bread with peanut butter or treats in the grooves of pine cones and hide.
- Freeze a bagel – great for teething puppies. Supervise and take away once it starts to defrost.
- Spend some time teaching tricks! Training creates mental stimulation which is tiring!
- For dogs that like water - have the sprinkler on a timer that turns on and off during hot days in the garden. Or play with the hose!
- Swing ball for dogs. Instead of a short line make it longer. Have knots at intervals along it with either a tennis ball or a rope stick at the end. They can play tug and go around and around.
- Empty jar i.e. peanut butter and let them clean the last bits up.



- Hide (yourself) or an item in an easy place without your dog seeing. Release your dog by saying "find it". Make a big fuss when he does! Gradually make things more challenging to find.
- Take the pushbike out and let your dog run beside you.

BE AWARE THIS CHRISTMAS



MERRY CHRISTMAS & A HAPPY NEW YEAR FROM ALL
THE TEAM



VETS
on
ALABAMA

165 Alabama Road, Blenheim

Phone: 578 6965 Fax: 578 6960

Email: vets@alabamaroadvet.co.nz