

# Wellness for the older pet

## Important facts about senior testing

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

## What pets should take part in senior testing?

We recommend senior testing for all senior pets as well as any pet who is exhibiting one or more of the following symptoms: weight loss or gain, increased thirst or urination, lethargy, vomiting/diarrhea, poor hair coat, coughing, seizures, unusual behavior, or overall decline in condition.

## Is my pet a senior?

If your pet is 7 years old or older, we consider him or her senior. Your pet may seem healthy well into its senior years. However, many problems common to senior pets (like kidney or heart failure) may not present symptoms until your pet becomes seriously ill. A comprehensive senior care program helps your veterinarian identify problems early enough to institute preventive healthcare measures.

## What is senior testing?

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

- > **A physical exam** is the most important part of the senior care program. Your veterinarian will assess all body systems to check for any abnormalities.
- > **Blood chemistry tests** measure levels of various substances in the blood and diagnose diseases such as diabetes, and liver and kidney failure.
- > **A complete blood count (CBC)** provides a detailed look at the blood itself and helps the doctor diagnose anemia or infection.
- > **A urinalysis** gives information on kidney function and checks for urinary tract infections.
- > **The thyroid screen (T4)** helps diagnose thyroid disease, which is an especially common ailment in older cats and dogs.
- > **Glaucoma testing** measures the pressure in each eye quickly and painlessly using a tonometer. Undetected glaucoma leads to irreversible blindness.
- > During a **retinal exam**, performed after the pupils are dilated, the veterinarian will look for evidence of bleeding, degeneration, inflammation, or detachment.
- > **Blood pressure measurement** lets our team check for hypertension. Just as in humans, high blood pressure in pets can lead to kidney problems, heart disease, blindness, and other complications.
- > **Radiographs (X-rays)** come as part of the senior care program. Generally, we perform chest radiographs to assess the heart and lungs. However, your veterinarian may decide a different set of radiographs would be more important for your pet. For example, he or she could recommend abdominal radiographs to assess the liver or kidneys.
- > **FeLV/FIV testing**, recommended for senior cats, tests for the feline leukemia and feline immunodeficiency viruses, which can suppress the cat's immune system and lead to secondary infections, anemia, and even cancer.

## I'd like my pet to participate in the Senior Care Program. What do I do?

Call us to arrange a day for your pet to receive his or her testing. Please withhold food from your pet starting at 10 p.m. the night before so we can get an accurate blood sample. Make water available for your pet as usual. We prefer that you admit your pet to the hospital by 8:30 a.m., and we'll schedule a checkout appointment between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. the same day to review the test results with you.