



Dawson Creek Veterinary Clinic

238-116 Avenue, Dawson Creek BC, V1G 3C8
Small Animal 250-782-5616, Large Animal 250-782-1080
www.dcvet.ca

Senior Pet Care

By: Dr. Katrina Barth

As the new puppy you got *only last year* grows and thrives, years of companionship fun run by! Unfortunately in a mere heartbeat, it seems like Fluffy is no longer that spry, frisky pup looking to get into everything and anything, and is now an old, senior gal. Senior pets are considered ‘geriatric’, after they reach seven years of age; although mildly variable between breeds: a 7 year old dog in human years is 46 for small breeds and 57 for large breeds, and 51 for felines. The first signs of aging in a middle-aged furry friend might be creaky or painful arthritic joints, mild vision/hearing loss, but they might also be experiencing heart, kidney, thyroid or other organ disease. Some organs can be more susceptible or damaged in the aging process and these pets will enter a life stage where they aren’t so nimble. It is helpful to consider some reasons for extra care for these geriatric pets and below are some recommendations to ensure a high quality of life until the very end.

Many clients are highly concerned about potential risks of anesthesia and putting their old pet “under”—often times avoiding all treatments that may require it: for example a dental surgery with teeth extractions. Although, any anesthetic procedure comes with risks, veterinary anesthesia practice is significantly advanced, even over the last 10 years with current safer anesthetic gases and medicines, constant monitoring (blood pressure; vital parameter measurements), fluid therapy and pre/post-operative pain relief to ensure comfort. These protocols follow a high standard of practice, with surgery performed with special attention to each individual pet.

The decision to pursue certain surgeries or advanced treatment when a pet is “so old” has many folks wondering whether or not it is worth it. Many advanced procedures, such as dental surgery, orthopedic or mass removal surgeries, can often provide cures for painful conditions negatively impacting a geriatric animal’s life quality. An informed client and collaboration with your veterinarian can ensure your pet is free of discomfort. However, as a veterinarian, we can only guide how the medicine may affect their pet and the real difficulty exists in not knowing what is right or wrong in these emotionally-laden situations, especially given the years of devotion and companionship our pets have shown. A few questions can be asked to oneself whether or not to pursue medical attention for geriatrics.

Will this surgery/treatment give the patient the potential for a high quality life? If the treatment only prolongs their life for weeks, or additional more expensive chronic treatments will be required later, the decision may need to be adjusted. As a veterinarian, we carefully review the advantages/disadvantages to each treatment, giving a range of options. Are there particular after-care requirements for this surgery/treatment? Older pets may have difficulty bouncing back and often times need extra care/medications at more frequent intervals. Before agreeing to surgery/treatment, these requirements need to be known and considered. Finally, sometimes the ideal, successful outcome requires referral to a specialty hospital, are you willing to go to distant facilities and expenditure?

Generally speaking, a yearly examination will aid your pet in receiving the best medical care to ensure their health is maintained. This can serve as an avenue to catch, or prevent disease, in the acute stage or treat in the chronic stage. Often times, routine bloodwork and urinalysis is recommended with pets over 7 years of age, and may identify any problems that may not necessary be causing symptoms (checking liver, kidney and other organ function)—if all is clear, great! A baseline of your pets normal

values is recorded, so if they ever become ill, we know what their normal variations are. Chest and abdominal radiographs may also be recommended to screen for disease and assess heart health if a murmur is present. Seek out veterinary attention for any of the following situations: excessive weight loss, excessive urination/water consumption, changes in appetite, vomiting/diarrhea, persistent coughing, collapse/bouts of weakness, or sudden non-weight bearing lameness. Early recognition of disease can allow for early treatment. By embracing our pets' senior years and adapting to make sure their new needs are met, we can help them to live long and comfortable lives!

Finally, the greatest difficulty with any companion is knowing when to say goodbye. At times of suffering or vastly decreased quality of life, humane euthanasia should be considered. To be able to relieve animal suffering, including pain and discomfort, is a true gift— veterinarians can be a great resource in discussing this incredibly difficult decision and offer options with at-home euthanasia. March is senior animal health month at Dawson Creek Veterinary Clinic, and we hope these special considerations will aid you in providing the best possible care for you furry senior friends!