# **﻿Your Aging Companion**

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At Hillside Animal Hospital, we are dedicated to ensuring all of our patients receive the best care possible. We tailor our approach to fit the needs of specific age groups, as well as identifying specific needs for the individual pet. Companion pets age at a much faster rate in comparison to humans. For this reason, it is important to have an established senior wellness protocol to help an aging companion live a longer, healthier, and more comfortable life. Our goal is to provide the best medical care that our knowledge, experience, and state-of-the-art diagnostic tools can provide.

**What is a senior?**Pets age at a faster rate than humans do. To determine if a pet is considered a senior pet, there are different parameters that are considered. The weight and breed of the pet may help determine when we would consider a pet to be a senior. In addition, a patient’s medical history is also considered. On average, most dogs and cats would be considered a senior around 7-8 years of age. Keep in mind it may vary for the smaller and larger breeds. If it is determined your pet is considered a senior, we have a specific protocol that we follow to provide medical care and recommendations for these patients.

**Recommendations:**There were guidelines set forth by the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) in 2004 to help veterinarians provide the highest quality of care to their senior patients. For this group of patients, we would like to see them for wellness visits every six months. Performing a comprehensive blood panel, complete urinalysis, and intestinal parasite exam yearly is also recommended. For comparison purposes, seeing a senior pet every 6 months for wellness exams is roughly equivalent to every 2-3 years in human years. Likewise, running yearly lab work is roughly equivalent to every 4-5 years in human years.
During our senior wellness exam, we evaluate many-body systems. You will see our veterinarians examining eyes, ears, auscultating the heart and lungs, monitoring vital signs compared to previous visits, palpating the abdomen, observing body condition, and feeling the motion of joints, amongst other things. Our senior blood work panel consists of a complete blood count (CBC), chemistry, electrolyte, and thyroid testing. This blood panel looks at many different body systems, which evaluates liver, kidney, and thyroid function. The urinalysis will identify any abnormalities such as white blood cells, glucose, crystals, and even malignant cells. Utilizing the results from the blood work, in conjunction with the complete urinalysis, can help determine if there are any issues that need to be addressed. We recommend these diagnostics, even if the patient is not showing any clinical signs of disease. We like to think of it as an “internal physical exam.” If we are able to detect early signs of disease, we can intervene, and hopefully provide medications, supplements, and/or even a simple dietary change to promote a healthier, longer life.

If there are abnormalities, our veterinarians may recommend further diagnostics to help aid in a diagnosis. At Hillside Animal Hospital, we have the capabilities of performing radiographs, blood pressure, and ultrasounds in our hospital. Our veterinarians and technicians have gone through extra training and passed an examination to perform ultrasounds. We also are able to send images to a board-certified radiologist for interpretation.

**What to watch for?**As our pets age, even the smallest of changes can signify an issue. Since our patients cannot talk, the history you give us is extremely valuable. Paying close attention to their behaviors can provide much-needed information. Signs and symptoms to watch for, even subtle changes: bathroom habits, eating and drinking habits, mobility, foul odor and/or bleeding from the mouth, sleeping habits, cognitive function, persistent diarrhea, and persistent coughing. Any difference, whether it’s an increase or decrease, an examination by the veterinarian is warranted.

**Summary:**We value the importance of providing excellent medical care, physically and emotionally for our patients. We strive to provide great quality care for our patients, as well as, our clients. We understand having an aging pet can be very emotional at times for the owners. We are here to answer any questions, and hopefully, alleviate any concern you may have.

–Jayme, Hillside Animal Hospital Veterinary Assistant