



paws & more



Winter Pet Health Newsletter

How old is your pet really?

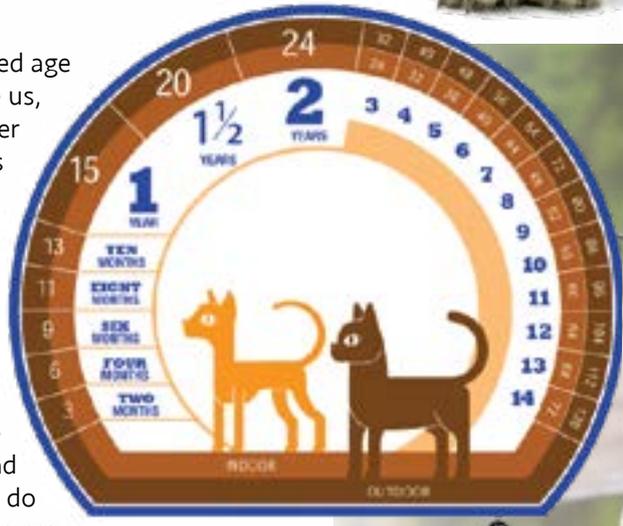
Coming into the colder season we all start to notice our older cats and dogs walking a bit slower, sleeping a bit longer and getting cold a lot quicker. This is, unfortunately, a normal part of life.

We often see patients coming in with early signs of arthritis from as young as 6-7 years of age, but is it really young? Cats and dogs age at a different rate to humans, they age at a different rate to each other, and cats and dogs also age at a different rate depending on size.

So how old is your pet?

The charts to the right show you an estimated age for your pet. We say estimated because, like us, different breeds can have a shorter or longer life span, even if they are the same size as another breed.

You may think your cat or dog is only 6-7 years old, and still young, you maybe surprised to see just how old your pet is in human years. Old age creeps up on all of us and as humans we can adapt our lifestyles to make it easier as we get older. From comfy beds, different styles of exercise and joint supports, to joint supplements and special food, there are many things you can do to accomodate your aging pet. Small changes can make a huge difference.



My pet is getting older - how can I keep them healthy?

Just as we go to the doctors for a check-up more frequently as we get older, the same is true for our pets. We need to keep an eye out for diseases early on, like cancers, infections and liver, kidney or dental issues. Some of these problems may be caused by the onset of old age; others might be hereditary or even diet. Taking a few samples gives us the greatest chance of quickly identifying issues early - giving your pet a longer, happier life.



What tests will be carried out?

Besides weighing your pet and giving them a thorough check over, your Vet may need to take some blood and urine samples for testing. These will show if there are any problems with liver, kidneys, urinary tract or pancreas.

A senior pet winter check up also gives you the opportunity to chat with the Vet about any changes you have noticed. The Vet can then offer practical, everyday advice that may make all the difference to your pet's quality of life as they age.



Has your pet's behaviour changed with the weather?

The condition commonly referred to as arthritis is more correctly known as Degenerative Joint Disease or DJD, for short. Most people think of arthritis as affecting the older generation of pets, but younger animals can suffer as a result of ligament or bone trauma, or some hereditary diseases. Large or giant breed dogs are commonly afflicted very early in life.

All species of animal may be affected by arthritis but it is the dog that shows the most obvious signs of the disease. Cats can be sneakier at hiding their signs of arthritis, but if you know what to look for you can pick up on some of the signs early.

What to look for?

- ! Not wanting to exercise or play.
- ! Difficulty getting up – especially after resting
- ! Difficulty jumping into the car, climbing stairs or jumping onto the bench (cats)
- ! Limping or short stepping gait when walking
- ! Change in character, behaviour or temperament, or sleeping more than usual
- ! Excessive licking of one particular body area

If you are concerned that your pet may have arthritis, you will need to make an appointment with your Anexa FVC Vet. Your Vet will perform a complete physical examination including assessing the mobility and discomfort in your pets joints. Sometimes, for accurate diagnosis of arthritis, an animal will require x-rays performed under general anaesthesia as certain other conditions may mimic the signs seen with arthritis.

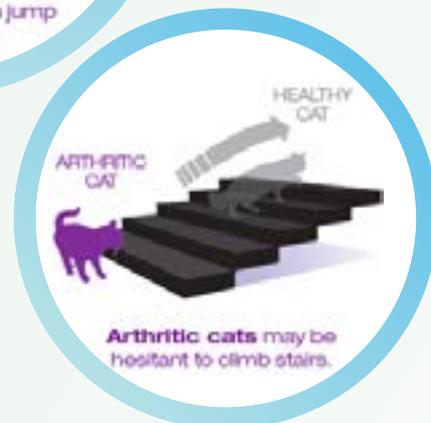
Your pet may also benefit from blood and urine testing to determine if other underlying health issues will alter the treatment regime for the arthritis.

Once a true diagnosis of DJD is made, your Vet may recommend a combination of pain relief/anti-inflammatory medications, "joint-supplements" and a weight-loss (where appropriate) and moderate exercise program.

Changes that you can make at home are:

- ✓ A raised soft bed, placed out of drafts
- ✓ Reducing the animals weight if it is overweight
- ✓ Keep the exercise level sensible. Arthritic joints do need to be kept mobile but excessive hard exercise can inflame the situation (dogs).

As arthritis has such an impact on the quality of life for your pet, it is important that you have your pet checked out if you suspect a problem; animals can be very good at hiding pain. For further information or advice please contact your local Anexa FVC Vet, we're here to help.





To desex or not to desex... that is the question!

Desexing a pet is also known as castration (males), spay (females), sterilization, neuter, or getting fixed. This usually happens around 4-6 months for dogs and cats, or 3-4 months of age for rabbits. There are various reasons that we recommend desexing a pet, often for either health or behavioural reasons.

Desexing males is often done to prevent aggressive behaviour, especially in rabbits and some breeds of dogs. It also reduces the risk of wandering, and eliminates the problem of unwanted babies! Castrated male dogs are at a much lower risk of prostate problems and at zero risk of testicular cancer. Castrated cats do not have the very smelly urine of tomcats, and are less likely to spray around the house.

Desexing females is most often done to prevent unwanted babies. But did you know that spaying dogs before their first heat reduces the risk of mammary cancer by 95%! Also, spayed rabbits eliminates the risk of uterine cancer (a very common cancer in older female rabbits).

The risks of desexing mainly focus around increased weight gain. A desexed dog usually needs less food than an intact dog. Also, some spayed dogs can be at a higher risk of developing urine leakage at an older age, which responds well to hormone pills.

If you are not planning on breeding from your pet, you should really consider getting it desexed. Your pet will thank you!

It all starts in the mouth

Dental disease is the most common serious ailment in cats and dogs! The incidence and severity of dental disease increases as pets age. In fact, the vast majority of cats and dogs three years of age or older have dental disease and are in need of professional dental care.

Dental disease is very painful. Studies show that cats and dogs experience pain like we do, but actively hide their pain from us. This instinct to hide their pain protected them from predators in their original wild state, but it makes it harder for us to help our pets because we sometimes have to look for very subtle signs of pain. Protecting our pets from the agony of decaying and infected teeth and gums is one of the most important things we can do to keep our pets healthy, comfortable and happy.

Dental care should begin as soon as you bring your new pet home with daily tooth brushing with pet toothpaste. The earlier you begin, the more quickly your pet will come to accept or even look forward to his dental care.

Our Vet Nurses will gladly show you how to take care of your pet's teeth at home to keep them their best between professional cleanings.

Annual dental care visits are generally needed starting at the age of two for large dogs and starting at the age of one for small dogs and cats (who are more prone to early onset severe dental disease.) Caring for the teeth early and properly will prevent more severe dental disease from developing.

With proper care, dental disease is both preventable and treatable. Caught early, dental disease can often be cured. Even when caught later, effective treatment is still available to prevent the progression of the disease and prevent complications such as organ damage and further tooth loss. Sometimes owners think their pet is "too old" or "too sick" for anesthesia and dentistry, but usually the benefits of relieving the infection and pain of oral disease far outweigh the risks of the procedure. Owners are often pleasantly surprised by how young and sprightly their older pet can behave after treatment for periodontal disease.





Should I buy pet insurance?

Many pet owners will do whatever they can to help their dog or cat live a long, happy and healthy life. But sometimes when sudden accidents, injuries or illnesses happen, even the most dedicated owner can be put in a difficult position when they haven't planned for the unexpected expenses.

To protect themselves from having to face sudden costs, more and more New Zealanders are starting to invest in pet insurance. It is estimated 1 in 3 pets will need emergency care every year, so getting pet insurance can let you focus on your pet's health rather than worry about how large the bills are going to be and whether you can really afford them.

The cost of your insurance will depend on the type of cover you choose and what added extras you think your pet will need now and in the future. The breed of your dog or cat may also increase your premiums. For example, breeds with a tendency to urinary issues such as the Dalmatian may have an additional loading to cover the increased likelihood of needing treatment.

As veterinary care improves, more options become available to treat your sick pet and let them go on to live a healthy, long life. By having insurance in place, you not only help to cover the cost of these options, you're also buying yourself peace of mind. The peace of mind that comes from knowing your pet can get the treatment they need to get well without your wallet being put on the critical list.

What is Euthanasia? (De-mystifying the end-of-life decision.)

It can be difficult to talk to your Veterinarian about euthanasia, but that doesn't mean it should be a mystery. Euthanasia is a special privilege that allows us to end suffering in a safe, painless, and dignified manner. But what exactly is euthanasia?

The process of euthanasia is fairly standard. Before euthanasia, you are asked if you would like to have your pet cremated or if you will take him/her home. You will be asked to sign a form stating that you understand what euthanasia is, and that you give the Veterinarian permission to euthanize your pet. At this time, if you want, you can request to pay the bill before the procedure, as it is sometimes unpleasant to be in a waiting room, paying your bill, afterwards.

You are given the option of whether or not to be in the room with your pet. Usually the veterinarian has a nurse in the room, holding the pet. You can touch and talk to your pet but, in order to inject properly, it is essential that the nurse holds your pet.

The fur on the leg is clipped, and either the Veterinarian places a catheter (taped to the leg) or simply uses a needle and syringe. The needle size is similar to what is used with a vaccination, but this time goes in the leg vein instead of under the skin. It works very fast in most animals, the body completely relaxes and sometimes releases deep breaths, muscle twitches, and bowels. Unfortunately, the eyes don't close. The procedure is quick and painless for your pet.

Making the decision to euthanize a beloved pet can be hard. If you have any questions about euthanasia, or your pet's quality of life, feel free to talk to one of your Anexa FVC veterinarians. We know that this can be a difficult topic, but we'd like to make understanding euthanasia as easy as possible.



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