

**VET SERVICES**  
HAWKE'S BAY



**SENIOR DOG CARE**

## SENIOR DOG CARE

Now that your dog is a senior (8+ years), there are certain changes we need to make.

### FEEDING

You should now change to a senior diet. Senior dog foods are formulated differently. In general, dogs of eight years and older start taking life a bit easier and, as a result, their nutritional needs begin to change once more. Senior dogs are less active and have a slower metabolism, so can be even more prone to gaining weight. Equally as they reach their geriatric years, illness and blunting of the senses of taste and smell mean it can be hard to maintain a good body condition. In their senior year's dogs need a high quality, palatable diet which is easy to digest, lower energy levels and a careful balance of other essential nutrients. Key minerals support ageing joints and along with protein, help support the aging immune system.

Depending on veterinary advice and underlying medical conditions it is advised to move older dogs onto a specially formulated senior dog food in preference to a normal 'adult' dog food. Manufactured complete and balanced senior dog foods are carefully formulated to reflect these changes in nutritional requirements and feeding habits. Your dog can continue to enjoy mealtimes without compromising on the essentials.

### WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

It is very important as our dogs age that the weight they are carrying is not putting unnecessary strain on their joints. Ask one of our nurses today for a free weight check. We have fantastic food products now, which really do help to reduce weight in our dogs. Your dog being in his or her ideal weight range will help prolong a happy and healthy life as they age. Arthritis is very common from the age of 6 years and carrying too much weight at any stage of life will speed up the onset of disease. Ensure warm soft bedding is available if your dog sleeps outside to help with arthritis as well.

### COMMON DISEASES AND SYMPTOMS

#### ARTHRITIS

Arthritis would be the number one disease we see. Our dogs slow down as they age, but there are many great products we can use to help keep them comfortable for as long as we can. Things to look out for if you suspect your dog may have arthritis are:

- 1) Taking longer to get up from lying down.
- 2) Struggling to jump into the car or on to the couch.



- 3) Reluctance to play with other dogs, or fetch toys.
- 4) Bunny hopping with their back legs.
- 5) Swollen joints, lameness.

### **EARLY RENAL DISEASE**

This is also a very common disease we see in older dogs. Renal disease is when your dog's kidneys are not working as well as they used to.

Symptoms to look out for are:

- 1) Excessive drinking and/or urinating
- 2) Dehydration, sunken eyes, dry gums
- 3) Weight loss
- 4) Loss of appetite
- 5) Vomiting and or diarrhea

A simple blood and urine test will determine how well your dog's kidneys are working, and treatment consists of medication and a special diet. Once kidney disease is present it can't be fixed, but we can help slow the progression of the disease.

### **EARLY HEART DISEASE**

Usually seen later on in adult life but can be seen earlier especially with certain breeds of dogs. We have medications for the treatment of heart disease, but once again it is slowing the progression of the disease, not fixing it.

Symptoms to look for

- 1) Lack of interest in playing, exercising (exercise intolerance)
- 2) Shortness of breath
- 3) A wet cough, especially in the mornings.
- 4) Weakness
- 5) Extending neck to breath
- 6) Blue to purple discolouration of the gums and or tongue.

By listening to the heart, we can pick up heart murmurs, but an x-ray for diagnostic purposes is usually advised.

### **LUMPS & BUMPS**

We start to notice lumps, bumps and warts as our dog's age. Some are just fatty lumps, called lipomas, and unless they are causing problems to the dog, we don't need to surgically remove them. But other lumps can be nasty and can spread quickly. If you notice any lumps, be sure to have your vet take a look at them. We can obtain a needle sample and have a look at the cells under the microscope. This will diagnose what type of lump or cancer we are dealing with and the action that is needed. Please note that in some instances your vet may advise that the cell sample be sent to the lab for examination. Remember that the larger the lump gets the more risks are involved to remove it. So, catching and removing (if needed) these lumps as early as possible gives your dog the best chance of a happy, healthy life.

## DENTAL DISEASE

Dental disease occurs as our dogs age due to the buildup of dental plaque on the teeth. This process produces inflammation of the gums (gingivitis) that causes the gums exposing the tooth and the tooth root. With an exposed tooth root, bacteria can seed into the pulp cavity and root producing an abscess. Chronically infected teeth can cause severe pain, changes in the eating habits, bad breath, loss of teeth, loss of body condition, and the bacteria within the plaque can serve as a source of chronic infectious material that can affect other organs of the body such as the heart, liver and kidneys.

With each health check your dog has, the vet will be looking at his or her teeth. Some dog breeds are renowned for having a much quicker onset of dental disease than others and need teeth cleaning on a more regular basis.

We have foods on the market that help prevent tartar build up, but please note these won't help if your dog already has tartar build up. We recommend once the teeth are clean to then change to a specific diet, as this will prolong the onset once again.



## BLOOD & URINE TESTING

As our dogs age it is also a good idea to test urine and blood samples. Even if we think our dogs are happy and healthy. These results give us valuable information on things which we can't necessarily see.

We recommend from 8 years of age testing blood and urine samples. If everything comes back normal, this gives us base line values for the future, that we can then monitor as your dog ages, and pick up on slight changes early on.

We also still recommend seeing the vet on a yearly basis, but also seeing the nurse for a 6-month senior check. This check is free and is a great opportunity for another check over of your dog and a chance to discuss any concerns. We can pick up on changes and we can help prolong the onset of disease.

**If you have any concerns about your dog between vet visits please call the clinic.**