

## ***Ask the Vet:* Time and Pet Aging March On**

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Yet again, and beyond anyone's control, a year has ended and another begun. This annual occasion always reminds me that just as time rolls along, the aging process does also. The young are lucky as their worries about time are few. But the older the rest of us grow, the more important time seems to be.

Attention to the aging process begs even more importance for our pets than for us. Our pet species generally speed from the start of life to finish 7-8 times faster than humans.

Many individual species and breed differences exist, making the popular “aging scales” used to equate a pet’s age to human age rather non-specific. As care providers for our pets, we need to provide healthcare to both slow the rate of aging and address medical and surgical needs as they arise. With a good grasp on your pet’s healthcare, they may enjoy their lives and we may be entertained by their antics.

Not every pet experiences the same changes, or severity of changes with aging. Differing sizes, conformations, sensitivities and living environments all factor into the health and aging process.

While our focus is on each individual, some common needs are recognized. For example, many aging cats require nurturing for kidney function loss and thyroid disease. Elderly small breed dogs are more prone to degenerative heart disease and abnormalities in metabolically active hormone secretion. Regardless of differences, all aging pets benefit from an ongoing prevention of obesity, dental disease, and the effects of arthritis.

You and your veterinary team will be most effective in helping your pet remain healthy, by combining your descriptions of pet behaviors, appetite, activities, and changes observed at home with the comprehensive physical examinations. This coordinated team effort is a very powerful gift for your pet.

Recognizing changes in your pet over time at home is just as important as recognizing changes in physical exams and blood and urine lab tests, when this information is compared with previously recorded results. Working together, you and your veterinary team may be able to identify problems soon after their onset when intervention is more likely to be both effective and less aggressive.

We face much tougher battles against disease when problems are neglected and allowed to compound over time. Frustration mounts when a pet is experiencing pain from untreated severe periodontitis or osteoarthritis and has recently acquired heart disease or kidney disease that prevents ideal treatment for the painful problem. With more timely interventions to help, more problems are tackled effectively and the quality of life for the pet is improved.

Now that we have landed in 2015, stay alert to your pet’s appetite, behaviors, and activities. Make sure that your veterinary team is aware of any changes that you observe. Use the examination and lab testing services so that results can be compared to past results and used for comparison of future results. Your pet’s individual changes are unique as he or she speeds from the start to the finish. Together with your veterinary team, you can help make your pet’s life journey feel long and wonderful.