

## PROTOCOL FOR UNDERSTANDING AND HELPING GERIATRIC ANIMALS

### Overview of What “Geriatric” Means

We all age, and some of us do it a lot better than others. The same is true for cats and dogs. Cats can be considered middle-aged starting somewhere between 8 and 9 years and entering old age and considered “geriatric” when they are 13 or so.

For dogs the issue is more complex because the larger the dog the shorter the life. This association has yet to be well explained, but there is some association between size and cell growth that may be important. If you have a toy breed, they may follow a cat-like pattern. If you have a medium-size breed (25 kg), the dog is middle-age somewhere by 7 to 8 years and becomes old by 10 to 11 years. Larger breeds are middle-age by 6 years and old by 8 or 9 years. Thinner dogs live longer than fatter ones and may age differently.

As is true for humans, aging for dogs and cats has never been a more palatable experience, but we need to understand the combined physical and behavioral needs of aging to insure the healthiest outcome. The following situations discuss changes that can be made to enhance the lives of aging dogs and cats.

### Play and Exercise

People assume that their dogs and cats slow down and won't play as they age. This assumption is wrong, and will become self-fulfilling unless the clients change their own behaviors. The best way to prepare for a successful and healthy old age is to prepare for a successful and healthy adulthood.

Play with your dogs and cats throughout their life, and encourage them to play with other animals. Let the older animal set the pace for play and be mindful of things like arthritis that might make it harder for the dog to catch a ball or a cat to chase after a feather. Accommodate these needs by adjusting your play style. If you have pets who loved to run or swim as youngsters, but cannot because of arthritis, consider learning to use treadmills and therapeutic swimming pools or water treadmills as a form of play. These tools can be found in facilities that practice canine and feline rehabilitation.

Swimming is as good for dogs and cats as it is for people. Physical therapy for health and to address injury or aging is still not common for pets, but there are centers that offer canine or feline swimming. These facilities are ideal in that they have life vests, have created pools where animals will not panic and where they can feel their footing, et cetera. You can create the same types of environments at home with some effort.

If you have access to a pool that's deep enough for swimming you can “swim” with your older dog or cat.

- Fit a life jacket to the pet.
- Get in the pool.
- Have someone gently hand you the pet.
- Shepherd the dog or cat around the pool encouraging leg movement. Do not let your pet become tired or scared.
- Hand or gently haul the pet from the pool (some canine life jackets come with handles for this purpose), and towel dry.

If you start with short swims, the pet can and will work up to more aerobic and strengthening activities if they enjoy

the water. If possible, do what hydrotherapy facilities do: heat the pool.

If you cannot do this, pets *can* go into hot tubs, *if and only if*:

- the temperature is moderate—you will not find it warm enough—and not at its maximum (remember that dogs and cats have hair that acts as insulation; we do not have that hair),
- the jets are off,
- no chlorine or other treatment product is involved,
- the pet is supervised (which means *you are in the tub with them*),
- the time spent in the tub is short,
- you do gently perform range-of-motion exercises with their limbs, and
- the pet cannot become chilled when taken from the tub.

Also, pet hair clogs filter systems. You'll need a plan to deal with this.

Please be aware that older dogs and cats who are blind, who suffer from severe arthritis, or who suffer from advancing dementia fall into and drown in pools every year. This can be prevented with adequate supervision and fences.

### Leash Walking

All dogs and cats—yes, and cats—benefit from leash walking. Leash manners are best taught when the animals are babies. If cats become accustomed to harnesses and leashes when they are young they will be willing to exercise on a lead when they are older.

Mental stimulation is part of exercise. When your pets go for a leash walk they are not just exercising their legs—they also are exercising their nose, brain, and social skills. All of these need stimulation. New data on humans shows that exercise provides for muscle health, but also has far-reaching benefits on how well neurons in the brain function.

We need to remember that, no matter what their age, *animals left in a yard by themselves neither get the exercise they want and need, nor do they get the mental stimulation that is beneficial to them*. In fact, such animals may be lacking social contact. If you doubt that dogs left outside are not getting what they need or want, videotape your dog the next time he is alone in the yard. The dog is not as active as he would be, were you there. Studies show that more than 75% of dogs left in yards spend almost all of their time by the door.

Outdoor cats may get more exercise and stimulation than dogs, but fewer outdoor cats make it to old age than do indoor cats. The same is true for dogs who free-range. People who wish their cats to be able to go outside for social and olfactory stimulation may wish to install a cat fence or some other containment system to decrease the chance of injury or death (see [www.catsondeck.com](http://www.catsondeck.com), <http://habitahaven.com>, <http://catnet.stanford.edu>, [www.kittyfence.com](http://www.kittyfence.com), [www.catfence.com](http://www.catfence.com), [www.purrfectfence.com](http://www.purrfectfence.com)). Such systems allow cats and some dogs to explore and enjoy the outside world in a humane manner.

That said, all animals who can walk can benefit from some form of leash walking, and all animals should be comfortable on a lead.

## Accommodating Old Age Changes with Leads and Harnesses

As dogs and cats age they may experience arthritic changes in their neck and spine. Accordingly, the lead and collar style you have used for the youngster may not be appropriate for an elderly animal. Regardless, the tools you choose should do no harm. This is the best argument for choosing head collars and harnesses as restraint and guidance devices throughout life. More information on these choices can be found in the handout, **Protocol for Choosing Collars, Head Collars, Harnesses, and Leads.**

## Speed and Distance

As the dog or cat slows they will still enjoy slightly more sedate leash walks. It's the client's job to learn what the distance limit is and prepare for it, either by knowing when to turn around, or having a car or cart available to take the dog or cat home. Very elderly dogs and cats may miss exploring the olfactory and social environment. A well-padded cart, wagon, or wheel barrow can redress this concern if it is well oiled and maintained and gently pulled. Commercial strollers for cats and dogs are now available and can be terrific for providing stimulation. Strollers are particularly beneficial for older, arthritic dogs who live with young dogs because they allow everyone to go on the same walk. If you include the older dog in these outings, he will blossom and become more interactive in other situations.

For dogs who may no longer be walking on more abrasive surfaces like roads and walkways, you may wish to trim the hair on their feet and between their toes to prevent them from slipping on tile or wood flooring. If you use small, electric clippers, trimming hair is safe and easy. You may also wish to lightly trim hair around the vulva and anus so that it is easy for the older dog to stay clean. Never trim a dog to the skin, even if you are trimming them because they swim a lot. Dogs use hair to both keep warm and cool down, so shaving them bald is not a good idea.

## Work for Dogs

If your pet is accustomed to doing a job for you on their walks (e.g., carrying the mail or a newspaper) ensure that they can still do this comfortably. This means ensuring that their teeth aren't hurting and their neck is not so arthritic that carrying the object causes pain. Dogs and cats will endure horrible pain to please, and we often do a less-than-adequate job of assessing pain. If your pet cannot carry their usual package, make a new package that the pet is able to carry. This could be a lighter paper, a toy, or some other object that is light and allows them to participate in your life.

## Running with Other Dogs or Cats at Play Groups

If your dog or cat enjoyed running or playing with other animals as a youngster, they will not want to give this up in old age. Play with a member of your own species is also a terrific form of physical and mental stimulation where nonvocal signals conveying concern or level of ability/debility will be easily recognized. You will have to pick your play group or playmates.



Tess, 14 years old and in buggy, was unable to go on the long walks the other dogs would take multiple times a week. Rather than leave her alone for hours at a time, the buggy allowed her to experience novel and complex stimuli, use different muscles, have the company of the other dogs (here accompanied by Flash) and smell the world as she passed through it.



The positive effect on Tess of such stimulation is clear in her engaged and relaxed facial expression. Dogs of her age and debility are too often left alone where they resort to sleep, in the absence of cognitive stimulation.

Companions who are evenly matched by temperament, ability, and size are even more important the older the dog or cat gets. You do not want your older pet to be injured or frightened during play with other dogs and cats. Puppies can be a great boon to an older animal and can encourage them to play quite energetically. Please remember, though, that some puppies play too roughly or too long for the older pet. If you monitor the play and redirect the puppy to other play as the older pet tires, everyone will benefit.



This buggy has a directional system where the dog enters from the back and leaves from the front. Notice that Tess is leaving onto soft, firm footing (the wheels of the buggy are locked).

Smaller groups or pairs of animals—always supervised—are ideal. Make sure that you always carry water and dishes, towels, and a few treats to reward good behavior. Watch to ensure that your pet is not becoming exhausted: stumbling, deep, erratic panting, and moving away from other animals are all signs of this.

If your pet is not ready to leave, but needs a rest, take the dog or cat away from the others, offer them water, wipe them down with a damp towel, if needed, and have them lie down on the towel, blanket or cooling bed that you have provided. Sometimes watching other dogs or cats play is enough.

If you fear that there is any risk of heat exhaustion, buy and carry with you one of the newer cooling vests, bandanas, or pads. These products contain a gel that acts as a surface coolant. Please remember that dogs and cats sweat only through their nose and paws and lose heat primarily by panting. Panting does not always meet the pet's needs, and this is especially true for very young or very old animals and for those who have a medical condition. ***If your dog or cat becomes uncoordinated and does not seem to be able to pay attention to or recognize you at any time, take her to your veterinarian immediately. Heatstroke is an emergency. Place cool, wet cloths on their belly and head and travel quickly.***

Be prepared to carry or provide transport for elderly pets who are tired.

## Car Trips

Trips in cars will always be enjoyable, if the dog or cat enjoyed car trips as a puppy or kitten. Even a dog or cat who is deaf, blind, and arthritic will enjoy a car ride if they did so earlier in life. The tactile sensation of motion and air, the olfactory stimulation and the pure comfort of being included in their people's daily lives do not diminish with age. In fact, the value of these outings may increase as the animal loses access to other activities they may have enjoyed.

Cats are relatively easily picked up and placed in the car on a bed or blanket with a seatbelt through the harness, or in an open crate. Dogs will need more help. There are now a number of commercially available ramps that help dogs enter and exit cars and boats. Very arthritic dogs will still need support getting out of the car: going down is harder than going up and gravity is going to help them fall if they are unsteady. A supporting hand or harness can make all the difference. Once in the car, padding (a bed or blanket) and a seat belt, crate, or barrier is essential. Older dogs and cats move less easily and can only slowly compensate sudden changes. They must be protected during these trips, in the event of sudden stops.

Be aware that older animals may be more sensitive to temperature extremes, so dogs and cats who always went with you in the late fall and early summer may not be able to do so at this stage of life without suffering—perhaps fatally—from cold or heat that you did not think was extreme.

## Pain and Very Aerobic Activities

Many people whose dogs participate in higher levels of obedience, agility, Frisbee, flyball, et cetera worry about aging, pain, and performance capabilities. Your first concern must be the well-being of the dog.

Aging can be viewed by the dog as a release from punishment if he has been unfortunate enough to have lived with someone who demanded perfection in a competitive activity, and for whom nothing is good enough. One hopes that most people reading this handout will not fall into that category.

If the dog really enjoys the activity but is increasingly struggling with jumps, catches, et cetera, consider massage, hydrotherapy (usually swimming), supplementation with nutraceuticals or specially formulated food, and/or anti-inflammatory agents. The number of antiinflammatories available for dogs and cats is growing. These agents can be used to relieve and prevent discomfort (as with humans they are best used *before* the pain is felt), but should never be used to push the dog to a level of *performance* that the *human* demands. Periodically step back and ask yourself what is in the dog's best interest.

All competitive activities can be modified for older dogs: jumps can be lowered; Frisbees can be thrown horizontally and a shorter distance, as can balls; courses can be shorter; et cetera. Even herding dogs can get help: I've seen farmers drive elderly collies to the sheep who need to be moved, have the dog do what's needed, and then pick the dog up and put him back in the truck or cart. This way everyone's needs are met. Remember that if your pet worked in any capacity, he still needs to feel useful. The extent to which he needs to work to feel useful will vary between animals and your job, as your pet's ultimate caretaker, is to learn what will humanely work for your dog.

## Support for the Failing: Carts and Slings

Physical instability and pain is linked to anxiety. Many animals who could get more exercise are afraid to do so either because they hurt or they are concerned that they will not be able to recover. The time to begin to use carts, slings, or manual help is before it is needed. Perhaps the dog needs to be supported in a sling or with a hand under her rump only

occasionally to go up the stairs. Knowing that there is help, if needed, will not only allow the dog to continue to use stairs, but will allow the animal to develop a signal system with her human indicating which days require help. This signaling can be as simple for the dog as standing at the bottom of the stairs and looking up.

Likewise, carts don't have to be an "end-of-mobility" decision. Instead, they can provide support and mobility at times when the animal is weaker, but still cognitively be able to learn to use such support creatively. Investigate these options, which are growing for dogs and cats, before you need them. If you don't like the idea of carts and slings, one option as you, the human, ages is to only obtain dogs that are of a size that you are sure you can always carry.

## Diet, Treats, and Eating

As pets age they may become "finicky." Fussy behavior may be the result of mouth or tooth pain or some change in digestive function. Here's where you need to ensure that your older animal is healthy. You should have a physical exam with complete lab work at least once a year when the animal becomes middle aged. Do not wait until your pet is ill—a baseline lab evaluation will allow your veterinarian to recognize changes early and to learn how long laboratory values have been out of whack. This information is critical for determining the type and quality of care your pet will receive as he ages. As animals become older, it may be reasonable to have checkups every 6 months. Ask your veterinarian.

If your pet needs professional dental care, do it as soon as possible. Dogs and cats who cannot chew their food experience a loss of pleasure from one of the most pleasurable activities of their lives. They also have gastrointestinal upset because the food is not well processed before getting to their intestines. You should have been brushing your cat's or dog's teeth all their lives, but if you have not, it's not too late to start, and there are many products that can facilitate this.

Depending on how well your dog or cat processes her food, you may wish to change diets with age. If your pet has a favored biscuit, she can likely still have this, although for some animals on protein-restricted diets, the protein in the biscuit will have to be factored into their overall diet. Talk to your veterinarian. Also, even if your dogs or cats lose teeth, they can still enjoy biscuits and food toys if there is no pain in their mouth.

A sudden change in eating behavior in an older animal warrants a visit to the veterinarian. This is one reason why you should watch your pets eat so that you know what normal is for your companion.

## Diets and Supplements for Your Pet's Brain

All clients should be aware of the incredible developments that have occurred in the pet food industry in terms of supplements and foods specially formulated with antioxidants, the "antiaging" compounds. In controlled studies, these foods and supplements have been shown to increase a pet's willingness to be active, to retain cognitive abilities, to interact well and with enjoyment with humans and other animals, to sleep well with fewer disturbances, and to retain house-training. These studies have all shown that the antioxidants

help, as does exercise and mental stimulation, but the largest effects are for the combination of the antioxidants and mental and physical stimulation. This will work for your pets, it should work for you, and you should do it!

## Elimination Behaviors

As dogs and cats age they can become arthritic and confused, just like us. Pain and joint immobility can be associated with an unwillingness to eliminate as the dog or cat had previously. In some cases, this leads to a cycle of constipation followed by diarrhea. Fecal material that is retained continues to lose water to the colon. The feces then become hard and are difficult to defecate. As the intestinal tract fills, the urgency associated with this imbalance then leads to defecation of hard feces followed by diarrhea. Whether it causes pain or not, at some point the dog or cat will need to eliminate. By addressing the pain and mobility issues, we can prevent this messy cycle that upsets pets and clients, alike.

Regular exercise promotes regular digestion. Anti-inflammatory pain killers will allow pets to maintain or increase exercise as discussed above.

If water and food dishes are at head height, cats and dogs who have arthritic necks will be able to eat and drink without pain and so will eat and drink more normally. Water or broth can be added to all foods to make them easier to chew and swallow and to provide more water for digestion. In this age of microwaves, all feline and canine meals can be warmed to make them easier to chew and to aromatize the volatile compounds in the foods. Stimulating the sense of smell often increases intake.

Agents that address constipation can be regularly added to the meals of older animals. Psyllium, the same bulk-forming agent used for humans, if added to meals with water will make the feces softer and easier to pass. This is really important for animals whose hips are less mobile and hurt. For pennies a day, cats can have  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon of psyllium mixed into food, and dogs can have  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 teaspoons, depending on size, type of food, and activity level of the dogs.

As hips fail and pain increases, dogs and cats may be less able to control their urination. It may be too painful to maintain a full bladder, or it may not be neurologically possible to do so. There are a couple of simple changes that can be implemented that will make the pet's and client's lives easier.

- Dogs can be taken out for leash walks earlier. Don't wait for the dog's bladder to be full; let the dog empty his bladder before it's full. This preventive action will insure that if there is a leak, the leak will be small, and also that the dog will get more exercise and more stimulation, which will help them remember to eliminate when given the opportunity.
- Dogs can also be taught to use a canine litterbox and a number of versions of these are now commercially available. You will need to retrain the dog to a new substrate, so the client who is considering this option needs to do it while the dog is still capable of learning new associations. For very little dogs, or for dogs who are at high risk for hip dysplasia and other mobility problems, clients may wish to dual train their dogs to eliminate in these boxes and outside as usual. This is also a good recommendation for people who intend to travel with their dogs and stay in hotels.

- Dogs can be diapered. Long-haired dogs should be trimmed. If diapering is the choice the clients **must** be prepared to change the diaper often, clean and dry the dog, and apply an unscented cornstarch powder and/or petroleum jelly to creases and folds. Urine scalding and bed sores are considered signs of neglect and, or abuse in dogs, and they need not ever occur.
- There are medications that will help older dogs who have decreased bladder muscle tone, regardless of cause. Most of these medications involve phenylpropanolamine (PPA) or a similar compound, and can be used safely in dogs if laboratory and physical exam is performed and the clients maintain a good dialog with their veterinarian.
- Steps are a problem. Clients can either carry dogs or, if the dog is big, build ramps or use carriers that help support the dog to allow them access to the outside. Dog doors must be “handicapped accessible.” This may mean removing the bottom lip and make them flush with the floor.
- For cats, litterboxes may need to be made lower. Cookie sheets or shorter litterboxes with the side cut out can help.
- Cats should not have to go any further than they easily can to find a litterbox. This may mean that the clients need one litterbox per room. Although less than aesthetically pleasing, this is not a difficult situation to maintain and the boxes can be removed and the cat placed in a smaller, provisioned area if the client wishes to have a party or guests who won’t understand.
- Cats develop arthritis and hip dysplasia, also. This means that stairs can be a problem. If the cat has problems, she cannot be expected to go up and down stairs to eliminate, regardless of how she behaved in the past. A litterbox must be available where the cat stays. If cats had been previously accustomed to jumping up to a litterbox, perhaps to keep the box away from dogs, a new plan will have to be devised. Clients can be creative when they have to be.
- Cats who use cat flaps may need to have a flap that moves more easily and one that requires less of a step. Cat/dog doors that are flush with the floor, without lips, prevent tripping.

## Sleeping

Changes in sleep cycles are common with age. When cognition begins to fail, the alterations become tremendously abnormal: animals pace aimlessly at night and sleep deeply during the day, the pacing may end with the animal in corners or vocalizing with no object of the vocalization apparent to the client, et cetera.

Good exercise and diet, and comfortable sleeping areas, may help older animals sleep better and more regularly. The dog or cat who may never have had a bed needs and deserves one in old age. Dogs and cats who are painful for any reason need beds with orthopedic grade foam or memory foam. All bedding should be washable. This is not only for the sake of the pet; anything that makes the client’s life easier will help with the maintenance of the animal.

If the sleep changes are truly extreme, it’s time to talk with your veterinarian about medication. There are commercially available cognitive enhancing and/or antianxiety agents that work. This is a quality-of-life issue, and medication can provide that quality.

## Interactions with Other Animals

The longer animals can maintain relationships with other animals, the better. Most animals are very good at reading nonvocal signals and if they know the elderly cat or dog, they will not insist on impossible or painful interactions. In fact, clients could learn from watching how other cats and dogs treat their elderly companion.

The introduction of a younger animal to an older pet can be both a godsend and a bane. Pain-wracked cats and dogs, deep in the stages of terminal old age, will not have the physical or mental plasticity to tolerate endless invitations to play. However, having a younger animal around the elderly one can stimulate the old cat or dog mentally and physically in a good way. If the client does not also have an adult animal or another youngster who can take the brunt of the play, they may wish to consider getting one. Otherwise, the clients will have to wear out the youngster and protect the elderly pet from unwanted attention while ensuring that they also have the company and stimulation.

The ideal time to get a younger pet is as the older animal is entering late middle age. The 8-year-old dog who you thought would never play again not only will play, but will look like a puppy. Additionally, by acting in the role of “foster parent” to the new baby in the house, all mental faculties are well exercised. Another pet can add years to the life of the older animal, and improve its quality in ways we likely do not fully understand.

## Stimulating the Nose and the Mind

The nerves responsible for the ability to smell—olfactory neurons—are unique in the world of nerves because they are only one cell away from the outside world in the olfactory epithelium within the nose. These neurons are replaced throughout life. When humans begin to suffer losses in their ability to think, we also note that they have an impaired sense of smell. Whether by stimulating smell we can enhance cognition is unknown, but in animals for whom their most complete information comes from scent, we must assume that the maintenance of the olfactory system is not independent from that of the cognitive system.

Some of the best play activity for older dogs and cats may involve stimulating their noses! Let your dog or cat use her nose.

- Encourage your pets to use food puzzles to get some of their daily caloric needs. You can create food puzzles using upended flower pots, rocks, and hollowed bones all placed on trays with food in the hidey holes.
- Take them on walks where you have hidden treats.
- Learn to use a “scent trail” or adopt some of the training dogs undergo for tracking to stimulate your older cat or dog.
- Use food toys where the pet has to work to get special food (assuming that the physical state of the animal is coupled to the difficulty of the toy). Food toys are commercially available and there is one to meet every dog’s or cat’s needs.
- Let dogs and cats explore the scent world outside. Take them to new areas where they can sniff new scents. The data show that dogs and cats sniff more when they are in unfamiliar environments, or when they are on trails that other animals pass.

Olfactory memory is some of the first memory we gain and some of the last we lose, so any play that can involve the sense of smell will be play that benefits the dog or cat!

If you are worried that, in the process of getting cognitive stimulation your older pet could become confused or wander and become lost, consider investing in a device that lets you know when they are a certain distance from you. There are now a number of these commercially available. They are equally suited to baby and older humans, and older dogs.



A commercially available locator system which uses a radio frequency tag that can be attached to a collar. The hand-held location (in silver, resting on the collar in the photo on the left) gives an auditory signal as the dog wanders from a pre-set distance and/or beeps as the device locates the dog.

## Massage and Physical Manipulation

Dogs and cats can benefit from deep muscle massage and range-of-motion exercises, as do we as we age. Because canine and feline sizes and musculature vary considerably, talk to your veterinarian about the right kind of pressure to exert that does not cause pain or anxiety. Many massage therapists are now also willing to take canine patients or to teach clients

basic massage techniques. This has a dual benefit: Giving a massage can be almost as relaxing as getting one.

After injury, or as aging changes your dog's or cat's mobility, range-of-motion activities can help prevent or regain lost function. Limbs should be slowly but firmly moved through an entire cycle of movement. Before you can be successful at this you need to know how the limbs of dogs and cats naturally move. The time to best learn this is when your pet is young and more tolerant. Discuss with your veterinarian if this option can help your pet. If so, have your veterinarian demonstrate the range of motion and practice on a compliant animal first. Any animal who becomes fearful, resistant, or aggressive should be re-evaluated. Many cranky animals, in fact, become more docile because such activities decrease pain and stiffness. Remember to use anti-inflammatory medication if needed.

## Manipulations: Ear, Teeth, Nails, and Coat Care

Any dog or cat who resented or fought maintenance care when young will tolerate it less when old. This is problematic because the older animal needs such care more than does a youngster.

- Overgrown nails will make it harder to walk on already painful joints.
- Untrimmed hair between the pads makes it easier to slip on smooth floors.
- Ear infections and waxy buildup will further compromise hearing.
- Bad, infected, and loose teeth will compromise nutrition.
- Mat of hair that hurt will make a dog or cat who is globally more painful overly reactive.

Old age is *not* the time to muscle an animal into some restraint posture and do everything, forcefully, at once. Actually, there probably never was a time when such force was a good idea, but it is a particularly bad idea for elderly animals. There are alternatives to restraint.

- Use a soft washcloth and delicious (canine or feline) toothpaste to work on one or two teeth a day. Give your dog or cat a couple of small treats while and after doing this.
- Trim one paw or a few nails on that paw at a time. Give your dog or cat a couple of small treats while and after doing this.
- Soak ears one day, and clean them over the next day or two and then repeat. Give your dog or cat a couple of small treats while and after doing this.
- Choose which section of the pet to groom if a whole-body groom is too scary or painful. Give your dog or cat a couple of small treats while and after doing this.
- Trim coats, if warranted. Give your dog or cat a couple of small treats while and after doing this.
- A short clip can make an elderly cat or dog feel, look, and move in a more spirited manner. *The resistance to such clips is all ours; it's we who worry that the pet won't live long enough for the coat to grow again. Put the pet's needs first.*

## End Notes

The suggestions discussed above are simple, and they can help repay—just a little bit—of what our best furred friends so freely and generously provide us. It's not fair that dogs

and cats don't live as long as we do, but they can live well and happily even as they pass through their last years. We will become better and more humane people for ensuring that this is so.

If you wish to make note of your dog's or cat's behavioral changes as they age in a way that will help your veterinarian provide the best care possible, consider periodically completing the following questionnaire. Bring a copy of the questionnaire with you to the veterinarian's so that you can discuss noted changes and have an informed dialog about humane care for your companion.

## Questionnaire to Evaluate Behaviors of Old Cats and Dogs

This questionnaire is for pets who are elderly, passing through middle age, and those who are experiencing age-related changes regardless of their chronological age. The terms "elderly" and "middle age" depend on species and breed so please make sure you understand what this means for your pet. Once you notice any alteration in any category, please re-evaluate your pet by answering all questions every 3 to 6 months so that we can monitor changes and address them as needed. We know that you cannot completely accurately assess your dog's or cat's hearing and vision, but the categories below will allow you to provide your assessment of your pet's abilities.

### Behavior Screen for Age Associated Changes

1. Locomotory/ambulatory assessment (tick **only** 1)
  - a. No alterations or debilities noted
  - b. Modest slowness associated with change from youth to adult
  - c. Moderate slowness associated with geriatric aging
  - d. Moderate slowness associated with geriatric aging plus alteration or debility in gait
  - e. Moderate slowness associated with geriatric aging plus some loss of function (e.g., cannot climb stairs)
  - f. Severe slowness associated with extreme loss of function, particularly on slick surfaces (may need to be carried)
  - g. Severe slowness, extreme loss of function, and decreased willingness or interest in locomoting (spends most of time in bed)
  - h. Paralyzed or refuses to move
2. Appetite assessment (may tick **more** than 1)
  - a. No alterations in appetite
  - b. Change in ability to physically handle food
  - c. Change in ability to retain food (vomits or regurgitates)
  - d. Change in ability to find food
  - e. Change in interest in food (may be olfactory)
  - f. Change in rate of eating
  - g. Change in completion of eating
  - h. Change in timing of eating
  - i. Change in preferred textures
3. Assessment of elimination function (tick **only** 1 in **each** category)
  - a. Changes in frequencies and "accidents"
    1. No change in frequency and no "accidents"
    2. Increased frequency, no "accidents"
    3. Decreased frequency, no "accidents"
    4. Increased frequency with "accidents"
    5. Decreased frequency with "accidents"
    6. No change in frequency, but "accidents"
  - b. Bladder control
    1. Leaks urine when asleep, only
    2. Leaks urine when awake, only
    3. Leaks urine when awake or asleep
    4. Full-stream, uncontrolled urination when asleep, only
    5. Full-stream, uncontrolled urination when awake, only
    6. Full-stream, uncontrolled urination when awake and asleep
    7. No leakage or uncontrolled urination, all urination controlled, but in inappropriate or undesirable location
    8. No change in urination control or behavior (assumes that dog was housetrained and that cat used litter appropriately)
  - c. Bowel control (circle appropriate answers, if the behavior occurs)
    1. Defecates when asleep:
      - a. Formed stool
      - b. Diarrhea
      - c. Mixed
    2. Defecates without apparent awareness:
      - a. Formed stool
      - b. Diarrhea
      - c. Mixed
    3. Defecates when awake and aware of action, but in inappropriate or undesirable locations:
      - a. Formed stool
      - b. Diarrhea
      - c. Mixed
    4. No changes in bowel control
4. Vision assessment (tick **only** 1)
  - a. No change in vision detected by behavior—appears to see as well as ever
  - b. Some change in vision **not** dependent on ambient light conditions
  - c. Some change in vision dependent on ambient light conditions
  - d. Extreme change in vision **not** dependent on ambient light conditions
  - e. Extreme change in vision dependent on ambient light conditions
  - f. Blind
5. Hearing assessment (tick **only** 1)
  - a. No apparent change in hearing
  - b. Some loss of/decrement in hearing
  - c. Extreme loss of/decrement in hearing
  - d. Deaf
6. Play interactions—if the dog/cat plays or has played with **toys** (other pets are addressed later), which situation best describes that play? (tick **only** 1)
  - a. No change in play with toys
  - b. Slightly decreased interest in toys, only
  - c. Slightly decreased ability to play with toys, only
  - d. Slightly decreased interest and ability to play with toys
  - e. Extremely decreased interest in toys, only
  - f. Extremely decreased ability to play with toys, only

- g. Extremely decreased interest and ability to play with toys
- 7. Interactions with humans: Which situation best describes that interaction? (tick **only** 1)
  - a. No change in interaction with people
  - b. Recognizes people but slightly decreased frequency of interaction
  - c. Recognizes people but greatly decreased frequency of interaction
  - d. Withdrawal but recognizes people
  - e. Does not recognize people
- 8. Interactions with other pets: Which situation best describes that interaction? (tick **only** 1)
  - a. No change in interaction with other pets
  - b. Recognizes other pets but slightly decreased frequency of interaction
  - c. Recognizes other pets but greatly decreased frequency of interaction
  - d. Withdrawal but recognizes other pets
  - e. Does not recognize other pets
  - f. No other pets or animal companions in house or social environment
- 9. Changes in sleep/wake cycle (tick **only** 1)
  - a. No changes in sleep patterns
  - b. Sleeps more in day, only
  - c. Some change—awakens at night and sleeps more in day
  - d. Much change—profoundly erratic nocturnal pattern and irregular daytime pattern
  - e. Sleeps virtually all day, awake occasionally at night
  - f. Sleeps almost around the clock
- 10. Is there anything else you think we should know?