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Caring for senior pets

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Pets are living longer and healthier lives. As your pet ages, you will need to watch for changes that may indicate disease or require adjustments to your pet's care.

You may need to make some accommodations in your pet's routine, such as keeping your dog indoors and providing a safe, warm bed. An older cat may need access to several litterboxes. If you have other pets, make sure they do not prevent your older pet from getting food or water.

As your pet's activity level declines, you may need to change the diet and feeding routine to avoid unhealthy weight gain. Diets with less protein and fewer calories are usually recommended for older dogs and cats. Your veterinarian can advise you on a good diet for your senior pet.

Frequent grooming can help prevent certain skin conditions and also allows you to inspect your pet. Keeping nails short allows your pet to walk more comfortably, especially if any arthritis is present.

It is important to keep a close watch on your pet's general attitude, appetite, thirst, and elimination habits, and report any changes to your vet. Your vet should be contacted immediately of any signs, such as vomiting, diarrhea, coughing, etc, that cause your pet distress, especially if they appear suddenly.

Chronic conditions such as diabetes and kidney and liver disease are common in older pets and can affect the amount of water your pet drinks. Plenty of fresh water should be available at all times. Again, monitor your pet's intake, and notify your veterinarian of any changes.

Many vets recommend checkups for senior pets every 6 months. Senior care programs are designed to detect common diseases of older pets as soon as possible. Starting a treatment and management program for a chronic disease is much more effective while the disease is in the early stages and can add years to your pet's life.

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