



IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE



1 SENIOR PET CARE

Take your pet to the vet for a check-up at least twice a year after the age of 7. Remember a once per year veterinary check-up is equivalent to you visiting your doctor once every 7 years!

2 RINGWORM

Although the name suggests otherwise, ringworm is not caused by a worm at all—but a fungus.

3 CASE STUDY – Hit by a Helicopter!

Lucy is a six-year-old Kelpie who was presented after she was injured by a model helicopter. She had suffered from severe skin lacerations to the head, ear and right shoulder.

Senior Pet Care: Pets age faster than people

Due to improved veterinary care and dietary habits, pets are living longer now than they ever have before. One consequence of this is that pets, along with their owners and veterinarians, are faced with a whole new set of age-related conditions. In recent years there has been extensive research on the problems facing older pets and how their owners and veterinarians can best handle their special needs.

When does a pet become "old"?



Cats and small dogs are generally considered geriatric at the age of 7. Larger breed dogs tend to have shorter life spans and are considered

geriatric when they are approximately 6 years of age. Owners tend to want to think of their pet's age in human terms. While it is not as simple as "1 human year = X cat/dog years", there are calculations that can help put a pet's age in human terms:

Cat years	Human years
7	45
10	58
15	75
20	98

Dog years	Human years (*dog size lbs)
7	Small – Medium: 44-47
	Large – Very large: 50-56
10	Small – Medium: 56-60
	Large – Very large: 66-78
15	Small – Medium: 76-83
	Large – Very large: 93-115
20	Small – Medium: 96-105
	Large: 120

*Small: 0-20 lbs; Medium: 21-50 lbs; Large: 51-90 lbs; Very large: >90 lbs
The oldest recorded age of a cat is 34 years. The oldest recorded age of a dog is 29 years.

Geriatric pets can develop many of the same problems seen in older people, such as:

1. cancer
2. heart disease
3. kidney/urinary tract disease
4. liver disease
5. diabetes
6. joint or bone disease
7. senility
8. weakness

Talk to your veterinarian about how to care for your older pet and prepare for possible age-related health issues. Senior pets require increased attention, including more frequent visits to the veterinarian, possible changes in diet, and in some cases alterations to their home environment.



Older Pet Care Considerations

Area of concern	Description
Increased veterinary care	Geriatric pets should have semi-annual veterinary visits instead of annual visits so signs of illness or other problems can be detected early and treated. Senior pet exams are similar to those for younger pets, but are more in depth, and may include dental care, possible bloodwork, and specific checks for physical signs of diseases that are more likely in older pets.
Diet and nutrition	Geriatric pets often need foods that are more readily digested, and have different calorie levels and ingredients, and anti-aging nutrients
Weight control	Weight gain in geriatric dogs increases the risk of health problems, whereas weight loss is a bigger concern for geriatric cats.
Parasite control	Older pets' immune systems are not as healthy as those of younger animals; as a result, they can't fight off diseases or heal as fast as younger pets
Maintaining mobility	As with older people, keeping older pets mobile through appropriate exercise helps keep them healthier and more mobile.
Vaccination	Your pet's vaccination needs may change with age. Talk to your veterinarian about a vaccination program for your geriatric pet.
Mental health	Pets can show signs of senility. Stimulating them through interactions can help keep them mentally active. If any changes in your pet's behaviour are noticed, please consult your veterinarian.
Environmental considerations	Older pets may need changes in their lifestyle, such as sleeping areas to avoid stairs, more time indoors, etc. Disabled pets have special needs which can be discussed with your veterinarian
Reproductive diseases	Non-neutered/non-spayed geriatric pets are at higher risk of mammary, testicular, and cancers.

Before any medical signs become apparent, behavioural changes can serve as important indicators that something is changing in an older pet, which may be due to medical or other reasons. As your pet's owner, you serve a critical role in detecting early signs of disease because you interact and care for your pet on a daily basis and are familiar with your pet's behaviour and routines. If your pet is showing any change in behavior or other warning

signs of disease, contact your veterinarian and provide them with a list of the changes you have observed in your pet. Sometimes, the changes may seem contradictory - such as an older pet that has symptoms of hearing loss but also seems more sensitive to strange sounds.

Possible Behaviour Changes in Older Pets

- Increased reaction to sounds
- Increased vocalization
- Confusion
- Disorientation
- Decreased interaction w/humans
- Increased irritability
- Decreased response to commands
- Increased aggressive/protective behavior
- Increased anxiety
- House soiling
- Decreased self-hygiene/grooming
- Repetitive activity
- Increased wandering
- Change in sleep cycles

Once any underlying or other disease causes have been ruled out, there is a chance your pet may be experiencing cognitive dysfunction. Studies conducted in the early 1990s were the first to identify brain changes in older dogs that were similar to brain changes seen in humans with Alzheimer's disease (ie, β -amyloid deposits). Laboratory tests were also developed in the 1990s to detect learning and memory deficits in older dogs. Recently these studies have started on younger dogs in order to fully understand the effect of aging on the canine brain. Similar studies in young and older cats are also ongoing.

What are the common signs of disease in an older pet?

The signs you might see will vary with the disease or problem affecting your pet, and some signs can be seen with more than one problem. As the pet's owner, you can provide your veterinarian with valuable information that can help them determine what is going on with your pet.

Common Warning Signs of Disease in Older Pets

Kidney disease	Urinary tract disease	Heart disease
Decreased appetite	Increased urination/spotting or "accidents" in the house	Coughing
Increased thirst	Straining to urinate	Difficulty breathing
Increased urination	Blood in urine	Decreased tolerance of exercise
Decreased or no urination	Weakness	
Poor hair coat		Decreased appetite
Vomiting		Vomiting
Sore mouth		

How common is cancer in older pets?

In pets the rate of cancer increases with age. Cancer is responsible for approximately half the deaths of pets over 10 years of age. Dogs get cancer at roughly the same rate as humans, while cats tend to have lower rates of cancer. Some cancers, such as breast or testicular cancer, are largely preventable by early spaying and neutering. A diagnosis of cancer may be based on x-rays, blood tests, physical appearance of tumours, and other physical signs. The ultimate test for cancer is through confirmation via a biopsy.

Top 10 Common Signs of Cancer in Pets

- Abnormal swellings that persist or continue to grow
- Sores that do not heal
- Weight loss
- Loss of appetite
- Bleeding or discharge from any body opening
- Offensive mouth odor
- Difficulty eating/swallowing
- Hesitation to exercise/loss of stamina
- Persistent lameness/stiffness
- Difficulty breathing, urinating, or defecating

Source: <https://www.avma.org/public/petcare/pages/caring-for-an-older-pet>

Ringworm

Although the name suggests otherwise, ringworm is not caused by a worm at all—but a fungus. This highly contagious infection can lead to patchy areas of hair loss on a dog, and can spread to other animals—and to humans, too.

What Are the General Symptoms of Ringworm?



Classic symptoms of ringworm include lesions that typically appear on an animal's head, ears, paws and forelimbs. These lesions can cause patchy, crusted circular "bald spots" that sometimes look red in the center. In mild cases of ringworm, there may

be just a few broken hairs, while bad cases of ringworm can spread over most of an animal's body. It's also possible for a pet to carry the fungus and not show any symptoms whatsoever.

Where Would my Pet Pick up this Infection?

The spores of dermatophyte fungi are extremely hardy in the environment; they can live for years. All it takes is skin contact with a spore to cause infection; however, the skin must be abraded as the fungus cannot infect healthy intact skin. This means that freshly shaved, scraped, or scratched skin is especially vulnerable.

Infected animals are continuously dropping spore-covered hairs as infected hairs break off into the environment. Some animals are carriers, who never show signs of skin irritation themselves but can infect others readily. A carrier might be subclinically infected, which means their skin is infected but shows no visible lesions. Ringworm patients undergoing treatment commonly fit in this category towards the end of their care; the skin is still dropping spores but the visible signs of infection have cleared up. A carrier can also carry the spores on their fur without being infected, much as an inanimate object might have spores on its surface incidentally. In this situation, the spores can be easily washed away. There is no obvious way to distinguish between these two types of carrier state.

There are several species of dermatophyte fungi. Different species of fungi come from different kinds of animals or even from soil thus determining the ringworm species can help determine the source of the fungal infection.

Can I get this Infection?

Yes, ringworm is contagious to people; however, some people are at greater risk than others. The fungus takes advantage of skin belonging to those with reduced immune capacity. This puts young animals and children, elderly people and pets, those who are HIV+, people on chemotherapy or taking medication after transfusion or organ transplant, and highly stressed people and animals at high risk. In general, if you do not already have ringworm at the time your pet is diagnosed, you probably will not get it. Keep in mind that skin must be abraded (irritated) to become infected.



skin belonging to those with reduced immune capacity. This puts young animals and children, elderly people and pets, those who are HIV+, people on chemotherapy or taking medication after

transfusion or organ transplant, and highly stressed people and animals at high risk. In general, if you do not already have ringworm at the time your pet is diagnosed, you probably will not get it. Keep in mind that skin must be abraded (irritated) to become infected.

How does the Doctor know this is Really Ringworm?

In some cases, we know for sure that the pet has dermatophyte fungi while in other cases we are only highly suspicious. Ringworm lesions on animal skin are rarely the classic ring-shaped as in people (in fact, in animals, lesions are often not even itchy) thus some testing is usually necessary. Common tests include:

- Wood's Light (Fluorescence)
- Microscopic Examination
- Fungal Culture
- Biopsy

How Is Ringworm Diagnosed and Treated?

Because this fungal infection can potentially spread over a pet's body and infect other animals and people, it's important that you see your vet for an accurate diagnosis if your pet is showing any signs of a skin problem.

Treatment of ringworm depends on the severity of the infection. A veterinarian may prescribe a medicated shampoo or ointment. In some cases, oral medications are necessary to cure ringworm. In severe cases, it may be necessary to use a topical and oral treatment, in addition to clipping away the fur. Once treatment begins, lesions should begin to heal in about one to three weeks.

Please note, it is important to treat your pet for as long as recommended by your veterinarian. Even though the skin lesions may have cleared up, this doesn't mean your pet is cured or can't infect another animal or person. Certain diagnostic tests may need to be repeated in order to ensure cure. And unfortunately, there is no guarantee that reinfection won't occur!

How Can I Prevent Ringworm from Spreading?

If your veterinarian has diagnosed your pet with ringworm, he or she will explain what you must do to prevent the fungus from spreading to your other pets—and to the human members of the household. This is especially important because the fungus is difficult to kill and can live in the environment for several months. Your vet may recommend baths with a medicated shampoo for all your pets, and will likely suggest washing, disinfecting or even discarding the infected animal's bedding, equipment and toys. One of the best disinfectants to use is 1 part bleach diluted with 10 parts water. And since ringworm can survive on hair and skin that your pet sheds, frequent vacuuming can help prevent transmission of the infection—but don't forget to change the vacuum bag!

Source: <http://www.aspc.org/pet-care/dog-care/ringworm>

Case Study – Hit by a helicopter!



Lucy is a six-year-old Kelpie who was presented after she was injured by a model helicopter. She had suffered from severe skin lacerations to the head, ear and right shoulder.

She was remarkably calm and stable when she came in. We treated Lucy immediately with strong pain-relief and intravenous fluids to stabilise her. We also administered Mannitol to reduce the chance of cerebral oedema (brain swelling) following the head

trauma that she had suffered. We performed some x-rays to rule out major internal injuries to the chest, then proceeded with surgery to suture her wounds.

The wounds were fairly fresh and uncontaminated, which increased the chances of successful healing. We flushed the wounds with saline to remove contamination and then sutured the skin closed.

Lucy was very bright the next morning and was discharged with pain-relief and antibiotic medication. So far Lucy is progressing well and we expect her to make a full recovery.

Typical of an Australian working-breed dog, Lucy was as tough as they come. She was a tremendously brave patient.