

## COMPANION ANIMAL NEWS SEPTEMBER 2002

**SEPTEMBER IS SENIOR PET HEALTH MONTH** –Thanks to the advances in veterinary medicine and nutrition, pets are living longer than ever before. Since veterinarians now have more diagnostic tools and treatment options to help your pet stay healthy, it's a great time to be a senior pet.

Still, like humans, older dogs and cats are more likely to encounter health problems than younger pets. That's why, as your pet reaches 7 years of age, a senior exam can help your veterinarian assess your pet's current health, and provide a baseline for monitoring changes in the years ahead.

Dogs and cats age approximately seven years for every human year, and large breed dogs can age even faster. That means diseases can progress up to seven times faster in pets. So it's important for us to examine your senior pet **AT LEAST** once a year, more often in pets that are on long term medications.

Diagnostic tests can help detect many diseases before your pet displays signs of a condition. Even if results are normal, the findings give us a good baseline to identify and monitor changes in your pet's health as the years progress. This is why we offer our **SENIOR WELLNESS EXAMS**. For dogs, we recommend a blood chemistry panel (this checks liver and kidney enzymes, blood glucose, and electrolytes), a complete urinalysis (to look for infections, crystals or early kidney disease), and a red blood cell count to check for anemia. For cats, we also include a thyroid screening test because they are so prone to hyperthyroidism. Some early conditions are very responsive to diet therapy or medications. This is good, basic, preventive medicine. When you and I go to the doctor for a complete physical, blood work is always done. Why not do the same for your pet? We offer a package price of \$45 for the canine senior wellness check and \$65 for the feline senior wellness check (the office call and exam fees are additional).

Some of you may have noticed that we do not vaccinate every animal every year any more. There has been increasing evidence that immunity to certain diseases (like distemper) lasts longer than one year in adult cats and dogs (IF they have had their puppy/kitten series and boosted one year later). We are now vaccinating on an individual basis depending on the lifestyle and risk factor in your pet. We **ALWAYS** recommend yearly complete physicals, especially to check teeth, heart, lumps or bumps, arthritis, or any behavior changes.

Did you know that we have medication to help treat urinary incontinence in dogs? Many people will euthanize their pet because they 'leak' in the house. There are many reasons for this. If it turns out to be a simple incontinence problem, it can be treated.

Even if your pet is just reaching his or her senior years, preventive health care can help detect problems early, when diseases can be treated more effectively. If you have any questions or concerns about your senior pet, please don't hesitate to ask.

Here is a true story about a feline senior citizen named Fluffy. Fluffy beat the odds because of early detection during a senior exam.

Fluffy sat dignified on the exam table, looking every bit the dapper older gentleman. The veterinarian remembered when she first met Fluffy. What a handsome young devil he had been...an orange tabby short hair. Comically, his hair was white right near his nose, making him look like he'd slyly dunked that handsome face into a bowl of milk.

Fluffy's owners, Jay and Linda, faithfully bring all their pets in for annual exams and laboratory screening. Upon physical exam four years ago, the veterinarian noticed that Fluffy had traded his dashing, slim silhouette for a newer, much wider model. Since nothing showed up in tests, it was suspected that Fluffy had become a lap cat. He was put on a low fat diet along with instructions to "increase his exercise".

The following year, when time for the next annual exam rolled around, Fluffy swaggered in more sleek and dapper than ever. With Fluffy at his "fighting weight" again, it first appeared that the prescribed diet and exercise regimen had worked well. It wasn't until the blood work came back that the truth surfaced: Fluffy was suffering from **hyperthyroidism**. Although he looked healthy now, his looks were deceiving. He was actually at the beginning of a downward spiral of weight loss, which, left untreated, could end in his death. His heart rate, blood pressure and metabolism had already increased so much that he was losing weight rapidly. Without treatment, Fluffy would have gotten so thin and frail that he would have gone into kidney or heart failure. Fortunately for Fluffy, this disease is treatable, especially when caught in the early stages. We have several hyperthyroid cats in our practice that are doing very well on medication. This is a good illustration of the importance of blood work and senior wellness checkups.

**GRAPES AND RAISINS CAN BE HAZARDOUS TO YOUR DOG!** – The ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center has received more than 50 well-documented reports of dogs developing acute kidney failure after ingesting grapes or raisins. They were from a variety of sources, and the ingested amounts varied considerably. Kidney damage was evident in most cases within 72 hours from ingestion. Only half the dogs that had received aggressive treatment recovered. The cause of this toxicity is still under investigation.

We had previously been recommending grapes for healthy snacks for dogs. After receiving this information from the Wisconsin Veterinary Medical Association, we have changed our recommendation. **Please avoid grapes and raisins for your dogs!** There have not been any reports of problems in other species (birds, cats, etc.). For nutritious low-fat treats, stick to apples, carrots, bananas, and other fruits and veggies.

**OTHER NEWS** - Congratulations to Wendy Lindner on the birth of her baby girl, Katlyn Jane!! Wendy is already back to work (thank goodness!), and baby is doing very well. Congratulations also to our two newlyweds; Danae and Nick Stieglitz, and Yolandi and Mike Boon.

Dr. Jean has enrolled in the **Veterinary Acupuncture Course** this fall. She will be traveling to San Diego for a week in October, November, January, and February for classes. There will be a two-day exam in March. In order to become certified she will also need to spend 40 hours of internship and write a case study. Dr. Jean is excited about this, and is hoping she will be able to use her new knowledge of Traditional Chinese Medicine to improve the lives of many of her patients.

**NEW WEBSITE TO CHECK OUT:** [www.veterinarypartner.com](http://www.veterinarypartner.com). It can answer all your pet health questions!

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