

Nutrition for Senior Pets

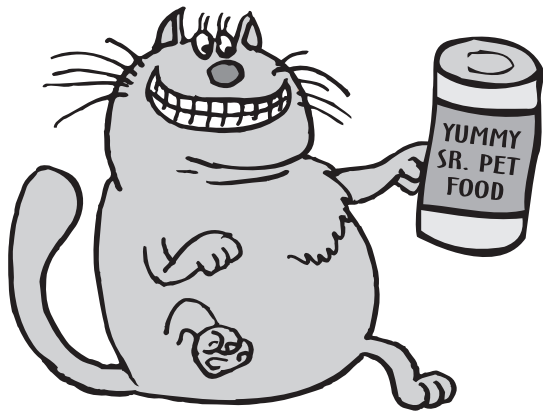
Nutritional needs change with age in both pets and people. Elderly humans develop osteoporosis, become too thin or have blood pressure or cholesterol problems. Changes in the senses of taste and smell affect appetite. Changes that alter activity and exercise levels also affect nutritional requirements. All these things can lead to decreased or increased needs for certain nutrients, such as fiber, calcium and sodium.

Older pets often suffer from nutritional deficiencies. Changes occur over time in metabolism and in the function of the intestinal tract. Problems such as thyroid abnormalities, heart and kidney disease and arthritis change the body's needs for certain nutrients. Nutritional excesses, as well as deficiencies, are also common in older pets.

Feeding the proper diet is important in both humans and their pets at every age, but in older animals it can become critical. The effects of a lifetime of living are appearing with age, including the effects of good or poor diets. Avoid feeding table scraps to older pets, as this not only can upset their nutritional balance but is also more likely to lead to stomach upset or diarrhea. Don't feed treats that are high in fat and salt. Also avoid foods that have lots of artificial flavors and colors, as well as too much salt.

Be sure to have your pet's teeth taken care of so it is comfortable for him or her to eat. Periodontal disease, gingivitis and cavities can make chewing very painful. Nutritional disturbances, weight loss and spread of infection to other organs are common results of dental disease.





If your pet is otherwise healthy but just getting up there in years, now is the time to switch to a diet made especially for senior pets. As the digestive tract becomes less efficient with age it is important to feed a high quality senior diet. Diets for senior pets should have limited or controlled amounts of sodium, phosphorus, protein and fat, all of which can harm an older pet's health if fed in excess. We never recommend generic, store brand or

cheap foods but we especially discourage them for older pets, who are more prone to diet related diseases.

If your pet has an age related illness, such as kidney disease, chances are good your veterinarian will prescribe a special diet or a supplement to help keep the disease under control. Blood testing in older animals frequently reveals problems that can be addressed with supplements or a change of diet. In cats, we often find low potassium levels on blood testing. Potassium deficiency causes no symptoms until in the advanced stages, and eventually leads to muscle weakness and collapse. Elevated cholesterol levels are common in dogs. Lower fat and higher fiber levels in senior pet food are often helpful. If your pet is too thin, on the other hand, a high fat food may be more appropriate.

Senior diets are usually lower in fat and calories but beyond age 12 or so many older pets actually need more calories to avoid becoming too thin. We may need to change pet foods more than once as your pet ages.

What you feed your pet every day is one of the most important components of good health care. Choose wisely, and be sure to follow your veterinarian's advice as to what food is best. It may mean the difference between a long, healthy life and one that's not.

Caring People Helping Pets



2082 Cheyenne Court, Grafton, WI 53024 • phone: 262-375-0130 • fax: 262-375-4196 • www.bestfriendsvet.com

