

Senior Pets and Nutrition

By Sean J. Delaney, DVM, MS, DACVN and Kari Liu, MS, Core Brands Managing Nutritionist



It is often said that age is not a disease. While this is very true, certain health concerns become more common as a pet ages. For some of these issues, nutrition can play an important role in promoting good health.

Many pet foods appropriate for senior dogs include the “chondroprotectives,” glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate. These ingredients can help support joint health along with the long-chain omega-3 fatty acids, EPA and DHA. These important fatty acids also can be helpful in maintaining brain health in older animals. Similarly, an essential fatty acid found in senior pet foods,

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linoleic acid, can help keep an elder pet’s coat and skin bright and vibrant.

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Much like many humans, pets tend to put on a little extra weight as they age. This can be managed with senior, low fat, and weight control foods that have less calories per cup or can which can help prevent overfeeding and thus, unwanted weight gain. When weight gain has already occurred, special foods designed for weight management can be used.

It was once thought that protein should be restricted in seniors, but new research suggests that many senior pets may need more protein as they age, not less. Occasionally, the old theory that protein is harmful for their kidneys is raised, but it is not necessary to put your senior animal on a lower protein food unless there are other health considerations. For example, it is often suggested that pets with kidney disease should be on a low phosphorus diet that is also lower in protein. But, lower phosphorus and lower protein foods are not necessary for senior dogs and cats that do not have kidney disease as restriction does not protect against kidney problems. In fact, restricting these nutrients unnecessarily could limit their availability for important daily needs. It should also be noted that these low protein and low phosphorus diets are not available over-the-counter from any pet food company.

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Older pets just like older humans can lose some of their sense of smell. Therefore, more odiferous foods such as canned food can sometimes be preferred. In addition, the higher moisture content and soluble fiber levels in canned foods can help aging pets that might have increased difficulty defecating. Canned foods also may be preferred by senior pets with dental disease as the softer texture may be easier to chew. As with any health concern whether it be arthritis, weight gain, kidney disease, reduced appetite, constipation, and/or dental disease, one should always consult with one’s veterinarian before considering any dietary change. After this consultation, one should be able to select a food that best fits their older canine or feline friend’s needs.