

November 2019

Every month it seems we have at least one national observance that focuses on our pets. Last month it was Adopt a Shelter Dog month and this month is another special month – it's National Senior Pet Month, a month we devote to adopting, caring for and loving our senior pets.

Since their lifespans are so much shorter than ours, a “senior” is usually designated as being over the age of 10-12 for a cat, and for a dog, it may be 11 years for a small dog like a Chihuahua or as young as 5-6 for an extra-large breed like a Great Dane. The old adage of dogs aging 7 years for each calendar year isn't really accurate anymore as veterinarians have studied this more carefully over the years.

[Click here](#) to see a chart created by the Pet Health Network that gives a more accurate assessment of their age progression based on the pet's weight.

But whatever age your pet is, once they get into those senior years, they require a different level of care in order to keep them as healthy as possible and to minimize those aging issues like arthritis or cataracts. A senior pet should have an annual wellness exam with your vet so they can run blood work, check their joints for signs of arthritis and give them a full checkup. It can start to get expensive to provide proper health care for your pet as they age, which is another good reason to get Pet Health Insurance for them. A few other things to watch related to their health:

1. Diet: they don't need special senior diets, you just need to keep their weight down and ensure their diet has plenty of protein. Here's a good article that covers this issue. [<http://slimdoggy.com/feeding-a-senior-dog-do-older-dogs-need-less-protein/>]
2. Exercise: Seniors aren't as active as they were when they were younger, but it's still important to keep them moving. Maybe just cut back on the intensity or length of time for your daily walks or hikes.
3. Aches & pains (RICE): Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation – the mantra for doctors and physical therapists relative to human orthopedic issues, works for your pets too. If that 15 minute walk turned into an hour because the fall leaves were out, your senior pet's joints may benefit from a little RICE treatment.

Unfortunately, despite all the benefits of adopting a senior pet, they are typically the most difficult for shelters and rescues to place and the first in line for euthanasia when space becomes an issue at the shelter. Everyone wants a puppy or a younger pet, but there are significant benefits to adopting a senior cat or dog.

1. They are already potty trained!
2. There's no teething or sharp puppy teeth or teething to deal with.
3. They typically come with some training and know the basics as well as how to walk on a leash.
4. They are usually past the rambunctiousness and misbehaviors of youth and are happy to have a warm, quiet place to sleep and be loved.

Next time you are thinking about adding another pet to your family, please consider a senior. Yes, you will have fewer years with them, but that pet will be forever grateful to you for giving them their final forever home and loving them through their final years. You will get it back in their love and devotion.