

Aging Pets

By Dr. Hannah Bigelow, DVM

Clients often tell me their older pets are just “slowing down” due to age. However, age is not a disease. Other conditions are likely attributing to this “slow down”. As our pets age so do their joints. Just like us humans, degenerative joint disease and osteoarthritis affect our pets. A recent study showed that 92% of cats between the ages of 5 and 15 have evidence of arthritis. 20% of dogs suffer from arthritis- that’s one out of every five dogs! 90% of middle age or older dogs have signs of arthritis. At least 20% of all cats and dogs seen by veterinarians are not being treated for their joint disease. Some common signs of joint disease in pets include weight loss, lethargy, hiding, inability to jump in and out of the car or on and off of furniture, and behavioral changes, such as decreased socialization and aggression. Cats may have difficulty using the litter box and grooming, may not jump as high as they used to, as well as other behavioral changes. These changes are not just because of age- they are due to pain! Please don’t let your pets suffer quietly.

So now that we know what joint disease looks like, how do we make our furry friends feel better? The first step is to visit your veterinarian, who will perform a complete physical and orthopedic exam. Together, based on history and exam, you and your veterinarian will come up with a plan of how to best help your pet. Often time diagnostics, such as x-rays, are needed to better understand and diagnose joint disease. There are many options for treating arthritis- joint supplements, pain medications, laser therapy, acupuncture, and even stem cell therapy. No two animals are the same. Your veterinarian can help find the best therapeutic option for you and your pet. Just remember- age is not a disease! We can keep our pets living long, happy, and healthy lives if we work together to properly diagnose and treat pain.

