

**Seniors and Shelters:**  
Looking after geriatric pets in shelters and getting them adopted

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**Agenda**

- Definition of a senior pet
- Special considerations for seniors
- Addressing special considerations in a shelter
- Adoption of senior pets

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**Definition of a Senior Pet**

- Describes the aging and older pet



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## Definition of a Senior Pet

- Number of years considered to be “senior” may vary
  - Species
  - Breed
- Typical ages considered senior
  - Dogs ⇔ 6 – 7 years
  - Cats ⇔ 7 – 11 years
- Last 25% of the predicted life span for species and breed

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## Special considerations

- Physical changes
- Behavioral changes
- Changing nutritional needs
- Decreased activity
- Environment/Consistency

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## Special Considerations Physical Changes

- General “slowing down”
- Ability to respond to infection is reduced
- Healing process takes longer
- Slower metabolisms and producing less hormones
  - Increasing intolerance to heat and cold
  - More consideration about temperature exposure



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## Special Considerations

### Physical Changes

- Sensory changes
  - Sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell dull
  - Slower response to external stimuli
  - Often a slow, progressive process
    - May even escape notice
  - Best remedy ⇒ Keep pet active!



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## Special Considerations

### Physical Changes

- Pain assessment
  - The “fourth vital sign”
  - Types:
    - Acute
    - Chronic
- Pain management
  - Identify
  - Prevent
  - Minimize



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## Special Considerations

### Physical Changes

- Signs of a Problem:
  - Sustained, significant increase in water consumption or urination
  - Sudden weight loss or gain
  - Significant decrease in appetite or failure to eat for more than two days
  - Significant increase in appetite
  - Repeated vomiting
  - Diarrhea lasting over three days
  - Difficulty in passing stool or urine
  - Change in housebreaking
  - Lameness lasting more than five days or lameness in more than one leg
  - Noticeable decrease in vision
  - Open sores or scabs on the skin that persist for more than one week
  - Foul mouth odor or drooling that lasts more than two days
  - Increasing size of the abdomen
  - Increasing inactivity or amount of time spent sleeping
  - Hair loss, especially if accompanied by scratching or if in specific areas (as opposed to generalized)
  - Excessive panting
  - Inability to chew dry food
  - Blood in stool or urine
  - Sudden collapse or bout of weakness
  - A seizure (convulsion)
  - Persistent coughing or gagging

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### Special Considerations

#### Physical Changes

- Common problem ⇒ Inappropriate elimination
- Kidneys one of the most common organ systems to wear out
- Not able to hold urine as long
- May be indicative of disease



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### Special Considerations

#### Behavioral Changes

- May confront age-related cognitive and behavior changes
- Most are subtle



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### Special Considerations

#### Behavioral Changes

- May include problems with:
  - Orientation
  - Social interaction
  - Activities and exercise
  - Grooming
  - Housetraining
  - Sleeping
  - Eating



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### Special Considerations

#### Behavioral Changes

- May be medical problems that mask themselves as behavioral problems



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### Special Considerations

#### Changing Nutritional Needs

- Specially formulated food designed with older bodies in mind
  - Help with weight control
  - Reduce consumption of nutrients that are risk factors for the development of diseases
  - Adjust for organ- or age-related changes



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### Special Considerations

#### Decreased Activity

- Causes bodies to deteriorate much more quickly
- Exercise ⇒ Preventative geriatric care



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### Special Considerations

#### Environment/Consistency

- Need for consistent environment
  - Avoid moving furniture and familiar objects
- Need for closer supervision
- Need for consistent routine
  - Avoid big schedule changes



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### Special Considerations – Shelter

- Physical health
- Behavioral/Mental health
- Nutritional needs
- Exercise and play
- Environment/Consistency

**Good source of information:**  
Survey of finalists for the Maddie's Fund® and  
Petfinder.com Marketing Competition

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### Special Considerations – Shelter

#### Physical Health

- Monitor health status
  - Physical exams
  - Reporting of problems
  - Laboratory work
- Treat medical conditions
  - Most common ⇒ Dental problems
- Adjust exercise according to medical conditions



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### Special Considerations – Shelter Behavioral/Mental Health

- Monitor emotional well-being
- Foster care, if possible
- Housing in a quieter area
  - Sometimes office of staff worker
- Housed separate from younger, more active animals
- Provide individualize attention



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### Special Considerations – Shelter Nutritional Needs

- More canned food
- Prescription food, if needed



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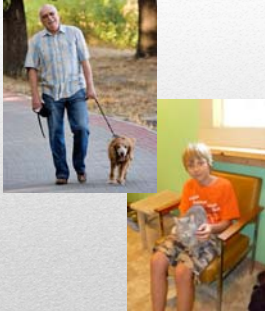
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### Special Considerations – Shelter Exercise and Play

- Dogs
  - Gentle walking and play
  - Play area ⇨ Separate from younger, more active animals
- Cats
  - Socialization and play times
  - Play area ⇨ Separate from younger, more active animals



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### Special Considerations – Shelter Environment/Consistency

- Foster care, if possible
- Housing in a quieter area
- Housed separate from younger, more active animals
- Maintain regular schedule
- Softer bedding
  - Especially for arthritic animals
- Litter boxes are easy to get in and out



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### Adoption

- Concerns of potential adopters
- Types of people drawn to senior pets
- Selling senior pets
- Creative adoption ideas

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### Adoption

#### Concerns of Potential Adopters

- Potential health issues
- Death of pet too soon after adoption



Mitigate health care concerns with extensive veterinary evaluation and care

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**Adoption**  
**Types of People Drawn to Senior Pets**

- Senior people
  - Better match for energy level
- Child-free homes
  - Attracted to quieter, less-demanding nature
- Perception ⇒ Big-hearted and compassionate



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**Adoption**  
**Selling Seniors Pets**

- Concentrate on calmer, settled and easy-going nature
- WYSIWYG
- Less work than younger pets
- “Feel good” factor of providing an older pet with a home
  - Matches with the perception that senior pet adopters are motivated by compassion
- Avoid using the word “old”
  - Preferred ⇒ “senior,” “mature,” or “wisest residents”
- Senior Dog Project <http://www.srdogs.com>
  - Promotes the adoption of older dogs
  - Created the “Top Ten Reasons to Adopt an Older Dog” <http://www.srdogs.com/Pages/adopt.ten.html>

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**Adoption**  
**Creative Adoption Ideas**

- Campaigns of senior pets for senior people
  - Adoption events at senior living facilities
- Pet’s own individual story
- Reduced or waived adoption fee
- Fundraising programs to cover medical expenses after adoption
- Celebrity look-alike
- Special programs

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**Adoption**  
Creative Adoption Ideas

- Pet's own individual story



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**Adoption**  
Creative Adoption Ideas

- Celebrity look-alike



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**Adoption**  
**Creative Adoption Ideas**

- Special programs:
  - Berkeley-East Bay Humane Society's Golden Paw Program  
<http://www.berkeleyhumane.org/adoptions/goldenpaws>



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**Adoption**  
**Creative Adoption Ideas**

- Special programs:
  - Oakland SPCA's Silver Whiskers and Muzzle Club  
<https://www.eastbayspca.org/SSLPage.aspx?pid=696>



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**Adoption**  
**Creative Adoption Ideas**

- Special programs:
  - Animal Friends Red Collar Society  
[http://www.thinkingoutsidethecage.org/site/PageServer?pagename=Programs\\_RedCollarSociety](http://www.thinkingoutsidethecage.org/site/PageServer?pagename=Programs_RedCollarSociety)



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## Questions?



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