

Sierra Animal Wellness Center

Specializing in Holistic, Integrative Veterinary
Medicine



November 30, 2017



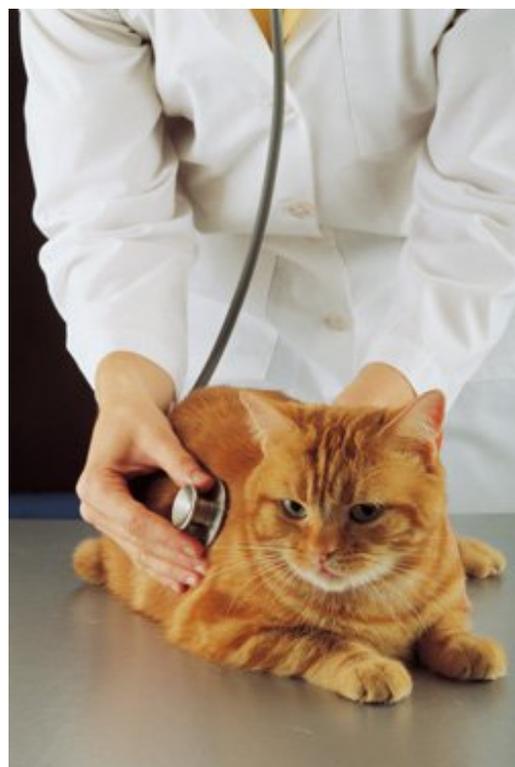
What is a Senior Wellness Screening?

A well-known phrase in veterinary medicine states: "For every one problem missed by not knowing, nine others are missed by not looking." In fact, many dogs and cats older than seven years of age harbor disease that is detectable only through an advanced screening. A Senior Wellness Screening can help ensure that any health problem is discovered early on, when we have the most options and best chance of a favorable outcome. While some illnesses are incurable, early detection and treatment can often help increase the length and quality of life. Senior wellness testing involves several elements, including but not limited to:

1. A thorough hands-on physical exam.

"Because it can seem like a relatively quick process, people sometimes assume we're not doing very much," says Dr. Peggy. "But actually, we're doing quite a bit." So, what exactly is she looking for? Veterinarians check an animal system by system while moving geographically across the body. What is involved? A lot more than we have room to write about here. [Click on this link](#) to read exactly what is happening during the physical exam.

What can you do to help with the exam? Prior to coming in, make a note of any changes you have seen in activity levels, eating and thirst habits, urinating and defecating habits, any behavioral changes or any other change you have noticed.



Sometimes seemingly small things provide us with big clues. Also write down any questions you may have.

2. **A urinalysis** as aging pets are often susceptible to kidney disease as well as problems with the bladder and urinary tract. This test can also diagnose diabetes. When you schedule a senior screen, be sure to keep your animal confined for 2 to 3 hours before the appointment and don't let him or her urinate between getting out of the car and entering our office. This will make it easier to obtain fresh urine.

3. **A single blood draw for four different tests:**

- **Thyroid testing:** Senior cats are prone to elevated thyroid activity (hyperthyroidism), while senior dogs often have decreased thyroid activity (hypothyroid). The good news is they are easily treated. Thyroid levels impact a wide range of the body's systems so a thyroid test, also known as a T4, can help ensure we start any needed treatment as early as possible.

- **Complete Blood Count:** Usually called a CBC, this is one of the most basic, yet most important tests to assess your dog or cat's overall health. It includes a series of measurements that describe the quantity and quality of the red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets, and it can help identify signs of infection, illness or anemia.



- **Comprehensive Health Panel:** Compared to the CBC, which looks at the cellular components in the blood, the Comprehensive Health Panel is a biochemical profile that assesses the function of internal organs, measures the electrolytes such as blood potassium and identifies the levels of circulating enzymes. It provides information on the health of the liver, kidneys, adrenal glands, immune system, and body metabolism and is helpful

in identifying certain hormonal or endocrine system diseases. This is an important diagnostic tool and can help identify diseases in the early stage when more treatment options are available. If all results are normal - and we hope they are - they provide an important baseline for the future. In some cases a diagnosis only comes from watching the various parameters change over a period of time.

- **Snap 4DX:** This test for dogs should be done every year to detect heartworm infection and tick borne diseases, major problems in our geographic area. The tick

borne diseases are Lyme disease, ehrlichiosis, and anaplasmosis.

4. Radiographs (x-rays) or ultrasound testing. I don't typically order these unless the results of the physical exam or other tests indicate a potential problem requiring further investigation. Chest x-rays, for example, can reveal certain things about the heart and lungs. Abdominal x-rays can be used to assess the liver and kidneys.

While we recommend regular exams for your senior pet, you are the one who spends the most time with him or her and you are the one who knows what is normal. If you observe any changes don't wait for the regularly scheduled exam.

When is Your Pet Considered Senior?

Cats age uniformly, no matter what their breed. However, dogs age according to their size. Larger dogs have a shorter lifespan than smaller dogs. Animals, in general, are considered senior or geriatric when they are in the last 25% of their predicted lifespan. For cats this means they are geriatric beginning at 9 years of age. A small dog is also considered geriatric at 8 or 9 years but a giant breed dog is considered geriatric at 6 years of age. When your pet is geriatric in "dog years", it is equivalent to being a human that is over 60 years of age.

How Often Should Your Pet Have a Senior Wellness Exam?

If we begin senior wellness examinations in middle age, we can establish a baseline for future comparison. We recommend yearly exams and testing in most middle age patients. This is comparable to seeing your doctor every 4-5 years.

However, once your friend is a senior, routine health care visits are recommended every six months. Because animals age at different rates, exactly when the twice yearly exams should begin will depend on the animal. If you think about it, twice-yearly exams make sense because sadly, the lifespan of a pet is much shorter than ours, so more frequent wellness checks will catch changes more quickly, giving us time to treat problems promptly. Twice yearly exams are the equivalent of you seeing your doctor every 2 to 3 years.

If you have any concerns about your senior give us a call to schedule an appointment. You can reach us at (530) 346-6611.

Until next time, be well.

- Dr. Peggy

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Clinic Hours

Monday, Thursday and Friday
from 9:00 to 6:00

Tuesday from 9:00 to 3:00

Wednesday from 12:00 to 6:00

Contact Us

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