



Janine M. Oliver, DVM

Dr. Oliver earned her B.S. in Physical Therapy (1987) from East Carolina University and her D.V.M. from North Carolina State University College of Veterinary Medicine (2008). She was a human physical therapist for 12 years before returning to school to study veterinary medicine. She had additional training in veterinary nutrition, dentistry, exotics and emergency critical care. She is a general practitioner veterinarian with special interests in geriatric feline and canine internal medicine, nutrition, physical rehabilitation, soft tissue surgery, dentistry, and exotics. She moved to Greensboro in 2009 and joined Adams Farm Animal Hospital in the spring of 2012 and loves what she does there every day.

Dr. Oliver with Spock, Zorro and being photobombed by Krypto.

Management of Aging Companion Animals

Age is not a disease, but some diseases become more prevalent with age. Acute, chronic pain, mobility problems, periodontal disease, ophthalmic diseases, cognitive disorders, incontinence, cancers, Cushing's Disease and obesity are just some of the many problems that can accompany age.

The definition of a senior pet is one that has entered the later 1/4 to 1/3 of average life expectancy, the definition of a geriatric animal is one that has reached and is exceeding their life expectancy based upon the existing data. Genetics, environment, emotional state, nutrition, quality of preventative care over their life time, amount of excess fat, air and water quality and hygiene all play a role in how fast all animals age.

Animals feel pain and discomfort the same as humans. They may react to it differently and hide their weakness instinctively so as not become prey, but they experience it the same as us. We are not accurate at predicting how long our companion animals will live. In general, cats and small dogs tend to live longer than big dogs. I have seen cats live to be 28 up to 32 years old and many small dogs live into their early twenties. Some giant breed dogs are now living to be 12 to 15 years old.

At Adams Farm Animal Hospital we enjoy taking care of our patients at all life stages, but we have a special affinity for our aging patients. They have given so much love and loyalty over their lives and we respect their special quirks and rich personalities developed over time. Much like humans, animals continue learning throughout their lives and their wisdom often shines through in their interaction with their owners and our staff. We want to help our clients maximize the quality time they have with their aging pets.

The number one way you can help your cat or dog live a longer and healthier life is to manage their weight. Fat is not just for padding and warmth. It is an active organ. When present in normal amounts it functions as needed, but when present in excess it secretes 14+ pro-inflammatory factors that can predispose your pet to cancer, diabetes, pancreatitis, orthopedic injury, and other metabolic diseases. Even if your pet is a little overweight, it is imperative that you work with your veterinarian to get the excess fat off while maintaining lean muscle mass.

After weight management and appropriate nutrition, other ways you can help your pet age comfortably are to work with your veterinarian to prevent parasites, treat and prevent periodontal disease, manage acute and chronic pain, anxiety and metabolic diseases. Have problems evaluated as early as

possible. Medical problems handled early and effectively will actually save money and heartache in the long run.

Some people decline dental care or other surgical procedures for their pets because they thought, or were told by someone, their pet was too old for anesthesia. Almost daily, people tell me they are not going to continue preventative care or they are not willing to manage an easily treatable disease because their pet is too old. What if you stop providing care for the treatable things because your animal is 13, but they

live much longer? Is it fair to compromise their comfort for years because they might die at any time? What about one year? Would you want to put up with dry eye, or a toothache, or indigestion, or severe arthritis pain, or parasites for even one day, let alone months or years?

Age alone is not a good reason to avoid anesthesia when providing medical care. There *are* patients who are too sick to undergo anesthesia. It is not their age, but their underlying illness that may make anesthesia too risky. The anesthetic and pain management protocols that we use today, available to all veterinarians who choose to use them, are significantly better than what was available even ten years ago. Safer more effective drugs at lower doses and in combination, referred to as a "multimodal" approach, can improve the safety and efficacy of the protocol. Appropriate anesthetic monitoring has also improved safety.

Physical exercise and rehabilitation modalities can also make a big difference in quality of life for our aging cats and dogs. Adult stem cell therapy (see further information at www.vet-stem.com), cold laser therapy, massage, acupuncture, acupressure, therapeutic exercise are just some of the modalities available to manage chronic pain and dysfunction.

We are very fortunate here in the Triad because there is a non-profit advocacy organization, Bingo Pet Hospice (www.bingopethospice.org). They hold informational meetings, loan out equipment for the care of aging animals, and offer grants for veterinary care based on owners financial constraints. Their goal is to prevent convenience and financial euthanasia. Please consider supporting this wonderful organization.

For pet owners of animals younger than 14 years of age we recommend Trupanion pet insurance. The company's mission is to end financial euthanasia. They offer the most comprehensive veterinary medical coverage in the industry and their claims process is simple. They *do not cover pre-existing illness*, but they cover any injury or illness that occurs after sign up. They cover 90% of what ever fees are incurred. If you cannot afford to maintain your own interest bearing emergency fund for your pets then obtaining Trupanion insurance is a wise decision. Adams Farm Animal Hospital has no financial stake in Trupanion insurance. It has helped many of our clients in times of crisis, so we have experienced firsthand what they can do for our patients, young and old alike.

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