

Wilmette Pet Center

"the place for people who love pets"

Part 1

On Sunday, the 26th of January 2014, Dave and I attended a Pet Food Summit, where we attended a lecture by Dr. Karen Becker, a renowned wholistic vet, on caring for our aging pets. We're going to be sharing some of her wisdom over the next few newsletters.



A little bit dorky,
but I'm a big fan!



Aging is the natural progress of time, and is different than illness and degeneration. And while aging is inevitable, there is a lot we can do to help keep our pets at their happiest and healthiest!

Signs of aging can be subtle or profound, and usually strike at the weakest point. Things to watch out for:

- Tiring more quickly
- Development of vision or hearing problems
- Graying hair
- Behavioral changes like mental confusion, separation anxiety, excessive vocalization, or elimination accidents in the house

Good health starts with a good diet; we are big believers in feeding your dog and cat an appropriate diet, made with human grade meats without cheap fillers like corn, soy, or wheat. High protein diets will help keep the excess weight off of your pet. (For more on weight control, check out our [care sheet](#).)



Some older cats and dogs seem to get a "disconnect" between their nose and their brain as they get older. Their favorite food isn't quite as appealing as it was before, and they eat less. This is a great time to switch it up! Offering something meaty and savory can help encourage them to eat. We really love the new [Orijen freeze dried diets](#); they're an easy way to add some amazing flavor to their favorite food, and the high protein is great, too, for helping keep your dog or cat's

weight at an optimal level, too! More frequent, small feedings can be a lot easier to digest than two big meals a day.

Feed a diet high in omega 3s, from fish and marine animals, or add fish oil to their kibble. The omegas have been found to not only help keep the coat shiny and healthy, but it is also vital to joints, the heart, and even brain function. A diet rich in this nutrient can help reduce and delay symptoms of canine Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (CDS), which can include:

- House soiling, increased accidents, and forgetting potty training
- Changes in sleep patterns, like sleeping more
- Socialization problems, fearful behavior
- Changes in activity level, slowing down.
- Anxiety and elevated stress.



Supplements like Animal Apawthecary's [Senior Blend](#) and [Tranquility Blend](#) are great for this issue!

Good dental hygiene is vital to your dog or cat's health, and, since February is National Pet Dental Health Month, we're going to be focusing on this next week!

Moving slowly and having creaky joints is one of the most common signs of aging and arthritis. It's a double whammy for dog, since they still need their exercise, to both maintain their weight and their mental health. But we have great solutions! These are our best joint supplements:

[Hyalogic](#) - comprehensive line of high quality hyaluronic acid that helps lubricate joints

[Herbsmith](#) - Highly effective Chinese herbal remedies for a wide range of issues

[Animals' Apawthecary](#) - Herbal supplements for dogs and cats, formulated by leading experts in the field of holistic pet care.

While aging is inevitable, there are a lot of things we can do to help our loved ones live longer and healthier lives.

Part 2

February is National Pet Dental Care Month, and we thought it'd be a perfect topic in our caring for older pets. And since dental health is so closely tied with overall health, this is info that's good for all ages!

Few of us think about our cat's or dog's dental health until our vet recommends a deep cleaning. We notice our guy's bad breath, but think it's normal. Bad breath is usually a sign that something more serious is going on. Plaque and tarter build-up are just a serious issue for our cat or dog as it is for us.

Jan Bellows DVM, of Hometown Animal Hospital and Dental Clinic in Weston, Florida, states: "The toxins from periodontal disease are absorbed into the dog's blood stream. As the kidneys, liver, and brain filter the blood, small infections occur causing permanent and at times fatal organ damage. After periodontal disease is treated, and the owners give proper home care, most dogs respond wonderfully due to the decreased pain and infection." (*)

Deep cleanings at the vet can be stressful on your pet, can be expensive, and do carry some risk. Prevention is always so much better than treating problems later. And we have a lot of options for keeping your dog's teeth at their healthiest at home:

Dental treats are a great way to improve your pet's teeth in a way they love!



[Crumps Naturals](#) - pure sweet potato and liver-coated potato chews are perfect for scraping teeth clean. The vitamin A and chlorophyll really help keep their breath fresh, too.

From the classic [Greenies](#) to Ark Natural's Breath-less toothpaste treats and [Whimzies](#) potato and rice based dental treats, they all help reduce plaque, tartar, and bad breath.

Looking for something more natural for your dog?

Raw bones by [Dag Bones](#) - Raw bones are an excellent way for a pet to keep their teeth clean; they also provide a lot of mental stimulation and help relieve stress. For more info, check out myths on raw bones.

For serious care, use our pet dental lines:

[TropiClean](#) dental system - a wide range of products make it easy to maintain your pet's teeth without brushing.

Nylabone has a lot of solutions for dental care. From the [Dental Chew](#) to their line of [toothpaste and brushes](#), it's a fantastic way to improve your pet's oral health



Brushing your pet's teeth is a lot easier than more people think. The key is to build up to it slowly and gradually by taking small steps. Let them first sniff and taste the toothpaste. Dip a finger into beef bouillon (for dogs) or tuna water (for cats) and gently rub along your pet's gums and teeth. Focus on is the gum line (the crevice where the gums meet the teeth), where bacteria and food mix to form plaque. Start at the front of the mouth, then move to the back upper and lower teeth and gum areas. Once your pet is okay with a little bit of touching, gradually introduce gauze over your finger and rub the teeth and gums in a circular fashion. After a week or two, once they are used to this, introduce an appropriate dog or cat sized toothbrush. Flavored toothpastes can help make it more enjoyable for your pet.

Don't forget to constantly praise them and reward them with a small treat once you're done!

Routine professional dental care is also vital; make sure you're taking your pet to the vet on a regular basis. Using some of these products can drastically help reduce the need for deep cleanings and help prevent problems in between visits.

Part 3

With all the changes that goes on in an aging cat or dog's body, one of the most profound is the changes to their senses. Eyes, ears, hearing, and taste/smell all can fade separately, and can require some changes in their lifestyle. Understanding the process, and how to help prevent and delay it, is vital.

Hearing: As cats and dogs age, their hearing can start to fade. You might think that they're ignoring you, but there may be a real reason! A lot of animals begin to get crusty ears, which can exacerbate already weak hearing. Keep them clean and keep them dry! Clear, dry ears are healthy ears.



Use gentle, alcohol-free cleansers like [Vets Best](#) Ear Relief, with calendula and chamomile, to keep the ear passage clean on a daily basis. Astringent cleaners are needed for ears that get

yeasty, and, if your pet's ears are inflamed (if they keep rubbing them or experience discomfort when you touch them), you may need to go to your vet and get medicated ear drops.

Eyes: Antioxidants are powerful compounds that help prevent damage to cells in the body. Like



with so many things, begin them early to help prevent problems later in life. Keep your eye on their eyes, too. Some dogs can build up a lot of eye gunk; use a gentle cleanser daily to help keep their eyes clear. Many light colored dogs get those dark stains under their eyes. This is the result from bacteria in the hair follicles interacting with tear fluid. A natural treatment like Angel Eyes, added to their food, kills the bacteria and eliminates those stains. If you begin to see a milky blue film develop, make an appointment with your vet, as cataracts may need surgery to be removed.

TIP: If your pet's vision is starting to go, use their other senses to help them out! Consider lighting one type of candle at mealtimes, by their food, to help them find their dinner. Use the same type, only during meals, to help guide their nose to the bowl.

Taste/smell: As we discussed before, older cats and dogs can seem to experience a “disconnect” between their noses and their brain. Foods they used to love they suddenly turn their noses up at or quickly lose interest. This is, we believe, one of the easiest issues to address!



Offer a lot of appetite stimulants to entice them to eat. A rich canned food (like [Merrick's](#) line of savory, fun flavors) or some of our new [Orijen](#) or [Stella & Chewy](#) dehydrated diets can really give them reason to eat. Mix it up by offering a new flavor or an entirely new food. Broth, gravy, or goat's milk make great toppers and appetite stimulants. Warming their favorite food can bring out the flavor and aroma.

If they seem to be hesitant when eating their food, make sure you check their teeth, as bad and painful teeth will definitely affect their appetite. Keep those teeth healthy will our [line of dental products](#) (remember, February is Pet Dental Care month!)

It is not uncommon for older cats and dogs to move to a soft food diet – either canned or raw, as both are much easier for them to eat (easier to digest, too). We have tons of variety in foods, so we will find something your pet loves. And remember, there is no risk when you buy any of our foods with our !00% guarantee: if you or your pet do not love their new food, bring it right back to use and we'll switch it out for something else!

A great overall supplement for your aging pet (even a healthy one) is [Animal Apawthecary's Senior](#) blend. This tincture contains a natural blend of various herbs to help support the nervous, digestive, circulatory and immune functions in older dogs and cats.

Time can get even the best dog and cat. You are the most powerful force in your aging pet's health. You feed them the best of foods, give them the most fun toys, and you can make a real change to handle the new issues of age. And don't forget that your vet is one of your strongest allies in helping your aging pet. It's recommended that older pets see their vets every 6 months, and be sure to report any changes in behavior when you notice them.

Part 4

In this fourth article on caring for aging pets, we're going to focus on some of the signs that are easier for us to see.

Skin and coat: As they age, a cat or dog's skin and coat can begin to get dry. This can lead to itching, irritations, abrasions and hair loss. Fish oils, with their Omega 3 fatty acids, are your best friend here. Besides being very tasty, fish oils such as [Grizzley's salmon oil](#) and [Nature's Logic North Atlantic sardine oil](#) add these important compounds, and within 3 - 4 weeks you'll begin to see big changes in their coat and skin. It's also recommended that you rotate the source of your fish oil; it helps cover the range of micronutrients and minimizes any chance of pollutants. Coconut oil is gaining in popularity for its soothing effect on the skin. Bathe your pet with a gentle and moisturizing cleanser, such as [EarthBath's Oatmeal & Aloe](#) or Tea Tree shampoos to help soothe irritated skin, or consider using a waterless shampoo for pets that are difficult to bathe.



Muscles, bones, and nerves: All of these body systems suffer deterioration due to aging. A lot of this is oxidative damage, where free oxygen causes breakdowns in cellular structure and function. Nervous system issues can display as tremors, loss of integrated movement, stumbling, incontinence, and slipping and falling. Antioxidants, such as vitamin E and C, added to the diet are helpful in preventing this type of damage.

[Pet Apawthecary's Tinkle Tonic](#) is formulated for dogs that are having problems with incontinence. It offers natural support for dogs and cats that need it.

Joints: Joints are often one of the first signs of aging in our pets. We all know the signs, from slowing down, to groaning when they get up, to not wanting to jump in your lap anymore. Bad joints can also lead to a host of other problems, from injuries as the body compensates to

weight gain from decreased exercise. But we have some great solutions when your cat or dog starts slowing down!



[Wholistic Pet Complete](#) - Joint Mobility and Run free are a great way to get glucosamine and MSM, two of the best supplements for arthritic joints, into your pet's diet.

[Hyalogic](#) supplements - Made with human grade hyaluronic acid, these are the highest quality and most effective joint supplement we carry. It comes in 4 different formulas, so you can find the right one for your pet's needs.

It's thought that the earlier you begin joint therapy, the more effective it is and the longer problems can be delayed. Many people begin preventative treatments, such as vitamin C, glucosamine, and MSM, for their large breed dogs, who are more susceptible to joint problems, when they're puppies!

There comes a time when the stairs or the jump into the car have become impossible. Consider the use of ramps and lift harnesses, like Guardian Gear's 4-in-1 Lift and Lead, to help them maneuver around.

A lot of older animals suddenly begin to get thin, the exact opposite problem other animals have! Their metabolism changes and their body eventually begins to utilize the protein in their muscles. Help them keep the weight on by increasing the amount you feed. Go for really high protein; raw is one of the best ways to give them that. Raw diets will also help with that "disconnect" that some animals get between their nose and their brains and help keep them eating. Offer an extra meal during the day of some high protein, high fat kibble, maybe with a nice dose of salmon oil on top.



As with any animal, your pet's best ally in staying healthy, besides you, is your vet. Call them when you notice any changes in your aging cat or dog's body or behavior.

Part 5

The last part of our series is going to focus on the internal systems, those vital systems whose health can be a complete mystery to us. This is where a great relationship with a vet you trust is vital. It's recommended that aging pets visit the vet twice a year. While this may seem like a lot, it gives them a good chance of catching any problems earlier. For a lot of these systems, blood work is going to be one of the most important tools here to get an idea of what is going on. For others, it's going to rely on your own observations of your pet. Discuss any health concerns you have with your vet and determine what tests are needed.

Immune system: Your pet's prime line of defense! When this begins to get weak, their body can become susceptible to all sorts of pathogens. Exercise, the proper diet, and reducing stress are all vital to a strong immune system.



Offer support for weak immune systems with herbal supplements such as [Herbsmith's Immune Support](#). Some animal's immune systems get too active as they age, and they become allergic to things that have never bothered them before. In this case, [Herbsmith's Clear Aller Qi](#) offers a natural way to bring balance back to their immune system.

Liver: The liver is where all the toxins of life get removed. The best way to support the liver is to ease its burden: feed a whole, species appropriate diet that is as close to natural as possible, with no preservatives and additives. It sounds simple, but our dogs and cats live in a world filled with toxins that can be overwhelming. Foods can be broken down into two groups: foods that harm and foods that heal. High chemical loads and inappropriate ingredients can all increase the burden on the liver.

Milk thistle has long been used to help detoxify the liver. Herbsmith's Milk thistle blend is great for a cat or dog with allergies, digestive issues, or to combat the negative side effects of the harsher alternatives.

Kidneys: Especially important for cats is keeping up their water consumption. Cats are naturally desert creatures, and don't have a big thirst response. Their bodies expect to get the needed moisture through their diet (in the wild it's rodents, lizards, and birds). With cats living indoors, people tend to feed dry kibble - perhaps to the mistaken old wive's tale that canned food rots a cat's teeth while dry helps keep them clean. Over the years, the cat's kidney dry out, leading to kidney disease later in life. (Just remember, all food is going to make your mouth dirty). Most wholistic vets now feel that raw diets, followed by canned foods, are going to give your cats the

moisture they need the way their bodies expect. Keeping your pets on diets high in moisture, especially when started young, can help stave off kidney problems.

(As an aside, one of our favorite facts to point out is the shape and function of a cat's teeth. They're sharp and angled, ideal for cutting meat. They're not flat for grinding, and when you hear your cat eating their food, they have to use their tongue or the roof of their mouth to help chew the foods. Canned and raw diets are a lot easier on their mouths.)



A pet fountain, like the [Cat-It Drinking Fountain](#) is a great way to increase the moisture in your pet's diet; most animals just love to drink from moving water, and this is a lot easier than leaving a faucet on!

They're great, too, because the continuous circulation keeps the water cool and the included filter helps keep the water clean.

Check out them chompers - no molars here. (Looks like someone could use some Tropiclean Dental Gel!

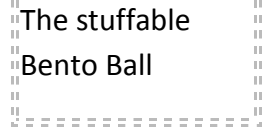
Heart: Prevention here is key! Keeping your dog active and feeding an appropriate diet during their lives will help prevent heart issues in your pet. Keeping your pet's weight will help keep the heart healthy and reduce the strain on it.

We're beginning to sound like a broken record here! The proper diet, antioxidants, and fish oil are all vital to a healthy heart.

Brain: This can be one of the most difficult changes to see in your beloved pet. There are no real tests the vet can do to determine brain function; here, it's up to your powers of observation. Things to look for are confusion, anxiety, increased sleeping, forgetting (including housebreaking), and behavioral changes.



Offer your pet a lot of mental stimulation, including toys, puzzles, and treats they have to figure out. The stuffable Bento ball is a great toy; once they work away the treat in the middle, you can fill it with your own fun recipes to help keep them busy (check out my article on [recipe ideas](#) - you can use them as frozen or not!) A lot of socializing with friends, new and old, is also vital in helping keep their brain active and flexible.



There are a wide range of supplements that help support a healthy, functional brain. These range from the ever healthy omega 3s from fish oils, to ginko, to coconut oil. Herbsmith's coconut oil is a high quality supplement that supports brain, skin, and joint functions. SamE, that supplement that people are finding so helpful for mood regulation and memory has been shown to have the same effects for our pets (consult your vet on appropriate dosages.)

Time can indeed get the better of our pets. As a caring pet owner, we want to do everything in our power to keep them at their healthiest for the longest period of time. With a proper diet, a the help of a trusted vet, and some attention to the changing needs of our aging pet, we can do just that.