

Fall 2006

www.BradshawVet.com  
(916) 685-2494



BRADSHAW VETERINARY CLINIC

# Fall 2006 Newsletter

## Common Concerns for Your Older Dog

Signs of aging are inevitable in older dogs. Aging can predispose dogs to certain illnesses. By being aware of some concerns regarding older dogs, you can be a more educated and prepared guardian for your aging companion. If you have any concerns regarding your aging pet, please schedule an appointment with one of our veterinarians.

The following is an outline of some of the most commonly diagnosed illnesses known to affect older dogs.

**Nutritional Concerns-** A proper diet is very important in the care of a geriatric dog. Obesity is a very common and serious concern because it directly correlates to a decreased longevity, and may contribute to other problems. Proper nutritional management is a very important part of the care for your geriatric dog, especially since it is something that you

can control.

**Dental Disease-** Dental disease and gingivitis are common findings in the older dog. Untreated dental disease usually leads to tooth loss and may serve as a reservoir of infection for the rest of the body. In this manner, severe dental disease may pose a risk to other body systems.

**Arthritis-** Degenerative joint disease, also known as arthritis, is another very common issue affecting aging dogs. While it is to be expected that older animals will tend to slow down with age, animals with arthritis may feel more comfortable if appropriately treated. Signs of arthritis in dogs include difficulty rising, trouble climbing stairs or jumping, falling on slippery floors, having difficulty getting comfortable or being restless at nights. There are many anti-inflammatory medications that your vet (cont. on page 2)

## BVC Reminders

- We are now open for appointments from 6am to 10pm!
- The last [vaccination clinic](#) for this year will be October 7th from 9am until 11am.
- With Halloween and the holidays just around the corner, remember to keep the chocolate and sweets away from your pets and avoid [chocolate toxicity](#).
- Don't FALL out of your monthly parasite prevention program just because winter is approaching! Mosquitoes, fleas, ticks and intestinal parasites thrive all year long in our area. Keep your pets protected all year long! Give us a call to refill your pets prescription.

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### Dates to Remember:

- *Last vaccination clinic for this year will be October 7th from 9am until 11am.*

## Common Concerns for Your Older Dog (cont.)

can prescribe that may improve your pet's quality of life and comfort level.

**Eye Disorders-** As dogs age, their vision worsens. Just as in people, cataracts can develop resulting in cloudy vision. Sometimes tear production lessens and the surface of the eye is not properly lubricated. Dry eye is a common problem affecting older dogs, especially small dogs with bulging eyes such as the Shih Tzu, Pekingese and Pug.

**Kidney Disease-** Kidney disease is one of the most common metabolic diseases of older dogs. With early diagnosis through blood tests, some dogs can do quite well on a special diet and medications. The biggest key is to diagnose kidney disease early. This is one primary reason veterinarians recommend routine blood tests in older dogs.

**Bladder Stones-** Older dogs tend to have an increased risk of developing bladder stones. Often, these stones cause little problems but can cause obstruction if the dog attempts to pass a large stone that becomes stuck in the urethra. Periodic abdominal radiographs can help determine if bladder stones are developing in your dog and if treatment is necessary.

**Endocrine Disorders-** The two most common endocrine disorders affecting older dogs are hyperadrenocorticism (Cushing's disease) and hypothyroidism. Cushing's disease is a disorder resulting in excessive secretion of cortisol resulting in illness. Hypothyroidism is an underactive thyroid gland, which also affects the health of your dog. Both disorders are treatable, and proper treatment may dramatically improve your dog's overall attitude and strength.

**Heart Disease-** The most common heart disease in the senior dog is chronic valvular disease. Thicken-

ing and irregularities of the valves of the heart may lead to abnormal blood flow within the heart chambers, eventually causing heart enlargement and heart failure. Early detection of this disease and proper therapy may slow the progression of the heart disease.

**Diabetes-** Aging dogs tend to have a higher risk of developing diabetes. Whether due to diet, poor insulin secretion or resistance to insulin, diabetic dogs can often be helped with medication.

**Skin Tumors-** Skin lumps and bumps are common findings on the elderly dog. On the basis of the size, location and aspiration results, your veterinarian may recommend removal of one or many skin masses. If not removed, monitor the lumps for changes in size or shape.

**Urinary Incontinence-** Older dogs may sometimes become incontinent, leaking small or even large amounts of urine when lying down or when sleeping. Medications can sometimes help.

**Prostate Problems-** If your dog is an intact male he is at significant risk of prostatic disease. Prostatic infections, abnormal enlargement, abscesses, and cysts are all potential problems in the intact male. Tumors of the prostate occur with equal frequency in both neutered and intact males.

**Cancer-** Unfortunately, cancer is a significant problem facing the senior dog. Not all cancer needs to be fatal. Surgery, chemotherapy, and even radiation therapy is available that can significantly extend your pet's quality time or produce a cure. The prognosis depends on the type and location of the cancer.

**Behavioral and Cognitive Dysfunction-** As dogs age they may become more "set in their ways", more inflexible, less patient and

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more irritable. Sometimes they will forget learned behaviors including normal urinary and defecation habits. Older dogs may sleep a lot more, and be less responsive to external stimuli. These signs may be related to underlying disease, or may be due to the gradual decline in their senses and cognition. Sometimes medication can help.

**Other Concerns-** As dogs age, their organs also age and do not function as well as they once did. Various liver diseases are common in aging dogs, including cirrhosis. Another concern with elderly dogs is the potential to develop anemia. Whether associated with kidney disease, cancer, chronic disease or primary bone marrow disorders, anemia can cause your dog to be profoundly weak and without treatment may even become so severe that emergency medical help is needed.