MANAGING SENIOR PATIENTS: PROACTIVE AND MULTIMODAL APPROACH

By Dr. Monica Tarantino, DVM

Senior dogs and cats represent approximately 30% of our pet population\(^1\) have an increased incidence of disease and quality of life concerns. Without proper screening, conditions such as osteoarthritis, chronic pain, cognitive dysfunction, and other age-related diseases go undetected, resulting in missed opportunities for intervention. Developing senior pet health plans that combine proactive screening with a multimodal approach to common diseases allows for more effective management of disease and chronic pain, which leads to improved quality of life among our aging pet population.

Osteoarthritis and Chronic Pain

Arthritis is a disease of chronic pain and is estimated to impact 80% to 90% of elderly dogs and cats.\(^2,3\) Though it can start at any age, many pets go without joint support and management plans until the disease has progressed and inflammatory processes within the joints are well underway.

Incorporating early screening and arthritis management plans that include weight control, omega-3 rich diets and supplements can be beneficial to long-term joint health without the side effects seen in long-term NSAID use. Supplements containing ingredients like Perna canaliculus, glucosamine, MSM and DMG have been shown to reduce inflammatory markers in joints that contribute to pain and inflammation.\(^4,5\) The bioflavonoids, Acacia catechu and Morus alba have preliminary data demonstrating a reduction in pain sensitivity in an induced arthritis model in rats and reduced cartilage damage in ex vivo experiments.\(^6\)

Canine Cognitive Dysfunction (CCD)

Studies suggest that between 28 to 68% of elderly dogs have signs of cognitive dysfunction or behavioral changes associated with aging.\(^7\)

Similar to arthritis, signs of CCD such as disorientation, changes in sleeping patterns, activity levels and behaviors may go unnoticed or be attributed to ‘old age’. Early identification of signs related to cognitive dysfunction provides an opportunity for medical intervention which is achieved via a combination of diet, prescription medication, mental enrichment and supplements. Supplementation may include medium chain triglycerides (MCTs) which provide an alternate energy substrate for the brain, omega-3 fatty acids and S-adenosyl-L-methionine (SAM-E) has demonstrated increased mental activity with continuous use.\(^8\)

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Behavior Changes

Behavioral changes in senior pets can be attributed to a number of causes including emerging disease, pain, and cognitive decline. These changes add stress to the human-animal bond making it difficult for senior dogs to interact with owners and impact overall quality of life. After treating the underlying cause of the behavioral change in the patient, supplements with anxiolytic properties may help support calming behavior and overall cognition in dogs. Products containing Tryptophan\(^9\) and L-Theanine\(^10,11\) can help alleviate signs of stress in some animals, and should be considered for oral supplementation for the control of stress due to age-related behavioral changes in older dogs.

With our population of senior pets that are prone to multiple disease processes and chronic pain, applying a proactive and multimodal approach to their common conditions should be considered optimal. The use of safe and efficacious supplements to support diseases of chronic pain, cognition and behavior should be considered a key component of senior dog health protocols.

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Many senior pets suffer from age-related conditions, including joint discomfort and cognitive dysfunction that affect their quality of life. VetriScience’s clinical strength supplements help counter the effects of aging so your senior patients can make the most of their golden years!

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