

Geriatric Exams: What to Expect

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

A twice-yearly checkup can do much to keep up your senior's quality of life. The earlier in the disease process that a diagnosis is made, the earlier treatment can be started and, generally, the better the prognosis. Regular veterinary exams may also teach you about your pet and what to expect in the coming years.

Geriatric exams are also called "senior wellness programs," "senior care programs," or "geriatric screens." A geriatric exam consists of more than the checkups you are used to, and may include checking your pet's weight (to check for [obesity](#) or unexpected loss of weight) as well as any combination of diagnostic tests. Your pet will also get a full physical examination – your veterinarian will look at your pet from head to tail. At your pet's first geriatric exam, tests will be performed to establish a "baseline" for comparison with your pet's future diagnostic tests.

Some tests might include:

Urinalysis - to see the amount and what your pet may be excreting in his urine

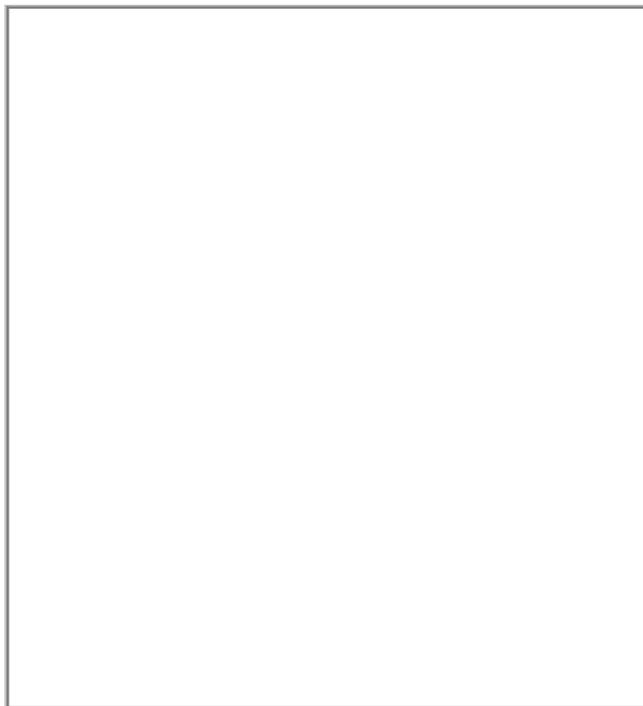
A CBC (complete blood count) - which determines the amount and types of blood cells in your pet's blood and can point to many abnormal conditions

Chemistry panel - which measures levels of various substances such as glucose, proteins, enzymes, and electrolytes in your pet's blood.

This chemistry panel is a valuable tool in identifying diseases such as diabetes mellitus, liver disease, kidney disease, and several hormonal diseases

Other tests - these may include stool tests, radiographs (x-rays) and a heart test called an ECG (electrocardiogram)

Preventive veterinary care can add years and quality of life to your older pet. We recommend twice-yearly checkups for [seniors](#) (see chart to decide when your pet is a senior).



Remember, even if your older pet is healthy, geriatric exams are important not only to catch disease processes, but to help you prepare for the changes your pet will experience as he ages.