



## Care of Your Aged Animal

As animals age, their ability to maintain health and vitality becomes limited and growing old gracefully can be a challenge! An older animal in the wild becomes slower, less able to hunt or graze, and keep up with their peers. Subsequently their condition deteriorates further and the natural cycle is that they do not survive for very long.

Keeping animals outside of their natural environment places the responsibility upon our shoulders to ensure that their care and maintenance is of a high enough standard to allow for quality of life.

A great contributing factor to the aging process is free-radical damage. Free radicals are produced by the body's natural metabolic processes through various chemical reactions or they might be introduced into the body as toxins from food or environmental sources.

The damage they cause to cells may be equated to the sparks that are thrown off a fire which eat away at the carpet in front of the fireplace. The cumulative result of this "wear and tear" is usually obvious later on in life as degenerative changes such as organ failures, joint damage, sensory losses of vision and hearing and the development of dis-ease such as cancer.

Anti-oxidants, such as vitamin C and vitamin E, which are found in nutritious foods and in various nutritional supplements, act as free radical scavengers and help to limit the damage caused as well as help to aid in repair. It therefore follows that, in addition to tender loving care, a well balanced diet full of optimal amounts of nutrients with low levels of chemicals and preservatives is an incredibly valuable factor in maintaining your animal's quality of life and to support their immune systems, which are often compromised in older animals. Dental care is also of utmost importance to assist in nutrient availability, especially in our equine friends.

As the winter months roll in, older animals' circulation and their ability to thermoregulate and keep themselves warm may be limited. In addition to this, problems such as arthritis and incontinence are more obvious and animals are less inclined to move around stopping regular wear of their nails which can grow long enough to put strain on their nail beds or even grow inward into their pads which is extremely painful. Their decreased flexibility also makes it difficult for them to groom themselves, especially if they are obese, leading to knotted coats which are uncomfortable and also harbor parasites such as fleas.

Warm and comfortable bedding will go a long way to keeping them comfortable and nurtured and regular, gentle exercise as well as massage will alleviate tension in their muscles. Some dogs and cats require their nails to be trimmed every six to eight weeks and their coats to be regularly brushed.

When it is no longer possible to preserve an animals' quality of life, it becomes necessary to consider euthanasia as it is the quality of their life rather than the quantity which is of utmost importance. This can be a difficult decision but is often a kind release from the pain and discomfort that some aged animals ultimately suffer from and I'm convinced that there's a special place for animals in heaven!