

How old is your pet?

We all know the old saying that dogs age seven years for every human year, well that's not quite true. Dogs and cats do age much faster than us, but the idea of seven dog years to one human year is a very rough estimation. The differences between dogs and cats as well as within the various breeds make it tough to come up with general guidelines. In addition, factors in a pet's individual lifestyle can cause it to age more rapidly.

Dogs and cats mature much more rapidly than humans. All but the largest breeds of dogs and cats are physically mature around 1 year of age. Cats tend to live longer than dogs - 15 years or more, and it is not unheard of for cats to reach 20 years or more. For dogs, the giant breeds (like Great Danes and Irish Wolfhounds) will age quicker than small and miniature breed dogs. The average lifespan of a giant breed dog will be 8-9 years of age, whereas the small breed dogs (such as Chihuahuas and Dachshunds) can live into their late teens.

There are many different resources to estimate your pet's age. It may not be perfect, but <http://www.dogage.com> is a fun website that takes many different factors of aging, genetics and lifestyle into account to help estimate your pet's age in human years.

The following chart is a rough guideline to determine your pet's age in human years:

Real Age	Cats and Dogs under 20 lbs	Dogs 21-50 lbs	Dogs 51-90 lbs	Dogs greater than 90 lbs
1	15	15	14	12
2	23	24	22	20
3	28	29	29	28
4	32	34	34	35
5	36	38	40	42
6	40	42	45	49
7	44	47	50	56
8	48	51	55	64
9	52	56	61	71
10	56	60	66	78
11	60	65	72	86
12	64	69	77	93
13	68	74	82	101
14	72	78	88	108
15	76	83	93	115
16	80	87	99	123
17	84	92	104	
18	88	96	109	
19	92	101	115	
20	96	105	120	

Besides being a fun comparison, knowing your pet's age in human years can help you to keep your pet healthy. Pets over 50 human years are considered senior pets and have different needs and health issues from younger pets. All pets should see their veterinarian at least once a year, and this is especially important for senior pets. A thorough physical exam will monitor dental health, weight issues, screen for some types of heart disease, some types of cancer and more. These check ups are also a good opportunity to discuss your pet's aging including vaccination recommendations, dietary needs, personality changes, mobility problems and more. As a part of the senior visit, your veterinarian may suggest bloodwork to monitor internal organ function as well as screen for illness such as diabetes and kidney disease.

There are many resources available to help senior pets and their owners adjust to aging. Don't hesitate to ask your veterinarian if you have any questions regarding aging. For the dog owners out there, consider taking a look at <http://www.srdogs.com> for information on not only caring for older dogs, but also on the pros and cons of taking an older pet into your home.

It is unfortunate that our pets are not with us for as many years as a lot of us would like. By keeping your pet's life stage in mind and making any necessary lifestyle adjustments, you can maximize your quality years with your pet by keeping it healthier and happier.