



# Senior Pet Care



# Basic Senior Pet Care

**Be proactive** in addressing normal expected aging changes as well as acute and chronic illness. While it is possible that age may play a role in making decisions about treatment, there are many medical issues that are easily treated. We want to treat what's treatable while taking a more conservative approach the older our pets get. Always take the overall health of the animal into consideration when evaluating for more involved treatment plans. Maintaining dignity and good quality of life are always priorities for our older pets.

**What is a senior pet?** Depending on the size and breed/mix, generally over 10 years is considered to be senior for dogs and a little older for cats.

# Keeping Senior Pets Happy and Healthy for as long as possible

- **Regular Wellness Vet Visits-** 2-3 times per year- full physical exam, wellness bloodwork and urinalysis, chest and abdominal x-rays, ultrasound if indicated
- **Sick Pet Vet visits-** When you notice early symptoms of illness, don't wait to have your senior pet checked just because they're old!
- **Good nutrition, healthy weight-** Vet recommendations, special diets for various illnesses, avoid becoming overweight to help with orthopedic issues, all systems work best with a balanced commercial or custom formulated diet
- **Grooming, nail trims-** Keep hair coats well brushed and clean. Matted dirty hair coats can cause discomfort and skin infections. When older dogs' and cats' nails aren't trimmed they can tear or they might curl around and grow into their paw pads which is obviously very painful and preventable.

- **Dental health-** A big source of worry for pet parents who don't want to take the risk of anesthetizing their older dogs and cats to have their teeth cleaned. There are also risks with leaving horribly infected teeth alone. It is very important to consider the overall health of the pet before deciding, but if there is advanced dental disease when physical exams and blood tests are normal, vets will recommend dentistry for older pets.
- **Preventatives-** vaccines, heartworm, flea, and tick preventatives- If you live in an area where there is risk, which is pretty much everywhere, consider using whatever prevention is appropriate for your location and the overall health of your pet.
- **Exercise appropriate for age and abilities-** Cut back on distance and speed, taking walks is still very important for older dogs. They look forward to it and appreciate the opportunity to continue their usual routines with some adjustments. Stop and sniff walks are time consuming but very enriching and healthy for dogs.
- **Meds, supplements, noninvasive therapies- laser, acupuncture...** Check with your vet to see what they recommend for arthritis and other mobility issues. Pet parents should be cautious about what they purchase and from whom, especially unknown online companies. There are some excellent supplements, but unfortunately, supplements are poorly regulated. There is no standard for producing supplements, and there are many products on the market that are ineffective or potentially harmful.

# Aging is not a Disease...but There's Lots to Keep Track Of

**Aging changes-** skin- inflammation, infection, neoplasia, eyes, vision, hearing, teeth, arthritis, degenerative myelopathy, organ failure

## **Common Symptoms of Illness**

- PUPD (increased water drinking and increased urination),
- GI- V/D (vomiting/diarrhea), weight loss, appetite changes
- Dermatitis- inflamed and infected skin, ear infections
- Masses- lumps and bumps inside and out (benign and malignant)
- Eyes- clouding of cornea and lenses (can be normal in older dogs but best to check where the clouding is located and if it is an indication of more serious eye disease)
- Slowing down (can be normal with age but also can be due to a variety of systemic disease),
- Respiratory signs- increased respiratory rate, coughing, difficulty breathing, (primary lung disease, pneumonia, cancer, or heart disease)
- Mental awareness, confusion, disoriented
- Vocalization

# Common Senior Pet Illnesses

- As stated previously, veterinary visits and diagnostics are necessary to diagnose and treat most illnesses. Some are highly treatable and should be addressed regardless of age.
- Veterinary specialists and specialty hospitals might be needed for complicated cases.
- Finances and overall health of the pet need to be considered when making a diagnostic and treatment plan in older (and all) pets



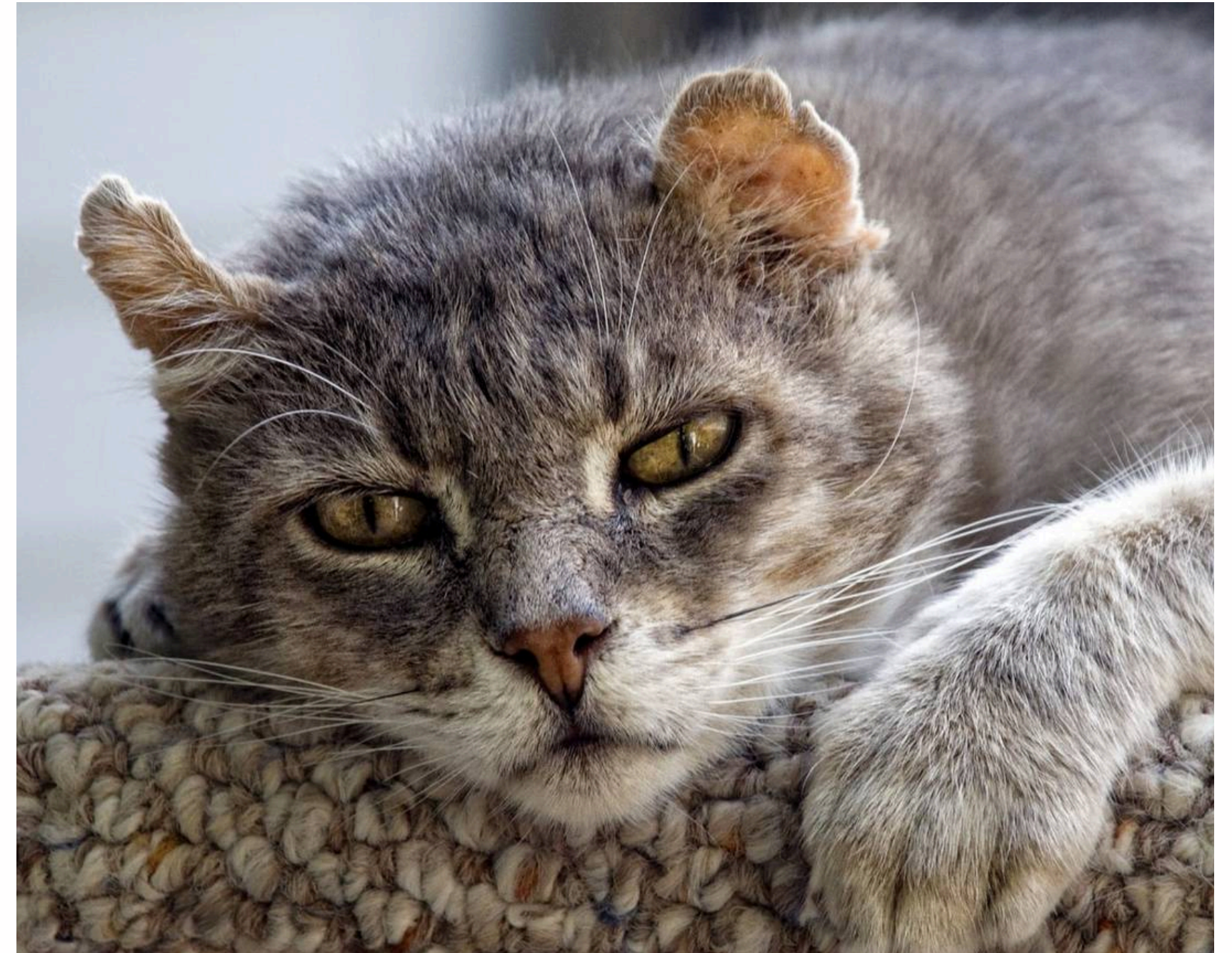
# Kidney Disease

- **Causes**
  - Aging changes, cancer
  - Infection- bacterial, lyme,
  - Other metabolic conditions
- **Symptoms**
  - Increased water intake and urination
  - Decreased appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, weight loss
  - Characteristic bad breath
- **Diagnosis-** History, elevated blood chemistry values, urinalysis, cultures, ultrasound
- **Treatment Options**
  - Fluids- IV in hospital, subcutaneous fluids at home
  - Low-protein diet
  - Medications- appetite stimulants, phosphate binders, blood pressure medications
- **Prognosis-** varies with stage of failure and ability of pet parents to administer treatments at home, some cats and dogs can continue on for some time with a good quality life with at home treatments



# Hyperthyroidism in Cats

- **Symptoms**- Increased water intake and increased urination, Increased appetite with weight loss, vocalization, cats over 10 years old
- **Physical exam**- Increased heart rate, gallop rhythm, weight loss, palpable thyroid nodule in neck
- **Diagnosis**- Thyroid levels are elevated on blood tests, also elevated liver values
- **Treatment Options**- medication (oral, transdermal cream), radioactive iodine
- **Prognosis**- good with treatment





# Diabetes Mellitus

- **Cause-** Insulin Deficiency causing increased blood glucose (sugar) levels
- **Primary Symptoms**
  - Increased water drinking (thirst) and increased urination
  - Weight gain, or weight loss depending on stage of disease
- **Diagnosis-**
  - Physical Exam
  - Elevated blood and urine glucose (sugar)
- **Treatment Options**
  - Insulin injections
  - New oral treatments available
  - Blood sugar monitored with at home Libre glucose monitoring device
- **Prognosis-** varies with individual animals and ability of pet parents to give injections and monitor glucose levels.



# Diabetes Insipidus

- **Cause- Lack of ADH (Antidiuretic Hormone)**
- **Main Symptoms**
  - Dramatically increased water intake
  - Increased urination
- **Diagnosis**
  - Blood tests
  - Urine tests
  - Water deprivation test under the care of a veterinarian
  - Rule out other causes of increased water intake and increased urination
- **Treatment**
  - Desmopressin injections or eye drops
- **Prognosis** is good with treatment



# Heart Disease

- **Symptoms**
  - Increased respiratory rate, respiratory distress
  - Cough, collapse
  - Difficulty walking around and exercising
- **Diagnosis**
  - Physical examination- heart murmur, abnormal heart rate and rhythm, muffled or crackle sounds in lungs
  - Radiographs (X-rays)- enlarged heart, fluid in lungs and chest, fluid in abdomen
  - Echocardiogram- changes in heart valves, abnormal pressures and flow of blood through the heart
- **Treatment Plan**
  - Diuretics, blood pressure and other meds that are tailored to the severity of the individual dogs' or cats' condition
- **Prognosis**- depends on stage of cardiac disease



# Old Dog Vestibulitis

Idiopathic, sudden loss of balance in older dogs (often mistaken for a stroke)

- **Symptoms-**

- Off balance, dizzy, head twisted and tilted
- Falling and stumbling, unable to stand, rolling when on the floor
- Nystagmus- Eyes twitching side to side, usually resolves within 12-24 hours
- Nausea, Vomiting (may occur)

- **Diagnosis-** Physical exam, rule out other causes of neurologic symptoms

- **Treatment-**

- Supportive care, keep them safe from falling on stairs and off furniture, anti-nausea meds,
- Hospitalization for fluids and IV meds may be required if the dog is so dizzy that they have difficulty eating and drinking

- **Prognosis-** very good, usually dramatic recovery within 5-7 days,

- May be left with a slight head tilt

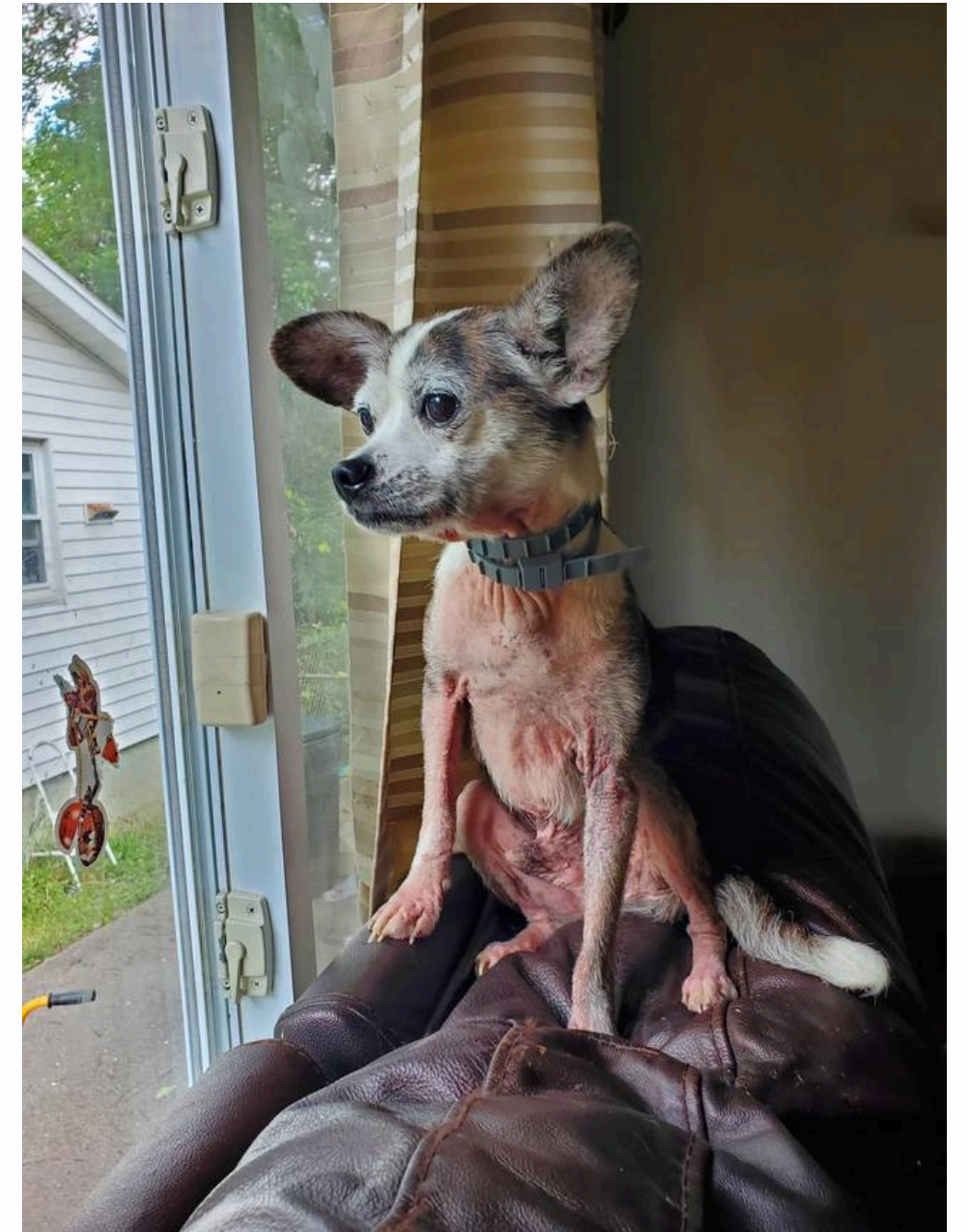
# Cancer

- **Common Types of Cancer in Dogs and Cats:**
  - HSA (Hemangiosarcoma)
  - LSA (Lymphosarcoma)
  - MCT (Mast Cell Tumor)
  - Carcinomas and Sarcomas
- **Key Facts:**
  - Cancer can affect every part of the body
  - Can cause a wide range of symptoms
- **Diagnosis:** Exam, bloodwork, urinalysis, x-rays, ultrasound, MRI
- **Prognosis:**
  - Varies based on the specific diagnosis, stage, underlying conditions,
- **Treatment Options:**
  - Chemotherapy, Radiation, Palliative Care
- **Recommendation:**
  - Consult with a veterinary oncologist to learn about the latest protocols, prognosis, and treatment options even if you don't think you'll choose to treat with chemo



# Dermatitis

- Commonly Affected Areas:
  - Skin- localized or generalized
  - Ears, Eyes
  - Feet, foot pads, in between toes, nail beds
- Diagnosis:
  - Veterinary exam for initial assessment and treatment
  - Skin scrapings, cultures, and biopsies for definitive diagnosis
  - Bacterial, fungal, parasitic, allergic, immune mediated, neoplasia, endocrine (hypothyroid, Cushing's)
- Treatments-
  - Vary with the diagnosis
  - Topical, oral, and injectable meds,
  - Diet changes, bathing,
  - Allergies- oral meds, bathing, hyposensitization
  - Treat underlying systemic disease



# Canine Cognitive Disorder

## Old Age Dementia in Dogs

- **Symptoms:**

- Pacing, circling, vocalization, trembling, anxiety
- Confusion with house training
- Disorientation even in familiar surroundings
- Night and day confusion
- Alternating with completely normal behavior

- **Diagnosis:**

- Based on ruling out other potential causes of the symptoms
- Physical Exam, bloodwork, urinalysis, x-rays, ultrasound, MRI

- **Treatment:**

- Antianxiety medications- trazadone, fluoxetine, gabapentin
- Selegiline
- Supplements- Leap Years (NAD)
- Changes in environment- crates, pens, gates
- Pee pads, diapers



# Loss of Mobility

- **Conditions:**

- Arthritis- back, hips, elbows, wrist, toes
- Degenerative myelopathy
- Disc disease and other spinal cord disease
- Injury- new acute, chronic old injuries
- Infections- Lyme, Ehrlichia,
- Immune mediated arthritis
- Congenital and hereditary disorders

- **Diagnosis:**

- Consider Breed, age, geographic location
- Activities and lifestyle
- Reported changes in mobility- acute, chronic
- Past injuries



# Loss of Mobility

## Treatments & Management

- **Treatment Options:**
  - Medications and Supplements- check with your vet for recommendations
  - Alternative therapies: PT and Rehab, Laser therapy, Acupuncture, Magnetic Field Treatments
- **Key Management Tips:**
  - Maintain ongoing communication with your veterinarian
  - Adjust treatment plans as the condition progresses
  - Be patient and open to trial-and-error to find the right combination and dosage of medications and supplements
- **Lifestyle Changes:**
  - Yoga mats, runners, and carpeting, esp on stairs, for good footing
  - Move cat food, water, and litter to easily accessible locations for older cats
  - Install ramps to avoid injury on stairs
  - Shorten walks and find new more accessible activities to do with your senior dog

# Treat What Is Treatable

- Treatment Options:
  - Medications and supplements
  - General support (e.g., fluids, surgery, hospital care)
- Examples of Care:
  - Kidney Failure: SQ fluids, blood pressure meds, low-protein diet
  - Mobility Aids: harnesses, slings, ramps, non-slip flooring (carpeting, runners, yoga mats)
  - Assistive Devices: wheels, braces, prosthetics, strollers, backpacks
  - Blind Dog Support: Halos for navigation, Second Chances for Blind Dogs- nonprofit Organization that donates Muffin's Halos
- Lifestyle Enhancements:
  - Exercise, enrichment, and social interactions
  - Safety measures (leashes, gates, fences) for pets with vision or hearing loss
  - Foster friendships with humans and other animals

# Stay Positive

- Enjoy your senior pets
- Focus on Quality of Life
- Offer good food and treats and take them places they enjoy most
- Play with them and let them sleep on the couch and in bed with you!



# When It's Time To Say Goodbye

- **How will you know?**
  - “You’ll know when” – often true, but consult your veterinarian for guidance.
  - Veterinary house call, quality-of-life consultations can provide an objective opinion.
- **Handling External Pressures:**
  - Avoid undue pressure from friends and family; seek support from those who align with your perspective.
- **Decision Factors:**
  - Urgent vs. Having Time to Decide: Circumstances vary—some situations are easier to manage than others, focus on quality of life and short and long term prognosis, as well as overall health of your pet
  - Unexpected vs. Ongoing Decline- urgent unexpected terminal illness in older pets can be much more challenging for pet parents to process and accept
- **Pre-Planning Assistance:**
  - If possible, connect in advance with a vet who will help if euthanasia is needed- house call vet, emergency hospital, or local vet
- **Coping and Recovery:**
  - Lean on friends, family, online support groups, or pet loss grief counselors.
  - You are not alone.

# Saying Goodbye with Dignity

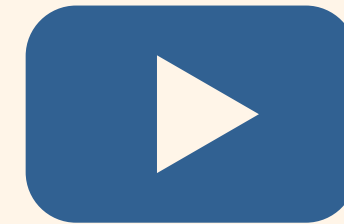
- **When euthanasia is necessary** to allow pets to pass peacefully- Who will be there, location within the house or elsewhere, special bed or blanket, music
- **Honoring Your Pet:**
  - Create meaningful memories: photos, writings, pawprints, or visits to special places.
- **Other Pets:**
  - Support grieving pets and consider if adding a new companion might help.
- **Welcoming a New Pet:**
  - Timing is very personal, but don't wait too long—many homeless pets are waiting for a loving home.



# Support for Parents of Senior Pets



Support groups found [HERE](#)



Check our Disabled Pets [YouTube Channel](#) for instructional videos

[www.disabledpets.org](http://www.disabledpets.org)

