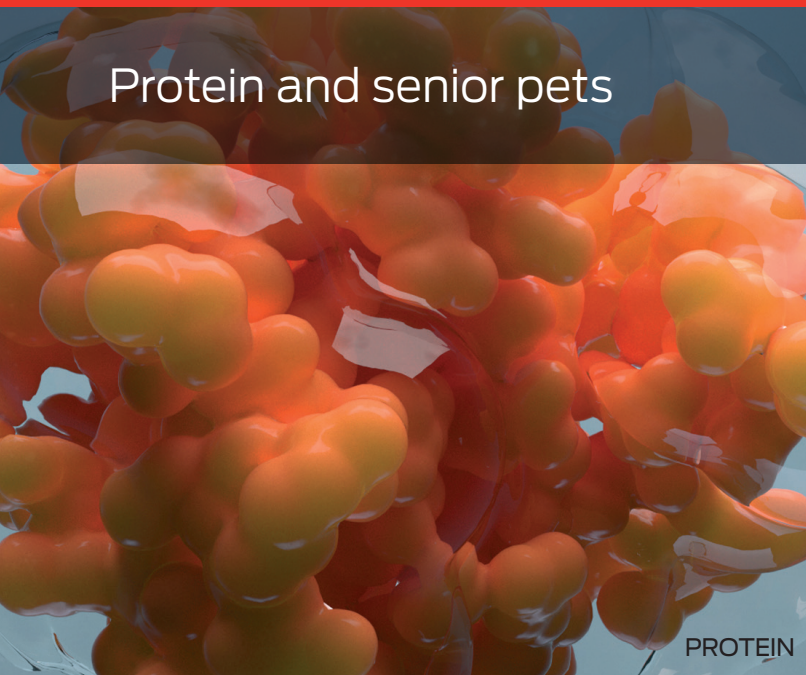


HOT TOPIC

Protein and senior pets



PROTEIN



In focus

Protein is an essential nutrient for dogs and cats,¹ but do their protein requirements change when they become older?

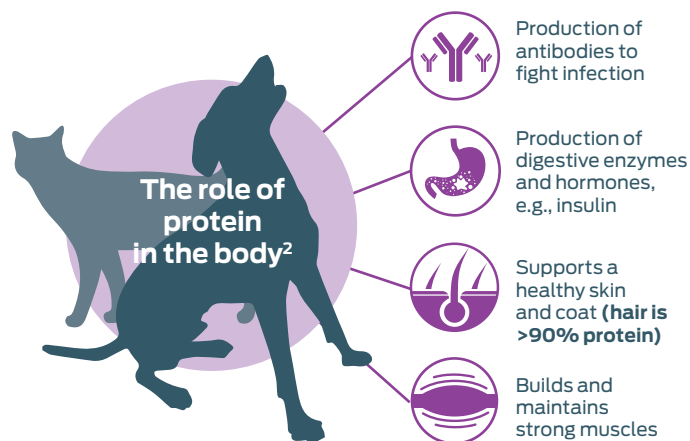
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Why is protein important for older pets?

Protein is a key nutrient for dogs and cats and a source of amino acids, the 'building blocks' used to build new proteins in the body. Irrespective of the pet's age, protein plays many important roles in the body.



As physical and metabolic changes occur in the body as part of the normal aging process, being able to maintain and repair muscle tissue, and having a healthy skin and coat and a strong immune system become even more important.

Do senior pets need more or less protein than younger animals?

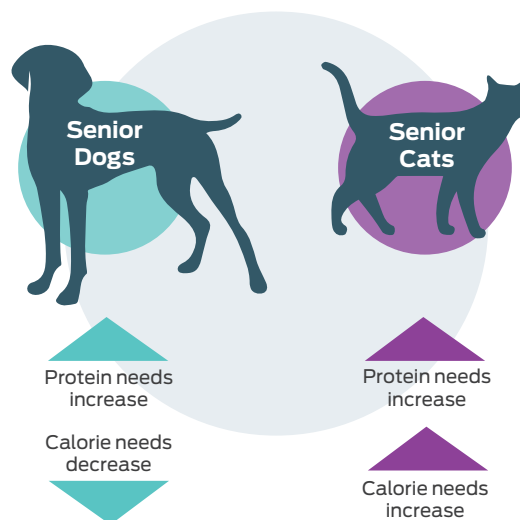
Studies show that as dogs and cats age, their bodies are not as efficient at digesting or metabolizing dietary protein. According to the scientific literature, restricting protein in healthy older dogs is not needed and can be detrimental.¹

Healthy senior pets should generally eat more protein than younger adult pets.^{1,3-6} If a pet does not consume enough protein over an extended period, they will ultimately lose lean body mass, seen as muscle wastage. (Although the body uses 'reserve' protein from its lean body mass every day, this must be replaced by dietary protein or the lean body mass will be slowly depleted.)¹ A loss in lean body mass may have negative effects on health, including greater susceptibility to infection and even a shortened life span.^{1,7,8}

As well as the quantity of protein, research also shows the quality of protein is important in maintaining lean body mass. Diets for senior pets should include high quality, highly digestible protein.^{4,9}

Are there differences in the protein needs of dogs and cats when they age?

- Similar to people, the energy (calorie) needs of many older dogs decrease particularly if they are less active, bringing the risk of becoming overweight. To meet their higher protein requirements whilst maintaining an optimal body condition, senior dogs typically need diets with a higher protein-to-calorie ratio (i.e., more protein for every calorie consumed).¹
- Unlike dogs, once cats reach about 10-12 years of age, their calorie or energy needs can actually increase. This is thought to be related to a decreased ability to absorb fat and protein^{2,7,10} which can result in weight loss. Senior cats from 10-12 years of age generally require a highly digestible diet which provides high levels of protein but is not restricted in overall calories.^{2,11}



When should protein intake be restricted for senior pets?

Historically, many veterinarians would recommend protein restriction for older pets in the belief that this would help protect kidney function, but this has since proved unfounded.

Numerous studies have confirmed that protein does not adversely affect the kidneys or cause kidney disease in healthy senior pets.^{1,2}

In pets with advanced kidney disease, however, there may be benefits to restricting both dietary protein and phosphorus. In chronic kidney disease, accumulation of the waste products from protein breakdown can occur in the blood, resulting in nausea and loss of appetite. Thus for these pets, dietary protein restriction can be beneficial.^{1,2}

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