**Caring for the Senior Horse**

Courtesy of:

**Cotati Large Animal Hospital**

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**What defines a senior horse?**

* Greater than 20 years old
* Some horses may age quicker depending on their previous use or body conformation

**Common clinical signs that your horse is aging:**

* Stiff joints/lameness
* Altered hair coat or lack of hair shedding
* Decreased muscle tone, swaying back
* Problems eating
* Weight loss

**Common issues that develop with age:**

* **Cushing’s (PPID):** Pars Pituitary Intermedia Dysfunction, most commonly known as Cushing’s, is an extremely common disorder of the pituitary gland in horses. They can develop Cushing’s as early as 15 years old. The earliest clinical signs include:
  + A wooly haircoat and delayed shedding
  + Decreased performance
  + Loss of topline muscle
  + Abnormal sweating
  + Immune suppression – this can lead to development of recurrent illness such as pneumonia.
  + Fat deposits
  + Laminitis (Founder): Cushing’s causes dysregulated cortisol in the body which can lead to laminitis flares.
* **Arthritis:**  Stiff joints can cause your senior horse to have difficulty standing for the farrier, getting up and down, or walking. **\*Talk to your veterinarian about medications or supplements to help with arthritis pain\***
* **Dental health:** Dental exams are crucial even as your horse ages. Problems can arise as a horse wears out or loses their teeth. Their diet may need to be changed to a “senior” diet which often is a complete pelleted feed that is easy to chew and digest. \***Talk to your veterinarian about the best diet for your senior horse\***
* **Weight loss:** Occurs as their gut becomes less able to absorb nutrients properly, as their teeth expire, or due to other underlying health issues.
* **Colic:** Senior horses have a higher chance of certain types of colic. Impaction colic is one of the most commonly seen due to improper water intake and poor dentition. Any colic requires immediate veterinary attention.

**What can I do for my senior horse?**

* Annual or semi-annual exams are important to monitor weight and overall wellbeing.
  + Dental exam
  + Bloodwork **\*to assess organ and immune system function\***