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Canine Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome

Does your geriatric dog ever forget how to go up and down the stairs? Did they stop greeting you as they used to? Do they spend more time sleeping? Keep you awake at night pacing? Stare blankly at walls or get stuck in corners? Do they not chase the ball like they used to? Your old friend may have Canine Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome.

WHAT IS IT?

Canine Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome, or CDS, is the age related deterioration of cognitive abilities characterized by behavioral changes that cannot be wholly attributed to general medical conditions. CDS is often referred to as “old dog syndrome” or “senility”. CDS closely resembles dementia found in humans with Alzheimer’s disease.

CDS is not “normal aging”. A number of pathological changes are suspected to play a role in its development. The progressive, degenerative course of canine CDS involves a gradual decline of cognitive abilities sufficient to produce functional disability in the home. A recent study concluded that greater than 62% of dogs over the age of 8 years had at least one symptom of CDS.

SIGNS

- Disorientation
- Decreased activity
- Abnormal sleep/wake patterns (including pacing and vocalizing at night)
- Loss of housetraining
- Decreased or altered responses to family members
- Confusion
- Withdrawal from the family
- Forgetfulness
- Difficulty in learning new tasks
- Increased aggression towards family members or other dogs

DIAGNOSIS

The first step in diagnosing CDS is recognition of signs, frequently observed first by the pet owner. Next, the veterinarian should conduct a thorough physical exam to rule out medical diseases as the cause of the behavior changes. This may include routine bloodwork or other laboratory tests to identify underlying disease. CDS is a common, recognizable condition in senior dogs. Understanding the syndrome and behavioral changes associated with it can help pet owners better deal with their aging friend and improve the quality of life for the dog.

TREATMENT

75% of dogs with CDS show significant improvement when placed on Anipryl, a medication used in the treatment of Parkinson’s disease in humans. Anipryl is a MAOB inhibitor and works by increasing levels of a neurotransmitter in the brain called Dopamine. Ask your veterinarian how much it would cost to treat your dog with Anipryl.