



Wholistic Paws Veterinary Services, LLC

Acupuncture, Rehabilitation, Hospice, and Euthanasia services in the comfort and dignity of your home.

“Senior Moments”: Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome



Has your older dog just not been acting like himself lately? Perhaps he’s not seeking as much attention as he used to and is interacting less with your family? Maybe she seems confused or disoriented? Some senior dogs may bark or howl excessively for no apparent reason, show an increase in aggressive behavior or separation anxiety, or become overly fearful or sensitive to noise. Older dogs that have been housetrained for years may start having “accidents” in the house. You may notice a change in your dog’s sleep patterns, with increased restlessness and pacing during the night. These behavioral changes can be as hard on your family as they are on your dog. However, most pet owners attribute them to normal aging and do not seek medical care.

Many of the behavioral changes commonly seen in senior dogs are related to underlying medical conditions that can be treated. For example, your dog’s decreased activity and mobility may be related to arthritis. An increase in aggressive behavior or vocalizing may be the result of painful dental disease. Inattentiveness or apparent confusion may be caused partly by vision or hearing loss. Many of these conditions and diseases can be treated, resulting in a better quality of life for your dog!

If underlying medical conditions such as infection or cancer have been ruled out as the cause of your dog’s behavioral changes, your

veterinarian may diagnose **cognitive dysfunction syndrome** (CDS).

What is Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome?

CDS is not an uncommon condition in older dogs. According to a study by leading animal behaviorists, nearly one in five dogs over the age of seven shows signs of CDS. At 11 years of age, the number jumps to one in three. In a pet owner survey, nearly half of dogs ages 8 and older showed at least one sign associated with CDS. Researchers believe that CDS is caused by physical and chemical changes that affect the brain function in older dogs, similar to Alzheimer’s disease in people.

CDS is a *syndrome*, or collection of signs. One or more of the following signs must be present, and other medical conditions ruled out as the cause, to make a diagnosis of CDS:

- ✓ Disorientation or confusion
- ✓ Less interaction with family members
- ✓ Changes in sleep patterns or activity
- ✓ Loss of house training

Can CDS Be Treated?

If your dog is diagnosed with CDS, your veterinarian may prescribe medication that can help to control the clinical signs associated with this disorder. However, each dog is an individual and treatment plans must be tailored to his or her individual needs. Acupuncture and Chinese herbs can also be helpful in improving the clinical signs that your dog is exhibiting.

Give Your Older Dog a New “Leash” on Life!

Contact your veterinarian if you notice signs of CDS or anything unusual in your dog’s appearance or behavior. Don’t assume that your dog’s behavioral changes are an unavoidable sign of old age. With recent medical advances in treatment—and a little extra love and care—you and your veterinarian can help your senior dog return to being a happy, active member of your family!