



Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome

Cognitive dysfunction syndrome (CDS), better known as senility or dementia, is a decrease in normal behaviors due to advanced age without any underlying medical or physical conditions. It can start as early as 6 years of age in large breed dogs and usually after 10 years in small breed dogs and cats.

Signs

The most common sign of cognitive dysfunction is disorientation. Your pet may get “lost” in a corner of a room or stare into space. You may also notice other changes in behavior such as becoming “needier” or more aloof.



Your pet may seem more anxious. Changes in sleep cycles can occur as well as accidents in the house. A dog forgets housetraining or a cat doesn't use the litter box. There can be changes in appetite and pets may start to vocalize loudly, often in the middle of the night

All of these signs can mimic other conditions such as pain, anxiety, separation anxiety, and panic disorder. Urinary tract infections, high blood pressure, thyroid, liver, or kidney problems, as well as others can also show some similar signs.

Diagnosis

A physical exam and complete work up including lab tests such as a complete blood count, urinalysis, blood screening, and thyroid testing, is necessary to rule out other diseases that commonly occur in aging pets.

We may also advise imaging such as x-rays, ultrasound, MRI, or CT scan to look for other conditions.

There is no specific test for CDS. It is diagnosed once other problems are ruled out. To complicate things, it's common for older pets to have health problems so CDS can be occurring at the same time. Your doctor needs to look at the whole picture to decide whether there are signs indicating CDS separate from the other conditions.

Treatment

Anipryl® is a drug approved by the FDA for treatment of cognitive dysfunction in dogs. Supplements can also be beneficial. Fish oils are rich in fatty acids that help improve brain and cognitive function. Research shows that antioxidants improve the condition.

There are things you can do that may help your aging pet. Avoid things known to cause anxiety and distress. Keep your pet in a comfortable, confined area to limit wandering and prevent self-injury.

Mental stimulation early in the disease is important to decrease the progression. This can be as simple as using treat balls, food toys, games involving puzzle solving, and interactive tasks such as fetch.

Physical activities such as swimming, massage, or range of motion exercises are also useful. This helps increase blood flow, keeps the muscles healthy, and activates the brain.

CDS is progressive. Start supplements early and provide a more stimulating environment to slow it down.

