

Cognitive Dysfunction in Dogs

Senior dogs don't only age physically – they age mentally, too.

Pet Health Network Contributors

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Overview

Unfortunately, as our favorite furry friends reach their later years in life, their mental function can decline, just as ours can. Canine cognitive dysfunction, or CCD, is caused by chemical and physical changes that affect the brain function of older dogs. Like people with Alzheimer's, CCD usually comes on slowly and gradually gets worse. Unfortunately, there is no known cause of this condition.

Symptoms

While some decline in mental function is expected in aging pets, some dogs seem more affected than others. Common symptoms of CCD can include disorientation, changes in your dog's interaction with family members and other pets, changes in sleeping habits, and increased bathroom accidents. The most common complaints of family members whose dogs suffer from CCD are that the pooch wanders at night and forgets her housetraining.

Zoetis, a pharmaceutical company that manufactures a medication to treat CCD, provides an excellent checklist to help you determine if your dog is showing signs of CCD. This checklist can be found at the [CDS In Dogs](#) website.

Diagnosis/Treatment

If you feel your dog has any of the symptoms of CCD, your veterinarian will most likely recommend the following:

- A complete physical and neurological exam
- Chemistry tests to evaluate kidney, liver, and pancreatic function, as well as sugar levels
- Blood tests to identify if your pet has been exposed to tick-related or other infectious disease
- A complete blood count to rule out blood-related conditions
- Electrolyte tests to ensure your dog isn't dehydrated or suffering from an electrolyte

imbalance

- Urine tests to screen for urinary tract infection and other disease, and to evaluate the ability of the kidneys to concentrate urine
- Endocrine tests, including thyroid and adrenocortical testing, to evaluate certain levels of hormones in the blood
- An ECG to screen for an abnormal heart rhythm that may indicate underlying [heart disease](#); or a blood test, Cardiopet proBNP, to assess cardiac health
- Blood pressure screening
- Radiographs (x-rays)

Because CCD often affects older dogs, these screening tests are extra valuable because they can also help uncover other common conditions or diseases your older pet may have.

Treatment for your dog to improve signs or slow progression may include the following:

- Drug therapy
- Specific treatment of any concurrent illness
- Behavior modification
- Establishing a routine exercise schedule

Prevention

Unfortunately, there is nothing you can do to prevent your dog's mental decline associated with aging or cognitive dysfunction. Regular visits to your veterinarian and routine preventive care screening can help address any concerns early and find other reasons for behavior change.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian – they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.