

Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome

Brains, like any organ, age over time. This is an area where research is ongoing, just as in the human field. We do know that some elderly cats and dogs develop certain behaviours associated with their brains ageing. Many of these changes will come on gradually over time. Some may develop quite quickly.



Signs associated with Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome:

- Increased vocalisation/barking for no apparent reason
- Forgetting where things are such as food bowls, litter trays, door to the garden
- Confusion over their daily routine and not making connections between the actions of their owners and what is expected of them. For example, an owner may open the back door and they just stare at them rather than going out to the toilet
- Changes in personality, possible becoming more clingy/ affectionate or unexpected aggression. Memory loss such as forgetting commands they had previously learnt
- Changes in appetite, refusing favourite foods, eating smaller or larger portions
- Vacant episodes/pacing/wandering off on walks and staring into space
- Anxiety
- Changes in sleep pattern
- Loss of toilet training

Some elderly cats and dogs will develop symptoms, subtle or obvious, that can be caused by certain medical problems. For example, cats with overactive thyroid glands (hyperthyroidism) can become very vocal or may struggle to remember to get to the litter tray when they need to, especially if they have diarrhoea. Deteriorating sight in cats and dogs may make finding their food bowls challenging. Anxiety and possibly aggression may be seen in pets who don't recognise their owners when their sight is poor. They may be easily startled if they are becoming deaf. Elderly cats and dogs with arthritic joints may become aggressive when handled.

During a consultation we will fully examine your pet and go through these symptoms and decide what tests we should do to separate the conditions that can be treated with medications and those that may be associated with cognitive dysfunction syndrome and need simply managing.



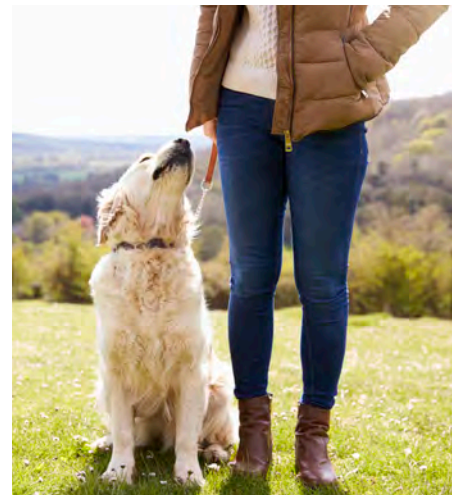
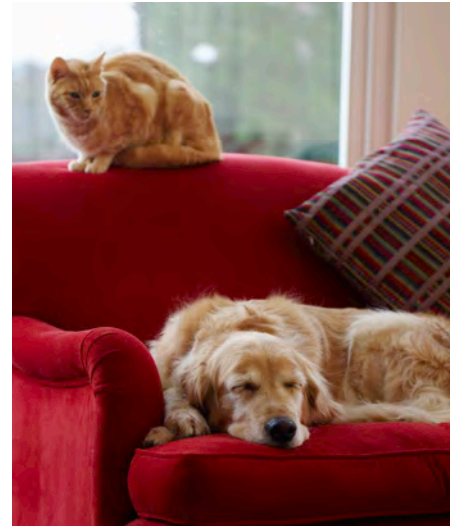
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To be sure that an ageing pet is suffering from true cognitive dysfunction we must have eliminated other common problems that we see in our older patients. We know that these cats and dogs will deteriorate over time and may develop severe signs of senility, so it's important to help them with their quality of life.

Managing Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome

- Stick to a simple routine as much as possible.
- Avoid allowing your pet access to large open areas. Dogs should be kept on familiar walks and use a long lead. Cats can be restricted to small rooms in the house and only allow outside whilst supervised.
- Keep food and water bowls in obvious areas and don't move them. Offer frequent small meals if necessary and keep it varied if they seem reluctant to eat. Monitor your pet's weight frequently as their nutrient requirements may change. Enjoying their food is important.
- Provide cats with several litter trays that have easy access. Help dogs into vehicles if necessary.
- Be aware of stress associated with changes within the home. Your ageing pet won't cope as well as you may expect if you have visitors or move furniture around. It is worth considering using pet sitters when you go away, rather than kennels so your pet can remain in a comfortable, familiar and safe environment.
- Give your pet plenty of signals if they need help understanding, for example, that it's time for dinner or a walk. Don't get angry. Stay calm and patient. Make them feel secure. They may change daily!
- Ask your vet about dietary supplementation with, for example, antioxidants. These may help slow down the damage to the brain cells.
- Some cats and dogs benefit from prescription medicines to help them (and you) cope with certain behaviours. We shouldn't just accept some behaviours as part of the ageing process.
- Assess your home for any potential risks such as steps and uneven surfaces.



So, it is important to monitor our ageing pets closely.

As an owner you know your pet best and any suspicion of deterioration of brain function should be discussed with a vet or vet nurse at an early stage.

There are many things we can do to help improve the quality of life of a cat or dog with true cognitive dysfunction. The earlier we start to monitor these ageing changes and the sooner we know if there are any concurrent illnesses, the better equipped we are to slow down the process that can lead to a rapid deterioration in that quality of life.

