

### **ALZHEIMER'S-LIKE DISEASE IN PETS NEEDS QUICK ATTENTION**

If your aging dog or cat starts acting strange, don't chalk it up to old age or think he needs a refresher course in potty training—seek veterinary care.

Why? There may be several causes for unusual behavior in senior pets, including one most owners typically don't think about: **Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome** or CDS.



Many pet owners mistake the gradual advancement of dementia as aging changes that are to be expected in an elderly dog or cat. But in actuality senior pets should function mentally almost as well, if not as well, as they did as younger. While older pets may have moderate hearing and/or sight impairment, they should not have noticeable changes in their mental activity.

For pets with CDS, however, it is another story. CDS is a degenerative inflammatory disease of the brain very similar to the human dementia of Alzheimer's disease. Studies show that it affects more than a third of dogs over age 11 and more than two-thirds over age 15. In cats, those numbers are likely similar; however, less is known about cats because fewer studies have been conducted.

Because they are with their pets daily, pet owners will be the first to notice the symptoms. Pets suffering from CDS may seem disoriented, perhaps going to the wrong side of the door when wanting to go outside or wandering aimlessly around the home. They may be restless or wake at night and be less active during the day. They may become anxious and irritable. They may have decreased interest in interacting or, just the opposite, may become clingy. They may also forget their house training behaviors.

While research is advancing understanding of CDS, a cure has not yet been found. However, there are ways to slow its progress. Because the disease can be significant, a visit to the veterinarian at the first sign of atypical behavior is key.

Diagnosis is based on recognizing the behavioral changes and excluding other medical conditions and drug side effects. If it is determined that your pet has CDS, discuss possible treatment options with the veterinarian.

Treatment options may include:

Nutritional supplements such as S-adenosylmethionine, or SAME

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Specially formulated diets that include antioxidants, fatty acids, and mitochondrial cofactors such as lipoic acid and acetyl-L-carnitine or a diet supplemented with medium chain triglycerides such as coconut oil

Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors, which have been used to treat early-stage Parkinson's disease in humans

Enrichment with daily exercise, play, training, and food-filled toys

If you don't get on it early and decisively, you may not have time as some pets deteriorate rapidly while others have a slow decline.

Some of these pets get so totally confused. They don't remember their owners or their house training. They walk into corners and stand there. They really have no life anymore. That's why as your pet's caregiver, you need to bring these concerns to the veterinarian's attention.