



Paw Prints

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Columnist

Dementia in dogs

After a lifetime of excited tail-wags, devoted companionship, and playing ball, it's no wonder your senior dog is beginning to show his age. Maybe his hearing has declined and his muzzle has grayed. Maybe his coat has begun to thin or maybe he is slow to rise and not as spry as his younger days.

Natural aging can change appearance, decrease mobility or dull the senses. If your older dog's personality has changed, he may be experiencing something much more serious than the usual signs of aging. If Fido seems confused, distant, or lost, he may be showing signs of Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (CDS).

More and more dogs are living into their senior years and, just like elderly humans, pets can suffer from a type of dementia.

With neurological signs similar to Alzheimer's disease in humans, CDS in dogs is caused by physical changes in the brain and its chemicals. And according to Donna Solomon, DVM at the Animal Medical Center of Chicago, it is a disease that involves the degeneration and loss of nerve cells within the brain of older pets resulting in behavioral changes.

Does Fido wake up in the middle of the night and pace back and forth? Or does he sometimes seem disoriented when trying to find the doggie door?

Due to the changes in your dog's brain you'll notice a deterioration of how your dog thinks, learns, and remembers, which may cause behavioral changes that can disturb the lives of both you and your furry family member.

According to the book *Decoding Your Dog*, by Steve Dale, the signs of CDS can be remembered by the acronym DISHA.

Disorientation — Such as being confused or getting lost in familiar environments.

Interactions with humans and other pets have changed — such as changes in affection, or irritability.

Sleep-wake cycle changes such as increased sleep during the day or waking during the night.

House training and learned behaviors may deteriorate.

Activity levels alter and even include aimless wandering or even compulsive disorders such as excessive licking.

If you suspect that your furry friend has CDS, make an appointment with your veterinarian. Many people don't mention their dog's changes to their vets, believing it is just "old age," but a combination of a number of the above symptoms are not normal to the aging process and options are available to help treat or control CDS.

There are also many CDS symptoms shared with other serious medical conditions. For instance, decreased activity could be a sign of advanced arthritis, and if your dog isn't paying attention as he once did, it could be a result of hearing or vision loss, and incontinence could be from a serious urinary infection or kidney disease. So it is important to let your veterinarian eliminate other conditions before



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE

That strange behavior may be more than just a sign of old age.

making a diagnosis of CDS.

Although there is no cure for CDS, there are multiple treatment methods to try to improve your dog's quality of life. Helping your furry friend cope with CDS and considering his needs when it comes to your home, its surroundings, and the environment, are the key.

Try to keep your dog awake during the day as much as possible so he can sleep easier at night. Try exercising Fido for 30 minutes a day. Try not to change or rearrange furniture. Increase mental stimulation, which might include food puzzles, interactive toys,

extra grooming, doing tricks and encourage learning new ones.

Eliminate clutter to create wide pathways throughout the house. Encourage gentle and involved short play sessions.

And please remember to have a daily routine for feeding and walking. Dogs thrive on routine.

Keep your patience and compassion. Your furry family member's world has changed, but every effort should be made to show him that your love, respect, and pride of his past and present abilities have not changed and never will.



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