

Behavioral Changes

in your senior dog



treated, if not cured. For example, your dog's decreased activity and mobility may be related to arthritis. An increase in aggressive behavior or vocalizing may be the result of painful dental disease. Inattentiveness or apparent confusion may be caused partly by vision or hearing loss. Many of these conditions and disease can be treated, resulting in a better quality of life for your dog.

If underlying medical conditions such as infection or cancer have been ruled out as the cause of your dog's behavioral changes, your veterinarian may diagnose *cognitive dysfunction syndrome* (CDS).

What is Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome?

CDS is not an uncommon condition in older dogs. According to a study by leading animal behaviorists, **nearly one in five dogs over the age of seven shows signs of CDS.** Researchers believe that CDS is caused by physical and chemical changes that affect the brain function in older dogs, similar to Alzheimer's disease in people.

CDS is a *syndrome*, or collection of signs. One or more of the following signs must be present, and other medical conditions ruled out as the cause, to make a diagnosis of CDS:

- Disorientation or confusion
- Less interaction with family members
- Changes in sleep patterns and activity, or
- Loss of house training.

Has your older dog just not been acting like himself lately? Perhaps he's not seeking as much attention as he used to and is interacting less with family members, or seems confused or disoriented. Some senior dogs may bark or howl excessively for no apparent reason, show an increase in aggressive behavior or separation anxiety, or become overly fearful or sensitive to noise. Older dogs that have been housetrained for years may start having "accidents" in the house. You may notice a change in your dog's sleep patterns, with increased restlessness and pacing during the night. These behavioral changes can be as hard on family members as they are on the dog. However, most pet owners attribute them to normal aging and do not seek medical care.

Any change in your older dog's behavior should **not** be considered just a normal sign of aging and should be reported to your veterinarian as soon as possible. Many of the behavioral changes commonly seen in senior dogs are related to underlying medical conditions that can be

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Can CDS Be Treated?

If your dog is diagnosed with CDS, your veterinarian can prescribe an effective medication or diet that can help to control the clinical signs associated with this disorder. However, because CDS is a syndrome (a collection of signs), no two dogs will show exactly the same signs, and response to treatment will vary. If your dog responds to the drug or diet, daily treatment will be needed for the rest of the dog's life.

Give Your Older Dog a New Lease on Life

Contact your veterinarian if you notice signs of CDS or anything unusual in your dog's appearance or behavior. Don't assume that your dog's behavioral changes are an unavoidable sign of old age. With recent medical advances in treatment—and a little extra love and care—you and your veterinarian can help your senior dog return to being a happy, active member of your family!

