

Dementia Not Uncommon in Older Pets

People are not alone in suffering from dementia as they age. Dogs and cats often experience the same problem. Called cognitive dysfunction syndrome (CDS), this condition is caused by physiological and chemical changes in the brain.

Signs of CDS include:

- Change in sleep habits - Your pet may reverse his waking and sleeping hours and may sleep much more than usual.
- Litter box and house training problems - Your dog or cat may have been perfectly trained before, but is now having accidents in the house or seems to forget where the litter box is, even though its location hasn't changed.
- Changes in relationships with people - Your once affectionate dog or cat may become aloof, preferring to spend more time alone than with you. He may no longer tolerate any petting and may stop greeting family members when they return home.
- Disorientation - You may notice your pet staring into space, howling or meowing for no apparent reason, losing its balance, or wandering aimlessly through your house. Your dog may stand by the wrong door to go outside or may not seem to remember the reason for going outside. Your pet may no longer recognize family members.

Although there is no cure for CDS, some veterinarians recommend a diet rich in omega-three fatty acids. Anipryl, a drug used to treat Parkinson's Disease, Alzheimer's Disease and Cushing's Disease in humans, can help relieve CDS symptoms in some dogs.

Anipryl is currently not approved for use in cats but some veterinarians do use it as an off-label medication and find that it helps their feline patients.

There are other treatable conditions that can cause the same symptoms as CDS and these should be ruled out by your pet's veterinarian.

These conditions include hypothyroidism, loss of hearing or sight, Cushing's Disease, osteoarthritis, urinary tract infection, renal disease or a neurological disorder.

If your pet has CDS, there are several things you can do to make his life easier.

- ◆ Talk to your pet's veterinarian about changing his pet's diet to one that contains high levels of antioxidants.
- ◆ Keep his routine consistent.
- ◆ Help your pet with his elimination needs. Add more litter boxes throughout your house if you have a cat. If arthritis is a problem in addition to CDS, make sure that the litter boxes are low enough for your cat to climb into. If your cat seems to forget to use the litter box, take him to the box several times every day.
- ◆ The combination of arthritis and CDS can make it difficult for your dog to avoid accidents. If he has trouble walking up and down your porch steps, buy or build a ramp that fits over the steps.
- ◆ Take your dog outside several times every day if he has a problem getting through your pet door. Navigating the narrow space of a pet door can be too much for a dog with arthritic hips and he might decide it's better to eliminate inside the house.
- ◆ Take your cat to the veterinarian if he stops using the litter box. Urinary tract infections can contribute to loss of house-training and litter box use and should be ruled out before you assume that dementia is the problem. Urinary tract infections are easily treated with antibiotics.
- ◆ Don't stop playing with your cat or dog. Playing and training help keep the mind sharper and may slow the progression of the disease.