

Cognitive Dysfunction in Dogs

The Senior and Geriatric Dog Vet Society recommends regular screening for cognitive dysfunction (CD) in canine patients over 6 years presented for wellness exams. If contributing medical concerns have been ruled out and treated, then a diagnosis of cognitive dysfunction may be made if behavioral changes are present. The most common signs of cognitive decline include disorientation, altered social interactions, altered sleep-wake cycles, loss of house training, and anxiety (DISHA). In addition, many dogs with CD have trouble learning new tasks, may 'forget' previously learned tasks, or may develop separation anxiety. It is important to rule out and treat any medical disorders that may contribute to or cause behavioral changes. In addition, behavioral disorders that have been present but left untreated throughout the dog's life should be differentiated.

Regular screening starting at 6-8 years of age will help create awareness in the senior dog's guardian to present their dog early. While there is no cure for CD, early diagnosis and subsequent treatment can help slow the progression of the disease and improve the welfare of the pet and the guardian.

DISHA assessment tool:

<https://www.purinainstitute.com/sites/default/files/2021-04/DISHAA-Assessment-Tool.pdf>

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