

# Recognizing Changes in Behaviour in Senior Pets as a Potential Sign for Medical Disorders

The Senior and Geriatric Dog Vet Society recommends regular screening for behavioral changes in senior patients presented for wellness exams. Behavioral changes may be one of the first signs of medical disorders, even if other clinical signs are not yet noticed or present. Guardians may not complain about behavioral changes since some clinical signs like 'slowing down', or 'sleeping more' are often considered normal in senior pets. Pain, in particular, has been associated with behavioral signs (noise phobias) in 28-80% of cases, this may include gastrointestinal, dermatological as well as orthopedic pain. Guardians may not readily identify pain, but the practitioner should investigate this carefully, especially in senior pets. In addition, behavioral changes may also be one of the first clinical signs of endocrine, neurological, or neoplastic diseases and should be investigated thoroughly before making a behavioral diagnosis only. Clinicians should avoid running diagnostics for medical disorders only when treatment for behavioral disorders fails but instead include this in the initial diagnostic plan. Behavioural clinical signs may require treatment, even if the medical disorder has been controlled, as learning may have occurred. Regular screening for behavioral changes helps make an early diagnosis and treatment plan and creates awareness with the senior pet guardians.

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