

Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome in Dogs

A brief guide on disease progression including end-of-life symptoms

Common Signs of Pain

- Panting
- Lameness
- Difficulty sleeping
- Pacing
- Abnormal posture
- Body tensing
- Poor grooming habits
- Tucked tail
- Dilated pupils
- Licking sore spot
- Muscle atrophy
- Decreased appetite
- Vocalizing/yowling
- Reclusive behavior
- Aggressive behavior
- Avoiding stairs/jumping
- Depressed
- Unable to stand

Before your pet's condition becomes unmanageable or they are losing quality of life, it is important to begin end-of-life care discussions. Learn about pet hospice care and/or euthanasia services in your area so you are prepared for what lies ahead.

What is it?

In dogs with Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (CDS), the brain undergoes a series of changes that result in a decline in the mental faculties associated with thinking, recognition, memory, and learned behavior. Fifty percent of dogs over age 10 will exhibit one or more symptoms of CDS. Cognitive dysfunction is a progressive disease with increasing signs of senile behavior, similar to the behavior demonstrated by humans with Alzheimer's disease, even though physiologically it is more similar to Parkinson's Disease.

How is it treated?

The only effective treatment at this time is an oral medication known as deprenyl (Anipryl) that treats the associated signs and increases brain concentrations of dopamine. Some dogs show a marked improvement while others do not respond at all. It may take up to 2 to 3 weeks to see improvement of clinical signs. Some herbal remedies have shown to be beneficial.

What is the prognosis for cognitive dysfunction syndrome?

Prognosis of this disease is dependent on the response to treatment. Prognosis is poor for those dogs that do not respond to medical therapy, as their condition will continue to deteriorate. Progressive disease will eventually lead to a static lifestyle for your pet or may cause him/her to be put in harmful situations. Often there is not a crisis situation, but rather a steady decline in quality of life. It can be a difficult decision to end the life of a pet whose body may be functioning well, but whose mind is not. A personalized treatment plan is important to manage CDS. Talk to your veterinarian regarding the best treatment protocol for your pet.

What symptoms can present as the disease progresses?

EARLY STAGES:

- Reduced activity
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Reduced responsiveness/apparent deafness
- Change in behavior
- Excessive panting
- A changed interest in food
- Difficulty navigating their regular environment

LATE STAGES:

- Persistent early stages
- Confusion/disorientation
- Inability to recognize familiar people
- Increased thirst
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Standing in corners or facing walls
- Wandering aimlessly
- Agitation/aggression
- Excessive barking

CRISIS:

Immediate veterinary assistance needed regardless of the disease

- Difficulty breathing
- Prolonged seizures
- Uncontrollable vomiting/diarrhea
- Sudden collapse
- Profuse bleeding – internal or external
- Crying/whining from pain*

**If your pet vocalizes due to pain or anxiety, please consult with your tending veterinarian immediately.*