

Canine Cognitive Disorder

Pet Health Network Contributors

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Overview

In simple terms, canine cognitive disorder, also called canine cognitive dysfunction, is dog dementia and a lot like Alzheimer's disease. While the conditions are not identical, the effects are very similar. This disorder impacts dogs late in life, and usually comes on slowly and gradually. The brain, just like the rest of the body, starts to deteriorate with age. In some cases, the deterioration causes changes in the physical and chemical makeup of the brain, resulting in a decrease in your dog's cognitive function.

What do we mean when we say "cognitive function"? It encompasses all of the mental processes, such as perception, memory, awareness, and judgment. Cognitive dysfunction is sometimes described as a "foggy brain"—a state in which normal, everyday functions are no longer simple.

All senior dogs are at risk for canine cognitive disorder (CCD), and every dog is affected differently.

Some of the most common signs of CCD are:

- Behavior changes
- Reduced ability to see, hear, or taste
- Aimless wandering
- Difficulty maneuvering around familiar environments
- Confusion/disorientation
- Staring off into space
- Loss of housebreaking skills
- Barking
- Obsessive behaviors (licking, barking, etc.)
- Anxiety
- Inability to recognize familiar objects or people
- Altered sleeping and waking cycles
- Reduced interest in food or family

Diagnosis/Treatment

Unfortunately, there is no single diagnostic test for CCD. Your veterinarian will perform complete physical and

neurologic exams and take a thorough history of your pooch. They most likely will recommend diagnostic tests to confirm the cause of his symptoms. These diagnostic tests also serve as a preventive care screening, which can help to detect other diseases in their earlier stages that might have similar signs.

These diagnostic tests may include:

- Chemistry tests to evaluate kidney, liver, and pancreatic function, as well as sugar levels
- Blood tests to identify if your pet has been exposed to tick-borne or other infectious disease
- A complete blood count to rule out blood-related conditions
- Electrolyte tests to ensure your dog isn't dehydrated or suffering from an electrolyte imbalance
- Urine tests to screen for [urinary tract infection](#) and other disease, and to evaluate the ability of the kidneys to concentrate urine
- A thyroid test to determine if the thyroid gland is producing too little thyroid hormone
- An ECG to screen for an abnormal heart rhythm, which may indicate underlying [heart disease](#); or blood tests such as Cardiopet proBNP to assess heart health.

Additional tests may be added on an individual dog-by-dog basis. Your veterinarian will recommend what is right for your pet.

Treatment

Regrettably, there is no cure for this disorder, but it can be treated to slow progression or improve signs. Drug therapy is a very popular way to treat canine cognitive dysfunction. These medications take time to kick in, but may help to improve your dog's cognitive function and increase her comfort and level of contentment. Other helpful steps can include antioxidant treatments, mental stimulation, and lifestyle modification.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian – they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.