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Dr. Brooke is a Greensboro native and works at Sedgefield Animal Hospital and Dental Center. A graduate of North Carolina State, she has been practicing veterinary medicine for 12 years. Dr. Brooke enjoys working closely with pet owners to provide all of her patients

Is It 'Just' Old Age?

What is Canine Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (CDS)?

Canine cognitive dysfunction syndrome is a physical breakdown of brain tissue seen in older dogs, that can be compared to Alzheimer's disease in people. The signs associated with the disease are usually slowly progressive and similar to age-related changes, so it can be difficult to recognize when something is wrong. Unfortunately, the only way to truly diagnose this condition is a brain biopsy, which is something we would obviously not recommend. Otherwise, it is diagnosed based on clinical signs, ruling out other diseases, and seeing how a pet responds to treatment.

What are the symptoms of CDS?

Because the signs can also be normal age-related changes, it is important to work closely with your veterinarian to determine what is 'just' old age and what warrants further investigation.

Symptoms may include:

- Restlessness/wandering/pacing
- Lack of interest in surroundings/events
- Confusion/disorientation/staring blankly
- Increased or decreased sleeping
- Reduced responsiveness to commands/apparent deafness
- Inability to recognize familiar people
- Increased thirst
- Excessive panting
- Loss of house training or having accidents in the house
- Excessive barking

What is the next step if my pet has any of the clinical signs listed above?

Rule out other diseases! Your veterinarian will do a full physical examination, take a complete history including nutrition and behavior, and perform routine lab work to rule out other common diseases. Based on the lab work, additional diagnostics may be

recommended if there are any abnormalities. Recently, a blood test has become available for diagnosing humans with Alzheimer's disease, so eventually this may be an option for our pets!

What other diseases can mimic CDS and have similar clinical signs?

There are LOTS of diseases that can look like CDS. Some of the most common ones are:

- Hypothyroidism
- Kidney disease
- Liver disease
- High blood pressure
- Cancer

If my pet has CDS, what can be done to help him?

As with Alzheimer's, unfortunately there is no cure for CDS, but there are quite a few options to help these pets. Regardless of the type of CDS, the common clinical feature is oxidative stress and damage to the brain cells. Therefore, all treatments look at helping with oxidative damage.

Treatment options include:

Anti-oxidants- we recommend a powerful anti-oxidant and will sometimes prescribe a combination of pet anti-oxidants and an omega fatty acid supplement. Supplements can vary dramatically and a recent study indicated that 80% of supplements sold over-the-counter do NOT contain what they claim to contain. For that reason there are certain brands that we trust.

Diet- we strongly recommend a high quality diet! In addition, certain diets contain prescription strength anti-oxidants and can replace supplements. Several companies have come out with diets specifically formulated for pets with brain disease. Ask us if you are interested in learning more about them.

Medication- There are a few medications that have been proven to help with CDS and Alzheimer's. This is a constantly changing field of medicine so always feel free to ask questions.

Behavior therapy or modification- anti-depressants and behavior modification can be helpful with some pets. Also, making changes around the house to decrease stress on your pet can be very helpful! Changes include blocking off stairs, elevating food and water bowls and changing the location of your pet's bed. We can discuss more specific recommendations for your pet's unique needs.

This can be a very frustrating illness to deal with, but there are things we can do to make it better! It can be tempting to simply sedate a pet with medications such as Xanax, but this can actually cause additional damage and can cause clinical signs to worsen over time.

There is help out there. If you think your pet has signs consistent with CDS, let's work together to help both you and your pet deal with the difficulties of aging!

See our ad on page 4.