

Dog Alzheimer's – What is Canine Cognitive Dysfunction?

Are you worried that your old dog seems confused or senile? Like humans, dogs can suffer from brain ageing called canine cognitive dysfunction (CCD). It's actually pretty common and affects somewhere between 14% and 35% of dogs. It is usually seen in dogs over 8 years of age¹.

CCD is often compared to human Alzheimer's disease and there are some similarities between the two. Both are linked to a decrease in brain function, and are progressive diseases – worsening over time. Although there is not a cure for CCD, there are things you can do to help delay the start and progression of the disease. Some of these are described at the bottom of this fact-sheet.

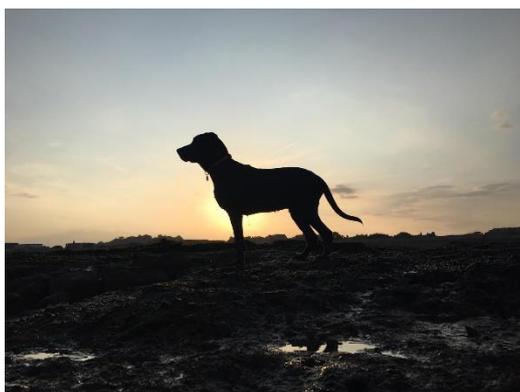


What causes CCD?

The symptoms of CCD occur because of a combination of several changes that take place within the brain. The underlying cause behind these is not very well understood yet, but are partly due to natural brain ageing. The brain becomes less good at making use of available energy, and deterioration of nerve cells and blood vessels are also commonly seen.

What are the signs?

The signs of CCD vary between individuals, and you may only notice a few of these in your pet. The four most commonly reported are apparent confusion, anxiety, disturbance to the sleep cycle (being awake at night), and decreased pet-owner interaction¹. Other signs you might be aware of include decreased activity levels, pacing, toileting accidents, trying to squeeze through gaps that are too narrow and increased barking^{1,3}. Bear in mind that many of these symptoms can also indicate a different health or behaviour problem, so always speak to your vet if you are concerned.



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What can be done?

There is a lot of evidence to show that providing great environmental enrichment can help to delay the start of CCD or slow down its progression. This means there are many ways you can help to keep your pet and their brain active. There are also special diets and medical options that your vet will be able to advise you on. These tend to vary in how effective they are depending on the individual.

At home, these are some things you can do to try and help your dog^{2,4}:

- Maintain a familiar environment by keeping furniture and household items in the same place.
- Keep food and water bowls in the same locations as well, so your pet can always find them.
- Add in specific cues to help your dog identify rooms in the house. For example, you can keep a radio on in a room.
- Keep calm and be a positive presence, even if your pet has an accident; remember they may not even be aware of what they have done.
- You can try some basic training with your dog to help them remember certain behaviours. You can alter certain commands to accommodate changes in their ability, for example training them to “stand” rather than “sit”. Adding in hand signals and high motivation treats (nothing too fatty) can help.
- Consider mental enrichment such as new age-appropriate toys and games.
- Ask your vet for advice, including treatments, diet and supplements to increase levels of omega-3, Vitamin E and MCTs (medium chain triglycerides), which support brain function. Omniomega is a supplement high in Omega 3 fatty acids and Vitamin E.
- Avoid any home remedies without consulting your vet, as these can have side-effects even if they are considered to be ‘natural’.
- Aim to keep to a usual routine, where possible, with walks and meal-times.
- Get your dog out on walks at a length and pace that suit them, and allow plenty of time for sniffing for mental stimulation.



1. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30846383?fbclid=IwAR1q3aN2QF--wCTez1X0cAVKujKShr7TPVlykWRREmLPXrWw52kOILiho1k>
2. <https://www.pdsa.org.uk/taking-care-of-your-pet/looking-after-your-pet/all-pets/dementia-in-pets>
3. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6943310/>
4. <https://todaysveterinarypractice.com/management-of-dogs-and-cats-with-cognitive-dysfunction/>

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