

13 Telling Signs Your Dog Is Suffering from Doggie Dementia

Clinical signs of cognitive decline are found in half of dogs over age 11. And if they live to age 15, it jumps to 68%. Do you know these 13 signs your dog is losing his mental abilities — and the top 10 tips for keeping him mentally sharp during his golden years?

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Many dogs begin to display behavior changes as they age
- Any change in your dog's behavior, regardless of age, should prompt a visit to your veterinarian for a thorough checkup
- If there are no underlying health problems contributing to your older dog's changing behavior, the cause could be canine cognitive decline
- Common signs of cognitive decline in dogs include an increase in the amount of time spent sleeping, decreased attention to surroundings, and generalized anxiety
- There are many things you can do as your older dog's guardian to help her stay mentally fit, including providing her with the right diet, beneficial supplements, and daily age-appropriate exercise

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As your dog gets up in years you may notice his behavior changing in subtle or even not-so-subtle ways. For example, some senior dogs, much like older humans, start sleeping more during the day and roaming the house at night.

And like people in their senior years, some older dogs may spend the overnight hours pacing or exhibiting other signs of generalized anxiety, such as panting for no apparent reason.

If your dog is in his golden years and you've noticed changes in his behavior, if you haven't already, the first thing you should do is arrange for a thorough wellness checkup with your veterinarian. It's especially important with senior pets to rule out underlying disorders that could be triggering behavior changes.

The Importance of Senior Pet Wellness Checkups

After the age of 8 (younger for some large and all giant breeds), your dog's wellness and nutritional needs can require fine-tuning every four to six months. In older pets especially, it's important to review weight, muscle tone, joint range of motion, diet, supplement protocol, and exercise habits at least semi-annually.

The senior pet wellness screen is an excellent tool for early detection of changes in your dog's health so that treatment, including appropriate lifestyle adjustments, can begin immediately.

Regular wellness screens allow your veterinarian to compare current test results with past results to check for changes that may need further investigation.

One of the most important benefits of early disease detection is that treatments are often more effective and less costly, and the quality of your pet's life can be maintained. Senior wellness testing involves several elements and can include:

- Physical examination
- Glaucoma screen and retinal exam
- Blood chemistry tests
- BNP heart health blood test
- Complete blood count (CBC)
- Blood pressure measurement
- Urinalysis
- Digital X-rays (chest and abdomen)
- Thyroid screen
- Tests for tick-borne illness

During senior wellness exams, your vet should also review the dog's diet and supplement protocol. Studies show dogs (and cats) need more protein as they age to maintain lean muscle mass and good organ and immune function.

Healthy pets of all ages need to eat a balanced, fresh, and whole food diet, preferably raw, made with organic, non-GMO ingredients. Some senior pets may need a diet that restricts phosphorus or sodium intake.

Your vet should also review your pet's supplement protocol and make suggestions based on the most recent diagnostic test results, physical exam, and any other health concerns.

So again, before deciding your older dog's altered behavior is age-related, it's important to ensure your canine family member isn't dealing with an undiagnosed illness or painful condition that needs to be addressed.

Is Your Furry Family Member Showing Signs of Doggy Dementia?

If your dog gets a clean bill of health, or if your veterinarian doesn't feel her behavior changes are the result of an underlying disease process, it's time to consider the possibility of canine cognitive dysfunction (CD), which is similar in many ways to Alzheimer's disease or dementia in humans.

Clinical signs of cognitive dysfunction syndrome are found in 50% of dogs over the age of 11, and by the age of 15, 68% of dogs display at least one sign.¹

However, dogs as young as 6 can begin to experience mental decline, so if your pet is around that age and is showing one or more symptoms of CD, don't rule out an age-related problem. The five most common symptoms of CD are:

- Increased total amount of sleep during a 24-hour period
- Decreased attention to surroundings, disinterest, apathy

- Decreased purposeful activity
- Loss of formerly acquired knowledge, which includes housetraining
- Intermittent anxiety expressed through apprehension, panting, moaning, shivering

Other signs, especially in the later stages of CD, can include:

- Failure to respond to commands and/or difficulty hearing
- Standing in corners or facing walls
- Inability to recognize familiar people
- Excessive barking
- Difficulty navigating familiar environments
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Wandering aimlessly
- Confusion/disorientation

Cognitive dysfunction in a dog is a diagnosis of exclusion. There are many conditions your older pet can acquire that mimic the signs of cognitive decline, so it's important to rule out all other physical reasons for a change in behavior.

For example, a small seizure can cause a pet to stand still and stare. If your pet seems detached, he could be in pain. Inappropriate elimination can be due to kidney disease. These disorders and many others can result in a change in behavior unrelated to cognitive decline. That's why it's so important to rule out all possible alternative reasons, especially in aging pets.

10 Tips for Helping Your Senior Dog Stay Mentally Sharp

Fortunately, there are many things you can do to help your aging dog maintain good mental function for as long as possible, and delay the onset and progression of cognitive decline.

1. The foundation for good health and vitality for pets of any age is a nutritionally balanced meat-based diet made from whole, fresh, organic, non-GMO ingredients suitable for your carnivorous dog.
2. Your pet's diet should also include an abundance of omega-3 essential fats, such as krill oil, which are critical for cognitive health.
3. Keep your dog's body and mind active with regular age-appropriate physical activity and mental stimulation (puzzles and treat-release toys can be beneficial). Senior and geriatric dogs need daily exercise to maintain good health and a resilient frame.
4. Massage, chiropractic care, acupuncture, and/or activities like water exercise help maintain muscle tone and balance, and alleviate joint pain.
5. Make sure your dog has opportunities to socialize with other pets and people.
6. Provide your dog with a SAME (S-adenosylmethionine) supplement as a safe and effective way to stall or improve mental decline. Consult your holistic or integrative veterinarian about dosing.
7. Medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs) have been shown to improve brain energy metabolism and decrease the amyloid protein buildup that results in brain lesions in older pets. Coconut oil is a rich source of MCTs. Feed

1/4 teaspoon for every 10 pounds of body weight twice daily for basic MCT support.

8. Other supplements to consider are jellyfish extracts,² resveratrol (Japanese knotweed), which protects against free radical damage and beta-amyloid deposits, ginkgo biloba, gotu kola, and phosphatidylserine — a nutritional supplement that can inhibit age-related cognitive deficits. Again, you should consult your holistic veterinarian for dosing guidance.
9. Keep your dog at a healthy size — overweight pets are at significant increased risk for disease as they age.
10. Maintain your pet's **dental health**.

Canine cognitive dysfunction is a progressive disease that can't be cured, but early diagnosis and intervention can slow mental decline and offer your aging dog a good quality of life.

Sources and References

[Stevens Point Journal March 19, 2016](#)

¹ [PetMD \(Archived\)](#)

² [ScienceDaily, October 28, 2006](#)
