What is Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome?

If you have an aging pet, particularly a dog, that is showing signs of confusion, failing to recognize you or exhibiting separation anxiety, they may have Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome.

CDS is believed to be a series of chemical changes, similar to Alzheimer's in humans, that take place in the brain as pets age. A University of California-Davis study found that more than 60 percent of dogs age 11 or older examined showed at least one sign of CDS, while a pet parent survey found 50 percent of dogs age eight or older exhibited at least one sign.

Holistic veterinarian Gloria Dodd lists the following symptoms of CDS at her Web site:

- Forget how to navigate stairs
- Stop greeting owner
- Spend much time sleeping during the day
- Forget they ate and want to eat again
- Night pacing
- Press their heads into corners of walls, or stare blankly at the wall
- Become aggressive or develop separation anxiety
- Cats howl at night for no reason, go into closets and can’t find their way out

CDS can ultimately lead to aggression, overeating or other health problems that may lead to having to put the pet down.

The first step in dealing with possible CDS is to meet with your veterinarian to make a diagnosis. Pfizer, a pharmaceutical company which makes the CDS medicine Anipryl, for dogs, has a Senior Dog CDS Checklist on their Web site you can download, fill out and take to your vet, as well as a Senior Dog Behavior History Form you can use.

Dodd’s holistic approach to treating CDS is to cleanse the pet’s system of aluminum, which she believes plays a key role in brain and nervous system damage. She recommends eliminating all commercial kibbled pet foods, replacing aluminum feeding and water bowls with stainless steel or glass, to refrain from wrapping pet food in aluminum foil and to switch to bottled spring water, since many municipal water supplies contain high amounts of aluminum. More specific information, including specific diet and medical treatments, are available on her Web site.

Clinical tests of Anipryl have shown improvement in dogs of at least one CDS signs after one month, according to Pfizer. Some side effects included vomiting, diarrhea and behavior changes, such as hyperactivity and restlessness.

By Steve Milano