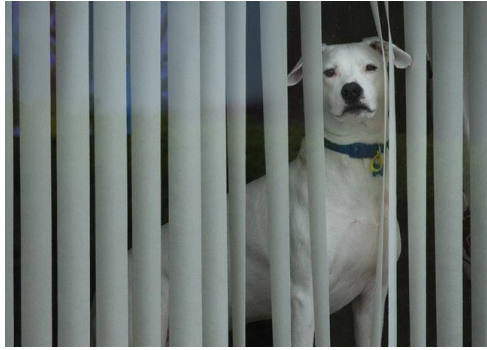


9 Signs Your Dog May Be Getting Dementia



If you have a dog, you probably hate thinking about negative things, such as the signs your dog may be getting dementia. But part of being a good pet owner is acknowledging that our pets do get sick, and they do age. And the more we can learn about all of the above, the better we can take care of them.

Dog dementia, otherwise known as Canine Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (CCDS), is very similar to Alzheimer's disease in humans. If your dog has it, they may start to show signs of confusion, anxiety, listlessness, and other neurological-based problems. But usually not until they're older.

"Age of onset can vary greatly based on individual breed characteristics, however we commonly see signs of CCDS in dogs 11 years and older," Dr. Emily Wilson, of Fuzzy Pet Health, tells Bustle. "Subtle initial clinical signs can be noted as early as seven years of age in some dogs."

The good thing is, if you notice signs of dementia, there are ways to help your dog feel better and stave off worsening symptoms. "One of the best things is regular environmental enrichment and mental stimulation," Dr. Wilson says. "This can include food puzzles or some simple low stress training to help engage their minds on a daily basis. Regular low-impact exercise is also really important and it will also help maintain a healthy weight as well as mental stimulation." There are also special diets, natural supplements, and medications your vet can recommend, if need be.

If you're worried about your dog's health, notice these changes, or want to know more, make an appointment with a veterinarian. Here are some of the signs of dog dementia to watch out for, as your dog gets older.

1. Aimless Wandering

Sometimes dogs want to wander around the house, so no need to worry if yours is strolling around or peeking out windows. But if your dog is older, and they appear aimless or lost in their own home, it may be a sign of cognitive decline.

Changes in orientation can include aimless wandering, as well as pets appearing 'stuck,' such as in a corner for no apparent reason," Dr. Wilson says. "As dogs develop CCDS they have difficulty with day-to-day routine recognition and remembering where to go, similar to humans with Alzheimer's disease."

If your dog is beginning to feel lost, it can help to keep them on a strict routine. "Keeping a regular schedule with your dog [can] minimize [their] confusion and anxiety," Dr. Turnera Croom, a holistic veterinarian, tells Bustle. "Also keep the layout of your home, and your dog's belongings, in the same place."

2. Changes In How They Interact With You

When a dog is getting dementia, they often go through slight personality changes, which can cause them to act differently around you.

"Social interaction changes are usually best gauged between the dog and the pet parent," Dr. Wilson says. "Signs can include seeking out the pet parent less for attention, increased anxiety, and increased fearfulness."

These new behaviors are usually due to confusion, and the anxiety it causes them. "All of these changes usually arise due to uncertainty of routine or familiarity, but each dog can show signs very differently because of varying personalities," Dr. Wilson says.

3. Peeing In The House

If your dog is house-trained, but is suddenly going to the bathroom inside, take note. As Dr. Wilson says, "Changes in house training are a common initial sign in some of our older dog patients. This may be due to decreased mobility in addition to confusion as to the 'routine' of going outside to potty. Dogs may forget or get confused which door to use to go outside even though it has been a part of their routine for years."

This could also be a sign of another health problem, such as gastrointestinal distress. One accident is usually nothing to worry about, but if it's become a habit, it may be a good idea to take your dog to the vet for a checkup.

4. Sleeping More Or At Odd Hours

Dogs sleep a lot, especially as they get older. And that's OK. With dog dementia, though, you may notice that they sleep more often than usual or at odd hours. Or that they have a different sleep/wake cycle than usual.

"It is important to pay attention to this since it can also be an early sign of CCDS," Dr. Wilson says. "Some dogs will start to sleep more during the day and then be restless with increased wakefulness during the night either due to increased anxiety or decreased awareness of their regular routine."

5. New Aggression

If your dog has always been sweet and laid back, but is now in the habit of growling at you or seeming shocked and territorial whenever your friends come over, it may be another sign dementia.

"Aggression toward family or friends [is] due to lack of recognition," Dr. Croom says. It's part of the cognitive decline, and a sign of confusion and anxiety — not hostility.

"The aggression that the dog may display confuses human family members prior to a definitive diagnosis," Dr. Croom says, which is why it's important to point out this new behavior to your vet, so they can suggest the correct treatment.

Keeping a routine can be a big help when it comes to lessening your dog's anxiety, as it makes them less likely to lash out in fear. There are also medications and supplements they can take, so it's definitely a fixable problem.

6. Loss Of Direction When Out For Walks

If your dog is getting dementia, you may notice they've lost their ability to follow usual routes while you're out walking, Dr. Croom says. And since this can cause them even more anxiety and confusion, sticking to a routine will be key.

"Trod down those well-worn sidewalks with your pup and help [them] remember the trees [they] always lifts [their] leg for," Dr. Croom says. By staying on the same path, your dog will feel more secure in their surroundings. And, as a bonus, exercise can really help stave off dementia symptoms.

7. Lack Of Interest In Play

For older dogs, a lack of interest in play can be a sign of dementia, according to Dr. Croom. So if your dog has always been down to play, but now has little interest, you should definitely point it out to your vet.

This could also be a sign of things like arthritis, as well as other health issues dogs encounter as they age, though. So try not to immediately assume it's dementia.

8. Pacing & Whining

All dogs whine and pace, especially if they're bored or need to go outside. Dogs with dementia do this more frequently, however, and at strange hours of the day.

"Pacing, whining, and panting are [...] common, and may increase in the evenings," certified professional dog trainer Erin Jones MSc, CPDT-KA, CDBC, tells Bustle. "As well [as a] change in sleeping patterns, such as waking up early or in the middle of the night and pacing."

9. Staring Off Into Space

As Jones says, if your dog has taken to staring off into space, it may be a sign of dementia. You know your dog best, so if this is out of character, it may be a good idea to ask a vet for advice.

Some changes in your dog's behavior can be attributed to other things, such as boredom, loneliness, or even other health issues — such as arthritis. If your dog is older, though, these changes may be an indication of dog dementia.

By spotting the signs of dementia, you can start adjusting how you care for your dog, possibly by stimulating their mind with fun games, taking them for more walks, or even giving them medications — whatever your vet suggests. It can be scary to watch your dog's mind decline, but there's quite a few things you can do to help them feel better.