



# White Whiskers

AGING PET CARE

Mobility · Pain · Hospice

## Aging and Cognitive Dysfunction

Like humans, as dogs and cats age there are degenerative changes that often occur in the brain. For some of us, this simply means forgetting where we put our phone or car keys but for others the process may be accelerated and more severe. The actual physiologic changes seen in the brain are very similar between species, so similar, in fact, that dogs are often used in studies attempting to learn more about how to prevent and treat Alzheimer's and Dementia in humans. In dogs, we refer to this condition as Canine Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (CDS) or "doggie dementia."

### ***CDS is most often characterized by the following changes:***

- Disorientation – i.e. getting lost in familiar places, wall staring
- Interactions – i.e. withdrawal from previous engagement, excess clinginess
- Sleep-wake cycles – i.e. Sleeps all day, restless at night
- House soiling – Loss of control and/or awareness
- Activity levels – Lethargy to anxious panting and pacing

Symptoms of CDS frequently occur at the same time our pets are undergoing age-related physical challenges which may leave your pet feeling more vulnerable on multiple levels. Since our animals depend on problem solving to know how to make themselves both physically and emotionally comfortable, being robbed of this ability can leave them feeling anxious. The physical manifestations of this anxiety are panting and pacing, behaviors that often become more intense at night.

Just as in humans, our understanding of how to prevent or treat CDS is lacking, but there are some correlations we can make based on current research in human medicine. **More than anything, we want to keep senior minds active which means providing them with a regular sensory input including, but not limited to regular walks (designed less for aerobic exercise, but more for mental stimulation), puzzles and controlled, novel experiences.** This has been shown to have a more positive and sustaining benefit for senior minds (human and pet alike) than any medication. While there are promising products available that address some of these neurologic changes, data remains limited in most and nothing appears to be a cure-all for our patients.

Whether there is a product that *is right* for you and your pet or we simply discuss small household modifications to make things easier for them, we look forward to sharing what we have learned over the years to help you map out a plan to make your senior pet's days comfortable and anxiety free.