



Canine Cognitive Disorder Informational Handout

Canine Cognitive Disorder (CCD) shares similarities with dementia and Alzheimer's in humans. It is most often seen in senior dogs (>6 years for large breeds, >12 years for small breeds). Symptoms include disorientation or confusion in familiar settings, changes in social behavior such as acting clingy or more aloof, anxiety/fear or aggression towards people/pets they know well, abnormal sleep patterns, loss of house training behaviors, and repetitive nonfunctional movements. Some dogs also develop weight loss due to reduced appetite from anxiety. This disorder is diagnosed as a rule-out (i.e., all other possible diagnoses are eliminated first). There are several things that can be done at home to manage dogs with CCD. We recommend avoiding exposure to stimuli that are known to cause your animal anxiety/distress. Normal/positive behaviors should be rewarded and encouraged. Punishment in any form - verbal, deprivational, or physical - will only worsen existing anxiety and worsen the problem(s). Problematic areas such as stairs, ledges, and tight corners where your dog could become trapped should be blocked off. If your dog has to be left alone for extended periods, we recommend setting up a secure space for them such as a room, pen, or kennel. This area should have a spot for toileting such as potty pads. If house soiling is a problem, frequent bathroom trips are recommended to encourage appropriate toileting behaviors. We recommend adding carpet runners or similar to surfaces with poor traction (i.e., laminate or hardwood flooring). Keep a regular routine for exercise/activity to maintain physical fitness. Mental stimulation can help improve cognitive ability and slow progression of the disorder. Treat balls, food toys, games involving puzzle solving, safe exercise, and interactive tasks are all useful. You can also add omega-3 fatty acids, which may have neuroprotective effects. A dosage of 1,500-2,000 milligrams per day is recommended. Please use a pet-specific formulation. There are prescription diets available formulated for neurologic health. Medications are available, but should only be used when appropriate behavioral and environmental management at home has failed to help.