

*Are dogs at risk for dementia as they age?*

It seems that increasing numbers of people are worried about whether it is possible that their dog might have Alzheimer's disease or some other form of dementia. The truth of the matter is that aging affects the brain in dogs the same way that it impacts the human brain. As they age, both species accumulate deposits of beta amyloids, a starch-like protein that forms islands of plaque, which then clog the brain and inhibit neural transmission. The similarity between the condition in older dogs and older humans is so great that the dog is actually being used as an experimental model for the study of Alzheimer's disease. When a dog shows signs of this problem, we refer to it as Canine Cognitive Dysfunction or CCD.

# Forget Me Not



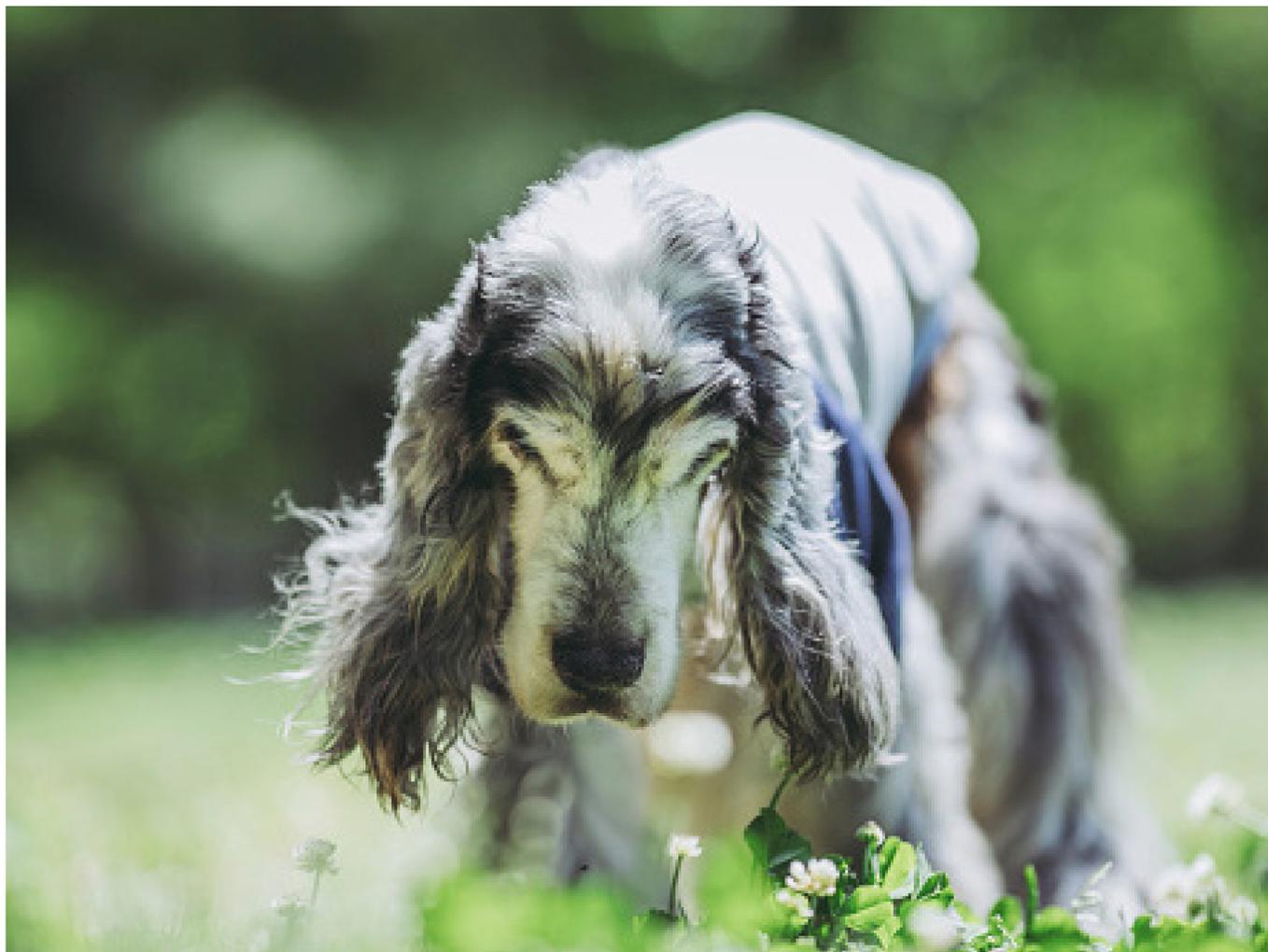
BY STANLEY COREN, PH.D.

Dementia in dogs was not a common problem 50 years ago, simply because dogs did not live as long as they do today. Because of advances in veterinary science there are now approximately 7,300,000 dogs who are 10 years or older in the United States, and it is estimated that around 62 percent of these older dogs will experience at least some symptoms of dementia.

I became personally aware of CCD a number of years ago when my much loved Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, Wizard, was in the middle of his twelfth year of life. It started with a change in his greeting behavior. He always met me at the door, but now his greeting behavior was much slower and uncertain even though both of the other dogs were already milling around me.

There were obvious signs that his mental abilities were slipping. At my dog-training club one of his favorite exercises was

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scent discrimination, where he had to go out to a pile of dumbbell shaped articles on the floor and retrieve the one that had my scent on it. He had always dashed to the pile and sniffed around with his tail batting from side to side until he found it and proudly returned to

me with it in his mouth. Now he would move out to the pile of articles, but then stand there as if confused, looking as though he had forgotten what he was supposed to do there. If I repeated the command for him to “Find it!” it would appear as though the light

bulb had come back on in his mind and he would search around and bring the article back to me.

These lapses in memory and mental processing were becoming more frequent. For instance, each day I’d let him out through the back door first thing in the morn-

ing so that he could eliminate. Normally he would dash down the steps with the other dogs and return to sit by the door when he was finished with his business. Now, however, he would walk out of the door, and simply sit on the porch and watch the other dogs in the yard. When they returned to be let back in, he would come along with them. A few minutes later he would slowly wander to door and look back at me with that “I have to go to the toilet” look. It became clear that once outside he simply was forgetting why he was there. Ultimately I had to snap his lead on, lead him down the steps, and then give him the “Be quick!” command that I had first taught him as a puppy when I began houstraining him simply to remind him why he was out there.

As is typical in CCD, Wizard was becoming more anxious than usual. He had always been a very placid,

easygoing dog. Now he seemed worried, especially at night when he would lie in bed panting heavily and reacting to any slight change in the environment.

The memory loss in CCD often leads to distressing situations. I have been told of dogs that wandered out into their own fenced backyard, apparently become lost, and seemed unable to find their way back to the door of the house. I have also heard of dogs that got trapped in corners or behind furniture because they couldn’t remember that they could escape by backing up. Other symptoms are decreased activity level and apparent loss of attentiveness. In Wizard’s case, this would show up as periods of many minutes where he would stare into space or at a blank wall.

Another noticeable symptom is changed sleeping patterns, which may be accompanied by increased anxiety, pacing behaviors,

or remaining awake for large segments of the night. Loss of other well-established habits is another symptom.

The behavior change that is most apt to be noticed by the owner is houstraining, where a previously houseclean dog will forget his training and make a mess where and when he normally wouldn’t.

Treatment of dementia in both dogs and humans is still a work in progress that’s being studied. According to laboratory results from the University of Toronto using aging Beagles as their test subjects, there are some promising drugs and dietary supplements which, when combined with some lifestyle changes, may slow or even reverse the process of the disease. **FD**

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# Signs of Aging in Dogs

As your pet enters his golden years, you may notice these changes.



### Limping

Arthritis and other age-related joint conditions affect many senior dogs. Supplements and physical therapy may help.

### Confusion or disorientation

Cognitive decline and vision/hearing loss of can cause your dog to act differently. He may forget a command or seem confused when you call. If your dog is not responding normally, speak to a veterinarian to identify the problem.



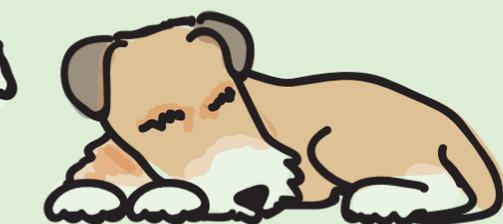
### Irregular potty times

Your dog might have to go out more often or have accidents in his crate. If this happens, talk to your vet. Also, be patient during this time—it is likely just as upsetting to him as it is to you.



### Bad breath

Dental disease is the most common condition afflicting adult dogs, and the first sign is often bad breath. Other signs include pawing at the mouth, spitting out food, and drooling. Regular cleanings and supplements can help prevent the buildup of plaque and tartar.



### Sleepiness

As a dog enters his senior years, he may take more frequent naps or sleep later than usual. This might be linked to a condition, like hypothyroidism, so speak to your vet if you notice any behavioral changes, particularly if it's paired with weight gain or loss.

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