

# Senior Pets



Naperville Area Humane Society

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*A better home. A better life. A better future.*

# ***Congratulations on your new family member!***

In order to provide you with support and set both you and your pet up for success, we have compiled some quick-reference information for you based on our most frequently asked questions!

Of course, we also have an abundance of resources on our website... but if we don't have what you're looking for, we can tell you who does!



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# Contents

<b>Contacts and Resources .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>When is My Pet a Senior? .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Changes in Senior Pets .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Senior Cat Care .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Senior Dog Care .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Pain Management .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Dealing with Medications .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Senior Diets .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Canine Cognitive Dysfunction .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Feline Cognitive Dysfunction .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>End of Life Planning .....</b>	<b>19</b>



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*A better home. A better life. A better future.*

## Contacts

As an adopter from NAHS, you are officially part of our family! You are always welcome to call or email with any questions.

(630) 420 - 8989

[adopt@naperhumane.org](mailto:adopt@naperhumane.org)

### ASPCA Poison Control

24/7 Emergency Line

(888) 426 - 4435

## Resources

Here are some of our favorite sources of information on everything pet! From **behavior** to **nutrition** to picking out the best **toys**, these sources have it all! Plus, it's all science-backed, verified information to ensure you're getting facts, not fiction.

### Fear Free Happy Homes

[www.fearfreehappyhomes.com](http://www.fearfreehappyhomes.com)



Take a look at the Adopter Resources page on our website!

We have lots of downloadable info. sheets and websites to visit for helpful tips, quick references, and more in-depth learning!



## ***When is My Pet a Senior?***



### **Dogs are considered seniors after 7 - 10 years old.**

Because every dog is an individual and breeds and sizes vary so widely, there is not a clear cutoff point for when a dog is considered a senior. Smaller dogs like Chihuahuas and small terriers can live upwards of 15 years. However, Great Danes, Mastiffs, and other giant breeds age significantly faster and may only live to 10 years old. Ask your vet if they consider your dog to be a senior if you aren't sure. There are also some telltale signs like a graying muzzle and common afflictions like arthritis to clue you in to whether or not your dog is getting to be a senior!



### **Cats are considered seniors after 12 - 14 years old.**

All cats are individuals, so some cats may begin to show signs of aging later than others. Signs of aging are similar to dogs, and may include common afflictions like arthritis and skin and coat deterioration. Other common afflictions that are typically seen in senior cats include dehydration, kidney disease, and hearing and vision loss.



### **Pets age differently than people!**

The concept of “dog years” or “cat years” is not entirely accurate. After the first year of their lives, dogs and cats are similarly matured as a 16-18 year old human. However, the animal's growth rate afterwards is significantly slower. So, a “human year” is not equivalent to 7 “dog years,” as you probably have heard before!

# ***Changes in Senior Pets***

## **What happens when my pet is a senior?**

Aging itself is not a disease. It is a natural process that is just often accompanied by illnesses and diseases as a pet advances in age. When pets reach a senior age, we often see changes in their physical, mental, and behavioral health.

### ***PHYSICAL***

As our pets age, their bodies become less adaptable and able to fight off illness. For example, their immune systems may weaken, their joints may become stiff, and they may start to develop dental disease, especially if dental care was not provided throughout their lives. Some cats may not experience any of these afflictions, while others may experience them all. Speak to your vet about preventative care!

### ***MENTAL***

Similarly to elderly people, pets may develop mental issues as they age. Our pets may become forgetful or disoriented at times, or become depressed or anxious if they are not physically able to do the things they did when they were younger. Our senior pets still need love and affection just as much as they need medical support during this phase of their lives.

### ***BEHAVIORAL***

Behavioral changes in our pets may be the first clues we get that a mental or medical change is occurring, especially if the behavior starts suddenly. Sometimes, the behavior we are seeing may not seem related at all to the issue, it's just different or unusual for your pet. This may be as simple as your pet not sleeping in their usual nap spots, having accidents in the house, refusing to go outside or come back in, or not being as playful as they used to. If you notice a change in your pet's behavior, check in with your vet!



# ***Senior Cat Care***

## **SEE THE VET**

Ideally, senior cats should see their vet twice a year for a physical exam and bloodwork. For older cats that are healthy, they can go with seeing their vet once a year. Senior cats' immune function may not be as strong as it used to be. We want to keep our senior cats healthy!

## **MAKE IT EASY**

Especially for cats with joint issues, making their food, water, litterboxes, and favorite resting places easy to access will help them stay healthy. Some cats have less control over their bowel, so making it easy to access the litterbox may minimize accidents, too!

## **PREDICTABILITY**

Cats in general like predictability in their life, but it is especially important for senior cats whose mental acuity may be lowering. Keep your cat in a routine so they know what to expect and when. This can also help to lower their stress levels!

## **KEEP WARM**

Cats love warmth, which is why they tend to gravitate towards cozy spots in the house. (Or even sit on your laptop!) For senior cats whose skin and fur coat may be thinner, providing warm places for them to rest and nap helps them stay physically and emotionally healthy.

## **KITTEN FREE**

Chances are, your senior cat will not benefit from having a kitten around. Having a rambunctious cat or kitten around may cause your senior cat undue stress and be more detrimental than helpful. Instead, help your cat "stay young" by encouraging play and quality time with you.

## **EXTRA HELP**

Our senior cats may not be able to see, hear, or move as well as they used to. Help them out by keeping a light on, giving them a boost to their favorite nap spot, and gently brushing them regularly. Especially for deaf cats, providing a window perch for them can be great enrichment!

## **COMMON ISSUES TO WATCH FOR**

- Dehydration
- Loss of appetite or weight loss
- Thinner, weaker skin
- Overgrown, brittle nails
- Excessive meowing
- Disorientation and wandering
- Avoidance or loss of interest in activities or socialization
- Lowered ability to groom themselves
- Hearing loss
- Vision loss or ocular changes
- Dental disease
- Kidney disease or failure
- Arthritis or joint stiffness
- Hyperthyroidism or hypothyroidism
- Hypertension

# ***Senior Dog Care***

## **SEE THE VET**

Ideally, senior dogs should see their vet twice a year for a physical exam and bloodwork. For older dogs that are healthy, they can go with seeing their vet once a year. Senior dogs' immune function may not be as strong as it used to be. We want to keep our senior cats healthy!

## **MAKE IT EASY**

Especially for dogs with joint issues, making their food, water, and favorite resting places easy to access will help them stay healthy. Some senior dogs have less control over their bowel and bladder, so making it easy to access their elimination area may minimize accidents, too!

## **PREDICTABILITY**

Dogs in general like predictability in their life, but it is especially important for senior dogs whose mental acuity may be lowering. Keep your dog in a routine so they know what to expect and when. This can also help to lower their stress levels!

## **KEEP WARM**

For senior dogs whose skin and fur coat may be thinner, providing warm places for them to rest and nap helps them stay physically and emotionally healthy. Keep your senior dog indoors when the weather is cooler, and when they do go outside, have them wear a coat.

## **PUPPY FREE**

Chances are, your senior dog will not benefit from having a puppy around. Having a rambunctious dog or puppy around may cause your senior dog undue stress and be detrimental. Instead, help your dog "stay young" by encouraging play and quality time with you.

## **EXTRA HELP**

Our senior dogs may not be able to see, hear, or move as well as they used to. Help them out by keeping a light on, giving them a boost to their favorite spot on the couch, and helping them up the stairs. Many senior dogs also benefit from an orthopedic bed to rest and sleep on.

## **COMMON ISSUES TO WATCH FOR**

- Lower energy levels or restlessness
- Loss of appetite or weight loss
- Thinner, weaker skin
- Obesity or weight gain
- Excessive barking or whining
- Disorientation and wandering
- Avoidance or loss of interest in activities or socialization
- Loss of bladder/bowel control
- Hearing loss, vision loss or ocular changes
- Dental disease
- Anxiety or reactive behaviors
- "regressing" in training or behavior
- Arthritis or joint stiffness
- Benign tumors or growths
- Muscle atrophy or muscle tone loss



# Pain Management

## Signs of Pain in Dogs & Cats



### Dogs

- Decreased social interaction
- Increased sleeping
- Anxious expression
- Reluctance to move
- Whimpering, groaning, yelping
- Panting when resting
- Lameness or limping
- Not going up or down stairs
- Lack of interest in food or play
- Sudden behavior changes (e.g. aggression, biting, growling)
- Arched or hunched back
- Excessively chewing or licking a particular area of the body



### Cats

- Hiding
- Reduced activity
- Changes in litter box habits
- Hissing, spitting, screaming
- Lack of agility or jumping
- Excessive licking/grooming
- Stops grooming/matted fur
- Stiff posture or gait
- Tail flicking
- Loss of appetite, weight loss
- Changes in facial expressions: squinting eyes, ears pointing outward, tense muzzle

**AMC** | Animal Medical Center  
SINCE 1910 | Usdan Institute for  
Animal Health Education

**Our dogs and cats are very good at hiding their pain from us. Many of the signals that our pet may be in pain can be very subtle. By the time we notice obvious signs, our pet may be in a substantial amount of pain. Especially as our pets age, we should know the signs of pain and watch closely for them.**

## What can we do about pain?

### Pharmacological

Our pets' pain can often be managed with medication, such as painkillers. Typically, these will be **NSAIDs** (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs)\*. There are other drugs available that may also help based on the cause of pain. Opioids are not recommended for long term use, as there are concerns about efficacy of pain management over time as well as the potential for human drug abuse.

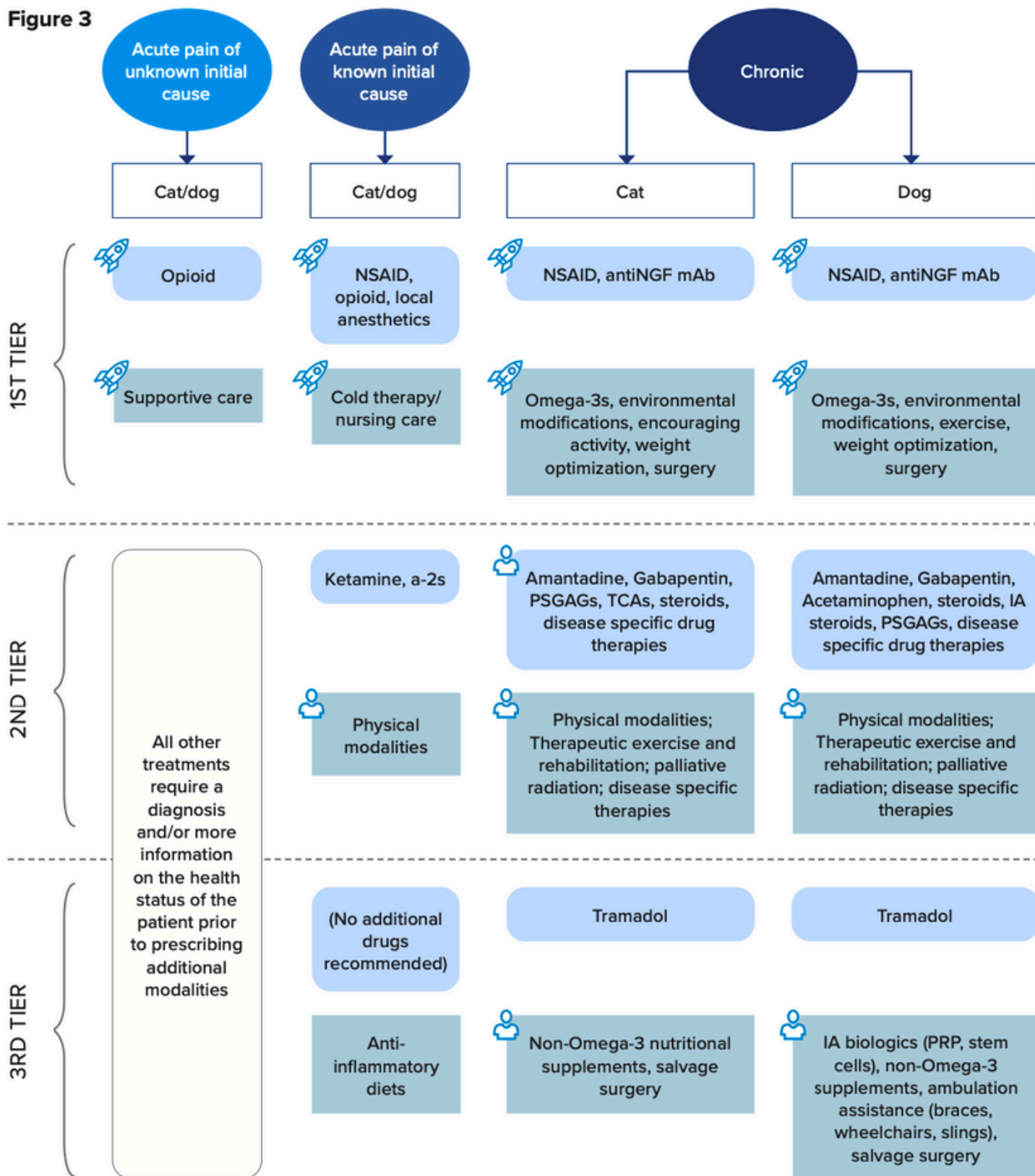
### Non-Pharmacological

Treatment and pain management that does not involve drugs directly can also be helpful. Certain **supplements**, making changes to the pet's **environment**, **exercise**, and managing the pet's **weight** can all be great ways to manage pain. Often, these can be used as preventative measures against pain as well! Keeping our pets physically fit can go a long way in preventing pain as they age.

**Check out the flowchart on the next page from the AAHA to look at recommended courses for managing pain in dogs and cats!**

\*Ibuprofen (Advil) is very toxic to dogs and cats, and should not be given under any circumstance.

Figure 3



# ***Dealing with Medications***

For most senior and geriatric pets, medications are part of the process of aging. While it may be a little overwhelming to try and administer multiple medications to your pet (especially if they aren't the most cooperative!), providing our senior pets with the best care we can and ensuring as little pain and stress as possible is very important for their overall wellbeing.

## ***Start Early***

Start teaching your pet to take pills and other forms of medication before you need them to! Trying to rush through cooperative care training because they need medication now does not usually go well. Being comfortable with taking medications can literally be lifesaving down the line. The ability to take medications easily means that your pet can receive a better level of care, and you will have more options!

## ***Fear Free***

An important part of learning to take medications is for your pet to feel safe while doing it. We want to go at our pet's pace, not pressure them, and reward them heavily after each little success! They do not understand why we want them to swallow a pill or hold still for an injection. This can be very scary for them, especially if they are not used to doing so or have not learned. By taking a "Fear Free" approach, we can minimize the stress for both us and our pets.

## ***Make it a Routine***

Our pets value predictability, especially when having to deal with something unpleasant. By working medications into a routine, we can minimize the stress involved for some animals. For example, maybe your pet gets their medication every night right before their dinner. Or maybe they get their medication every day before breakfast. If we can have our pets get their medication before a meal or a treat, this also doubles as a reward!

## ***Alternative Forms***

If you are struggling with a particular form of medication (for example, your cat really does not like taking pills), ask your vet if there are other forms the medication comes in. Maybe instead of giving your pet a pill, there is a liquid form of the medication available. Maybe you can crush the pill and mix it into a wet treat. (Always ask your vet before crushing up any pills!) Sometimes, changing the way medications are administered can make all the difference!



# HOW TO PILL YOUR PET WITH KINDNESS



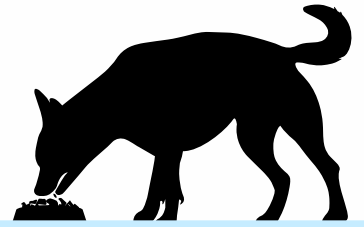
**FEAR FREE**  
**HAPPY**  
**HOMES®**  
Helping pets live happy, healthy, full lives

You can teach your pet to tolerate and even enjoy taking a pill. This is an important skill for young puppies and kittens to learn, and adult dogs and cats can benefit as well. Avoid this training if your pet is apprehensive or aggressive about being touched near the face. Here's how to get started.

- 🐾 Set up a comfortable treatment station with a nonslip surface in a quiet area of the home.
- 🐾 Take your pet to the treatment station routinely and give a special treat (something super-tasty that he doesn't get all the time) or meal there without doing a treatment. You are putting money in the treatment bank and creating a positive association with the location. Some treatments may be slightly uncomfortable, resulting in a small withdrawal from the bank of positive experiences. Create enough reserves to minimize impact.
- 🐾 Once your pet loves going to the treatment station, start practicing the pilling process there. Reach toward your pet's face, give a small treat, and let the pet eat the treat, repeating several times.
- 🐾 As long as the pet is not showing any avoidance or fear, progress to touching your pet's face by creating a 'C' with your thumb and index finger and placing your fingers over your pet's nose or, for small dogs and cats, over their forehead with your fingers behind their whiskers and lips. Give your pet a treat for accepting this handling. Repeat several times.
- 🐾 Begin to tip your pet's head back, and follow the action with a treat.
- 🐾 Next, with one hand stabilizing the nose/head and tilting it back, use your middle finger on your other hand to touch the front of your pet's lower jaw. Give a treat.
- 🐾 Holding a pea-size treat between your thumb and index finger, tilt the head back, and place your middle finger on the lower jaw. When your pet opens his mouth, place the treat in.
- 🐾 Continue to practice, opening the mouth wider for longer periods. Always follow with a treat. When a pill does have to be given, your pet will be relaxed with the process. Make sure to always follow pilling with a treat if medically appropriate.

You can use similar steps to teach your pet to accept procedures, such as ear cleaning or eye drops given. Consider incorporating the assistance of a skilled animal trainer dedicated to Fear Free and positive training methods to learn this skill with your pet. Contact your Fear Free Certified® Veterinary Professional for their recommendations.

# Senior Pet Diets

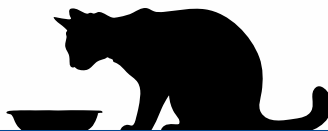


## What is a “senior diet”?

Pet diets labeled for senior pets are often not all that different from regular adult pet diets. There are no set requirements for senior diet nutrition as opposed to regular adult diets. Senior pet diets simply often include extra ingredients like joint supplements and extra fiber. Senior pet diets may also be less calorically dense, as obesity is a very prevalent issue among senior pets. Senior pets tend to have slower metabolisms and are less active, which both contribute to weight gain.

## Do I need to put my pet on a senior diet?

Not necessarily! While senior diets are “optimized” in a way, your pet will be getting all of the nutrients they need from a regular adult diet. Senior diets just have some more bells and whistles! Depending on your pet’s health and whether they have any chronic conditions, your veterinarian may recommend specific prescription diets.



## Senior Eating Habits

Your senior pet’s eating habits may change as they age. Their senses of smell and sight may grow weaker, potentially resulting in them being less interested in eating their usual food. Adding warm water, food toppers, or wet food may help the food to smell stronger and may make dry food easier on their teeth if they have dental issues. However, we want to ensure that we reduce the amount of food given in addition to the toppers or wet food, as the total caloric amount should stay the same. Adding in a lot of extra calories in the form of food toppers may get your pet to eat their food, but may also make them obese! You may also need to reduce the total amount of calories they eat per day if they are less active now.



# COGNITIVE DYSFUNCTION SYNDROME **EVALUATION TOOL**



Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (CDS) is an irreversible degeneration of the brain similar to Alzheimer's disease in humans, characterized by progressive cognitive impairment beyond that expected to occur with aging. CDS has a slow onset, can be difficult to manage and affects an estimated 14% of dogs 8 years and older.

## What Is DISHAA?

In order for a dog to be diagnosed with CDS, owners must observe their dog exhibiting specific behaviors. The DISHAA Tool helps owners identify these behaviors, enabling veterinarians and owners to work together to assess a dog's mental acuity.

<b>D</b>	<b>DISORIENTATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gets stuck, difficulty getting around objects, goes to hinge side of door</li> <li>• Stares blankly at walls, floor, or into space</li> <li>• Does not recognize familiar people/familiar pets</li> <li>• Gets lost in home or yard</li> <li>• Less reactive to visual (sights) or auditory (sounds) stimuli</li> </ul>
<b>I</b>	<b>SOCIAL INTERACTIONS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More irritable/fearful/aggressive with visitors, family or other animals</li> <li>• Decreased interest in approaching, greeting or affection/petting</li> </ul>
<b>S</b>	<b>SLEEP/WAKE CYCLES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pacing/restless/sleeps less/waking at night</li> <li>• Vocalization at night</li> </ul>
<b>H</b>	<b>HOUSESOILING, LEARNING AND MEMORY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less able to learn new tasks or respond to previously learned commands/name/work</li> <li>• Indoor soiling of urine or stool/decreased signaling to go out</li> <li>• Difficulty getting dog's attention/increased distraction/decreased focus</li> </ul>
<b>A</b>	<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease in exploration or play with toys, family members, other pets</li> <li>• Increased activity, including aimless pacing or wandering</li> <li>• Repetitive behaviors (e.g., circling/chewing/licking/stargazing)</li> </ul>
<b>A</b>	<b>ANXIETY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased anxiety when separated from owners</li> <li>• More reactive/fearful to visual (sights) or auditory (sounds) stimuli</li> <li>• Increased fear of places/locations (e.g., new environments/going outdoors)</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup>Salvin, HE, McGreevy, PD, Sachdev, PS, & Valenzuela, MJ (2010). Underdiagnosis of canine cognitive dysfunction: a cross-sectional survey of older companion dogs. Veterinary Journal (London, England : 1997). 184(3), 277-81. doi:10.1016/j.tvjl.2009.11.007



## COGNITIVE DYSFUNCTION SYNDROME

## ASSESSMENT TOOL



Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (CDS) is an irreversible degeneration of the brain similar to Alzheimer's disease in humans, characterized by progressive cognitive impairment beyond that expected to occur with aging. CDS has a slow onset, can be difficult to manage and affects an estimated 14% of dogs 8 years and older.

## What is DISHAA?

DISHAA is a tool to help you and your veterinarian assess the mental acuity of your dog, and for your veterinarian to potentially diagnose Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (CDS).



DISORIENTATION



SOCIAL INTERACTIONS



SLEEP/WAKE CYCLES



HOUSESOILING, LEARNING AND MEMORY



ACTIVITY



ANXIETY

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Owner's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Pet's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

Neutered/Spayed: ☐ No ☐ Yes

Breed: \_\_\_\_\_

Weight: \_\_\_\_\_

BCS (Body Condition Score 1-9): \_\_\_\_\_

Current Diet: \_\_\_\_\_

Medications and Dosage Frequency: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please complete this canine senior pet cognitive assessment. If you've noticed changes in multiple behavioral categories, be sure to talk to your veterinarian today about the health of your pet's aging brain.**

## BEHAVIORAL SIGNS

Identify signs that have arisen or progressed since 8 years of age and older.

**Score as 0=none, 1=mild, 2=moderate, 3=severe**
**Score**

### DISORIENTATION

Gets stuck, difficulty getting around objects, goes to hinge side of door

Stares blankly at walls, floor, or into space

Does not recognize familiar people/familiar pets

Gets lost in home or yard

Less reactive to visual (sights) or auditory (sounds) stimuli

Please complete assessment on other side.



## BEHAVIORAL SIGNS

Identify signs that have arisen or progressed since 8 years of age and older.

**Score as 0=none, 1=mild, 2=moderate, 3=severe**

**Score**

## SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

More irritable/fearful/aggressive with visitors, family or other animals

Decreased interest in approaching, greeting or affection/petting

## SLEEP/WAKE CYCLES

Pacing/restless/sleeps less/waking at night

Vocalization at night

## HOUSESOILING, LEARNING AND MEMORY

Less able to learn new tasks or respond to previously learned commands/name/work

Indoor soiling of urine \_\_\_ or stool \_\_\_ /decreased signaling to go out

Difficulty getting dog's attention/increased distraction/decreased focus

## ACTIVITY

Decrease in exploration or play with toys, family members, other pets

Increased activity including aimless pacing or wandering

Repetitive behaviors, e.g., circling \_\_\_ chewing \_\_\_ licking \_\_\_ stargazing \_\_\_

## ANXIETY

Increased anxiety when separated from owners

More reactive/fearful to visual (sights) or auditory (sounds) stimuli

Increased fear of places/locations (e.g., new environments/going outdoors)

## TOTAL (BE SURE TO CARRY OVER THE SCORES FROM FRONT SIDE OF SHEET)

Once this form is completed, your veterinarian will determine the cause of these signs through a physical examination and recommended diagnostic tests. However, even if your senior pet is experiencing multiple health issues associated with aging, there may be some degree of CDS.

A score of 4-15 is consistent with mild, 16-33 is moderate, and >33 is severe CDS.

## Cognitive Assessment and Health Concerns for Cats

Date ..... Pet's Name ..... Age .....

Category	Sign	Does not occur or is not applicable	Occurs once a month	Occurs once a week	Occurs once a day/night	Occurs more than once a day/night
VOCALIZATION	Vocalizes more than usual during the day or evening (meows or yowls)					
	Vocalizes more than normal during nighttime sleeping hours (meows or yowls)					
INTERACTIONS	More clingy/seeks more attention/more interest in being petted					
	Hiding/sleeping in unusual places					
	Less interest in being petted					
	Irritable or aggressive with family members					
	Irritable or aggressive with housemate pets					
	Less interest in greeting family members					
	More aloof/seeks less attention					
SLEEP/WAKE CYCLE	Asleep more than usual during the day					
	Awake more than usual during the night					
	Paces/wanders at night					
HOUSE SOILING	Urinates inappropriately in the house/outside the litter box					
	Defecates inappropriately in the house/outside the litter box					
	Urinates but seems unaware					
	Defecates but seems unaware					



## Cognitive Assessment and Health Concerns for Cats

Category	Sign	Does not occur or is not applicable	Occurs once a month	Occurs once a week	Occurs once a day/night	Occurs more than once a day/night
DISORIENTATION	Appears lost/wanders between rooms without purpose					
	Paces back and forth excessively or circles					
	Stares into space or stares absently at the floor or walls					
	Stands in corners					
	Gets stuck under or behind objects					
	Doesn't seem to recognize family members or housemate pets					
	Doesn't seem to recognize or is startled by familiar objects					
	Walks or bumps into doors or walls					
	Has trouble finding treats dropped on the floor					
	Less interested in or less reactive to sights and sounds					
	Has trouble finding food or water bowl					
ANXIETY	Increased anxiety when owners are away/doesn't like being left alone					
	Increased fear of new places/locations					
	More reactive to sights and sounds					
	Agitated or restless during the day or evening					
	Agitated or restless during nighttime sleep hours					

## Cognitive Assessment and Health Concerns for Cats

Category	Sign	Does not occur or is not applicable	Occurs once a month	Occurs once a week	Occurs once a day/night	Occurs more than once a day/night
ACTIVITY	Less or no interest in play or toys					
	Less or no interest in play with housemate pets					
	Less or no interest in self-grooming					
	Less or no interest in exploring					
	Exhibits repetitive behaviors (excessive grooming, licking inanimate objects)					
LEARNING AND MEMORY	Seems to have forgotten trained commands or routines, verbal cues, or name					
	Difficulty learning new commands or routines					
	Decreased focus/hard to get and retain pet's attention					
ADDITIONAL HEALTH CONCERNS	Vomiting					
	Diarrhea					
	Constipation					
	Straining to urinate					
	Straining to defecate					
	Vision loss					
	Hearing loss					
	Hair loss or thinning					
	Decreased appetite					
	Decreased water consumption					
	Increased appetite					
	Increased water consumption					

## Cognitive Assessment and Health Concerns for Cats

Category	Sign	Does not occur or is not applicable	Occurs once a month	Occurs once a week	Occurs once a day/night	Occurs more than once a day/night
ADDITIONAL HEALTH CONCERNS	Hesitant to jump up or down from favorite spots (couch, bed, table, cat tree)					
	Hesitant or unwilling to use stairs					
	Limping					
	Hesitant or unwilling to use scratching post					
	Weakness or sluggishness					

### Resources for Cognitive Assessment Checklist

Černá P, Gardiner H, Sordo L, et al. Potential Causes of Increased Vocalisation in Elderly Cats with Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome as Assessed by Their Owners. *Animals (Basel)*. 2020;10(6):1092. Published 2020 Jun 24. doi:10.3390/ani10061092

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Woodruff D. Cognitive Dysfunction and Related Sleep Disturbances. In: Gardner M, McVety D, eds. *Treatment and care of the veterinary geriatric patient*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017;57-76.



# ***End of Life Planning***

**Sadly, our pets cannot stay with us forever and will eventually reach the end of their lives. Planning for this will help both you and your pet deal with their passing as well as ensure they pass peacefully. You can ask your veterinarian about euthanasia services and what to expect.**

## ***How will I know it's time to euthanize my pet?***

**The biggest factor in deciding to euthanize your pet is assessing their quality of life. It can be a little difficult to objectively determine whether your pet is “living a life worth living.” Refer to the Quality of Life Assessment on the following page. Aside from quality of life, there are other factors to consider, such as the cost of keeping your pet alive (in regards to treatments, prescriptions, special diets, etc.) and whether being put through that treatment will lower their quality of life. For example, putting your senior pet through multiple surgeries to possibly extend their life by a month or two may not be worth the discomfort and pain of treatment. Ask your veterinarian about your pet's prognosis, treatment options and costs, as well as quality of life.**

## ***Something to Remember***

**Staying objective about your pet's current quality of life can be difficult, but ultimately may relieve some of the anxiety, guilt, and sadness that comes with choosing to euthanize a pet. Ask your veterinarian, a pet loss grief counselor, or another objective person for help. It may be tempting to say “just one more week” or “just get through this holiday season,” but as pet guardians, we need to remember to put our pet's emotional, mental, and physical needs first.**

## ***Signs It's Time to Consider Quality of Life***

- **They are in chronic pain that is not easily managed with medications**
- **They have stopped eating voluntarily or have lost interest in eating**
- **They have lost interest in activities they used to like to do, such as playing, eating treats, soliciting attention from other pets or family members, or going on walks**
- **They cannot stand on their own or frequently fall when attempting to walk**
- **They have chronic labored breathing or coughing**

# Quality of Life Assessment

Give your pet a score of **1 to 10** (1 being the worst and 10 being ideal) for each category. A **total of 35 points or less** is indicative that their quality of life is low and humane euthanasia should be considered. This scale was developed by Dr. Alicia Villalobos, a veterinary oncologist.

## **HURT**

## **SCORE**

Is your pet able to breathe, move, and simply exist without pain? Is the pain manageable with medication or other treatments?

\_\_\_\_\_

## **HUNGER**

Is your pet able to safely and comfortably take in adequate nutrition? Are they able to maintain a stable, healthy weight and body condition? Have they lost their appetite or are they overeating? Are they currently overweight or underweight?

\_\_\_\_\_

## **HYDRATION**

Is your pet able to safely and comfortably take in enough water? Are they able to maintain hydration? Are they drinking too much or too little water?

\_\_\_\_\_

## **HYGIENE**

Is your pet able to stay clean? Are they frequently soiling themselves or their belongings (like toys, blankets, and beds)? Are they getting sores from laying in one place for too long? Is their fur matted or dirty frequently?

\_\_\_\_\_

## **HAPPINESS**

Is your pet maintaining interest in activities? Do they still enjoy doing things they used to like doing, like playing or interacting with other pets or family members? Do they seem withdrawn, sad, antisocial, anxious, or depressed?

\_\_\_\_\_

## **MOBILITY**

Is your pet able to safely and comfortably get up and move about freely on their own? Do they frequently stumble, collapse, or fall? Is it painful to move?

\_\_\_\_\_

## **MORE GOOD DAYS THAN BAD**

Does your pet overall have more “good” days than “bad” days? Are they more often than not seeming “turned off” to life? Are they constantly nauseous, in pain, having trouble breathing, having diarrhea or seizures, or frustrated?

\_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL** \_\_\_\_\_