

New Hope for Senior Dogs

'Senile' dogs may get a second chance.

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No other medications are approved for treating cognitive dysfunction in the United States. As research progresses on cognitive dysfunction in dogs and Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia in humans, other CDS treatments should become available. Nicergoline, a drug that increases cerebral blood flow, is available in the United Kingdom for treating dogs' age-related behavioral disorders - and one day may be available here. Gingko, antioxidants and other compounds purported to help maintain brain function have yet to be proven.

Meanwhile, owners can help prevent mental deterioration in older dogs through ongoing activities. "People can engage their dog in activities that stimulate mental function," said Dr. Horwitz. She suggests taking the dog for exploratory walks where it can use all its five senses. Daily play sessions and continuous training also help keep older dogs vital and active. "The concept of use-it-or-lose-it applies here," she said.

So why not teach that old dog some new tricks? It's for his own good.