

Old Dog's Behavior Is Not Normal

Whining and crying at night may be first sign of Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome.

By Jon Geller, DVM

Q. My 21-year-old Toy Poodle is my life. Lately she is understandably showing real signs of old age. My main concern is that she whines and cries all night long. She typically stops when I pick her up, but not always. I generally hold her until she goes back to sleep.

I do not believe she is in pain because she does not do this in the daytime. Do you think she is scared? I leave a light on in the bedroom where she sleeps right beside my bed. She has cataracts and is slow moving.

This is becoming a real issue with Happy. Do you have any suggestions?

A. From what you describe, it sounds like your geriatric little Poodle may be suffering from Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome. This is similar to Alzheimer's disease in people. Older dogs begin to show signs of disorientation, have trouble with urinary accidents or incontinence, get confused about night and day, and may vocalize inappropriately.

Airy helps some dogs, but it is only available by prescription from your veterinarian. Before prescribing Airy, your veterinarian may want to do some blood tests and a thorough physical exam to make sure there are no other medical problems which could explain Harpy's problems.

There is also a special prescription diet made by Hills known as B/D that can help dogs with Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome. Dietary supplements such as Omega-3 fatty acids or fish oil capsules may help, too.

It is very hard to watch the inevitable problems that occur as your canine friends get old. It is important to realistically assess their quality of life, and be ready to make the difficult decision that comes up if you think Happy is suffering more than she should. Your veterinarian is the best person to help you decide if she is in pain, uncomfortable, or disoriented.