

COGNITIVE DYSFUNCTION (DEMENTIA) IN PETS

As a result of advances in veterinary medicine and nutrition we are finding these days that many pets are living to a ripe old age.

It is now not unusual to see a dog that is 15 years old or a cat that is 18. This increased population of elderly pets has meant that more work has been done into the sorts of health problems that they may develop.

Recent research has shown that elderly cats and dogs can suffer from dementia in a similar way to humans. MRI scans of the brain in elderly pets show a withering away of the brain tissue akin to what is seen on a human brain scan.

This loss of brain tissue leads to a condition called Cognitive Dysfunction and the symptoms may be recognisable to many owners of elderly pets.

Dogs, for example, often show signs of disorientation, forgetting where they are or seeming not to recognise familiar people or objects. Affected dogs may have disrupted sleep patterns, sleeping a lot during the day but then restless, unsettled and maybe barking at night. They can also forget things that they have previously learned, often their toilet training, which can obviously be a serious problem for all concerned.

Cats affected by cognitive dysfunction can become withdrawn and unsociable. They don't want the interaction with people that they used to. These cats can be very restless at night, pacing about and yowling for no apparent reason and again they can have problems remembering where they are supposed to go to the toilet.

Animals are benefiting from all the recent research into human dementia and Alzheimer's disease because the products that are being developed to help people are becoming available to pets. There are trials that show that supplementing pets with high levels of antioxidants and other anti-aging compounds can slow down the degeneration of the brain significantly. There are also drugs available to improve the brain's blood supply and increase energy uptake by the brain tissue.

If you feel your aging pet may be showing signs of cognitive dysfunction then please come and see us at Hook Veterinary centre. Treatment during the early stages of the disease generally gives the best results.

If anyone would like further information on this or any veterinary matter then please give us a call on 01256 764771.