**Cognitive function and dysfunction in again animals**

As dogs and cats mature, many factors contribute to how mentally and physically fit they remain. There is actually a diagnosis known as “[canine cognitive dysfunction](http://www.examiner.com/topic/canine-cognitive-dysfunction/articles).” Likened to [dementia](http://www.examiner.com/topic/dementia) and Alzheimer’s in people, symptoms can include inappropriate elimination, staring at the wall, not recognizing familiar people, diminished vision or hearing, and other behavior changes.

Many other conditions can contribute to the symptoms of cognitive dysfunction. For example, pain or stiffness can create brain fog from chronic release of stress hormones diverting blood from the thinking, problem-solving part of the brain to the more reactive part of the brain, and from the digestive and repair organs in the body to the legs. With the cold, damp weather that we have in the Pacific Northwest, arthritis and soreness in the muscles and bones if very common in pets. This adds to "stress" in the body. Taxed kidneys and liver can contribute to nausea and other toxicity symptoms, which can also create confusion mimicking dementia.

Of course there is a prescription medication that can treat this. It is prescribed on the basis of the patient meeting enough of the criteria determined to qualify as “Canine Cognitive Dysfunction” (CCD). However, the main drug used to treat CCD breaks down into two types of amphetamines once in the body. This makes it completely contraindicated in patients who are on many pain medications. Meaning, the dog can die if given two of these types of meds even weeks apart.

Healthier options for treating CCD include acupuncture, herbs, nutritional supplementation, and physical therapy. Acupuncture treats pain in the body, and also addresses inflammation, reduces stress hormones, and increases positive brain chemicals such as serotonin. Herbs that detoxify the liver and improve kidney function, brain circulation, and digestion also help overall cognitive function.