

DISHAAL Cognitive Decline Checklist

A pre-visit scoring tool for senior dog families

Use this checklist to track changes you are seeing at home before your dog's veterinary visit. It is designed to help you organize observations and bring a clearer history to your veterinarian.

Important: This checklist is not a diagnosis. Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (CDS) is a diagnosis of exclusion, so your veterinarian must rule out other causes such as pain, arthritis, illness, sensory change, neurologic disease, or other age-related conditions.

What is CDS?	How to score
CDS, also called doggy dementia or cognitive decline, is the canine version of Alzheimer's. Dr. Stacey Bone describes it as a "Biological Mirror," meaning some of the same plaque-related changes that affect the aging human brain can also affect a dog's brain.	Score each sign from 0 to 3 based on how much change you have noticed: 0 = Not present 1 = Mild or occasional 2 = Moderate or happens regularly 3 = Severe, frequent, or very disruptive

Pet name

Age

Breed

Date completed

Owner / family member

DISHAAL sections

DISORIENTATION

Sign observed	0	1	2	3
Gets stuck in corners or has trouble navigating around objects	■	■	■	■
Goes to the hinge side of a door or seems confused about how to exit	■	■	■	■
Stares at walls, the floor, or into space	■	■	■	■
Seems lost in familiar rooms, the yard, or the home	■	■	■	■
Appears less responsive to sights or sounds than before	■	■	■	■
Disorientation subtotal	_____			

INTERACTIONS

Sign observed	0	1	2	3
Withdraws from family members or spends more time alone	■	■	■	■
Shows less interest in greeting, affection, or social time	■	■	■	■
Seems not to recognize familiar people or pets at times	■	■	■	■
Is more irritable, fearful, or reactive with people or other animals	■	■	■	■
Interactions subtotal	_____			

SLEEP CHANGES

Sign observed	0	1	2	3
Paces, pants, or seems restless in the evening or overnight	■	■	■	■
Sleeps more during the day but is awake more at night	■	■	■	■
Wakes repeatedly during the night	■	■	■	■
Vocalizes, whines, or barks during the night	■	■	■	■
Sleep changes subtotal				_____

Continue scoring each category below. Bring this completed form to your veterinarian.

HOUSE SOILING				
Sign observed	0	1	2	3
Has urine accidents in the house after being reliably house-trained	■	■	■	■
Has stool accidents in the house after being reliably house-trained	■	■	■	■
Goes outside but then urinates or defecates inside soon after	■	■	■	■
Signals less clearly that they need to go outside	■	■	■	■
House soiling subtotal	_____			

ACTIVITY CHANGES				
Sign observed	0	1	2	3
Shows less interest in play, walks, toys, or family activities	■	■	■	■
Is more restless, hyperactive, or unable to settle	■	■	■	■
Paces aimlessly or wanders	■	■	■	■
Repeats behaviors such as circling, licking, chewing, or staring	■	■	■	■
Sleeps much more and seems unusually inactive or lethargic	■	■	■	■
Activity changes subtotal	_____			

ANXIETY				
Sign observed	0	1	2	3
Seems newly anxious when separated from family members	■	■	■	■
Shows new fear of storms, noises, or other sounds	■	■	■	■
Seems more fearful in familiar places or routines	■	■	■	■
Becomes distressed in new places or during transitions	■	■	■	■
Appears generally more worried, shaky, clingy, or easily startled	■	■	■	■
Anxiety subtotal	_____			

LEARNING AND MEMORY				
Sign observed	0	1	2	3
Responds less reliably to familiar commands like sit, stay, or come	■	■	■	■
Seems to forget routines previously known well	■	■	■	■
Has more trouble focusing or maintaining attention	■	■	■	■

LEARNING AND MEMORY

Sign observed	0	1	2	3
Seems slower to learn or relearn simple tasks	■	■	■	■
Learning and memory subtotal				_____

Use this space to note examples, timing, triggers, or recent changes:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Stop waiting for it to “get better” on its own. Use the DISHAAL checklist to track the changes you are seeing and get to your vet right away. By treating this early, you can help protect what is left of your dog’s precious brain.