

Night time waking in senior dogs.

Interrupted sleep is a common problem in older pets and may occur for many reasons, including both medical and anxiety-related causes. Often these issues can be managed and good sleeping patterns may be re-established, though many of the underlying conditions may be persistent and worsen with age. Quick intervention is important since undesirable habits may form quickly and family may become frustrated when sleep deprived.

* Dogs do get cognitive dysfunction, which is similar to dementia in people. The hallmarks of these syndromes are progressive confusion, reversal of day/night sleep patterns and poor adaptability to new situations. Just like older people with early-onset dementia, the dog may function well in routine and familiar situations but be confused in new situations.

* Dogs who are feeling pain or discomfort may pace, pant, vocalize or be restless at night but may not show any physical limitations during the day. The effects of pain or sore muscles may be more noticeable to the dog at night.

* The urge to eliminate may wake many dogs.. Senior pets are more likely to have medical conditions that would increase the pets urination or defecation frequency or decrease control.

* Anxiety can cause night time waking. Thunderstorms, wind or even noisy neighbours can cause anxiety.

MANAGEMENT

* First step is a health check with your vet who will evaluate possible medical causes.

* Try to establish a predictable routine for bed time. This should include a late night visit outside to go to the toilet.

* Warmth may also be an issue. Just as in older people, older dogs may not be able to regulate body temp and feel the cold more. Give your dog an extra blanket to help make him more comfortable.

* An orthopedic bed (memory foam) may help to ease pressure on older bones and joints.

* Quiet, soothing music (eg radio) may obscure sounds and help to calm an anxious dog. We use this method in the hospital for anxious dogs and it works very well.

* Failing eyesight is common in older dogs, just like people. A night light may help them to navigate a dark house at night.