

Doggy dementia: Here's what you need to know to protect your pet

A large new study of 15,019 dogs enrolled in the [Dog Aging Project, an ongoing investigation](#) into canine illness and aging, published [August 25] in the journal [Scientific Reports](#), identifies the top factors associated with a dog's risk of getting [dementia].

A key finding: Exercise may play a significant preventive role. The odds of a cognitive dysfunction diagnosis were 6.47 times higher in dogs reported as not active compared with those reported to be very active, researchers at the University of Washington found. But they also said that the disease itself could lead to lack of exercise, emphasizing that the study results, which are based on observations by owners, suggest correlation, not causation.

Odds of getting the disease also appear to increase in dogs that have neurological disorders, or impaired hearing or sight. Annette Fitzpatrick, a co-author of the study and a UW research professor with expertise in dementia in people as well as canines, commented, "When you don't get stimulation from the outside world, it seems to increase the risk of our not even being able to use our brains as well."

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In fact, the researchers noted, risk factors that correlate with canine cognitive dysfunction mirror some of the factors for humans with dementia, including Alzheimer's disease.

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