



Aged To Perfection

...sharing the latest on caring for seniors

DOG DAYS OF SUMMER

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Here we are in the hazy, lazy dog days of summer. What does that

really mean though? What exactly are the dog days of summer?

The term might be older than you think...and it has less to do with how lazy your dog is at this time of year than you might expect!

The term dates back to the Roman era when people described seasonal changes based on the constellations. One of the brightest stars in the sky is Sirius. It is part of the constellation known as Canis Major (which means big dog). Over time, Sirius became known as the 'dog star'. During the summer months, Sirius rises and sets with the sun, and happens to correspond with the hot, hazy days of August in North America. The Romans mistakenly thought that the bright star of Sirius was radiating additional heat toward Earth, causing the



humid, hazy weather. Now we know that the additional heat is actually due to the tilt of the Earth (hence the reason that 'dog days of summer' are in July-August in the Northern hemisphere, but are in January–March in the Southern hemisphere).

The dog days of summer are here for now, and hopefully will last a while longer before we inch toward autumn. While you might be feeling as lethargic and unenthused as your over-heated dog, just remember, these are the summer days that we long for all winter! So be sure to enjoy

the rest of your dog days of summer!





HALLUCINATIONS & VISION LOSS

Your grandmother has had macular degeneration for years and her vision is now quite limited. Lately, she's mentioned seeing little people in the living room, especially in the evening. Does that mean that she now has dementia? Is she experiencing a mental illness or disconnect from reality?

Quite likely she is not! Hallucinations with severe vision loss are more common than you

might expect, and there is a name for it: Charles Bonnet Syndrome. The condition is named after Charles Bonnet, a Swiss philosopher and writer who first described the condition in 1760 after witnessing his grandfather experience vision-loss hallucinations.

Charles Bonnet Syndrome (CBS) is a condition of temporary hallucinations in people with severe vision loss. The vision loss is usually due to one of the following three conditions:

- Macular degeneration
- Glaucoma
- Diabetic retinopathy

The visual hallucinations are typically quite simple—seeing people, animals, houses, or other everyday objects. In some cases, more complex



Patient with glaucoma who has blurred peripheral vision, but sees purple flowers in her central vision

visions are animated or dreamlike and continue for a longer duration. These visual hallucinations are almost like a mirage, and often contain greater detail than what someone can detect in their actual surroundings.

CBS is sometimes referred to as “phantom vision syndrome” because it is similar to “phantom leg” syndrome. After an amputation, someone may continue to “feel” sensation in a limb that is no longer present. The feeling is created and experienced in the brain; there is no stimuli to create the sensation. Likewise, with CBS, the retinal cells in the eye are no longer receiving the visual images (due to damage from macular degeneration, glaucoma, or diabetic retinopathy). The brain begins creating its own “phantom” images using images stored in memory to create new “vision”. The eye is only creating general images and cannot provide detail due to damage from the illness, yet the brain is still seeking those details. The brain will compensate for the weakness of the optic nerves and retina. Sometimes, the brain will do this by completing an image (ie: adding details that are not present); at other times, the brain may create whole images that are not present.

The hallucinations with Charles Bonnet Syndrome are visual illusions and are distinct from delusions. Visual illusions are a misinterpretation of external visual stimuli (interpreting the sweater



Patient with macular degeneration who has loss of central vision (obscured face), but hallucinates a detailed butterfly



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on the couch for a cat, and adding the details of whiskers and eyes). Visual illusions affect only vision, none of the other senses. A delusion is believing something that is not true, but believing it wholeheartedly (believing oneself to be the messiah). A delusion may include any of the senses and often a delusion is supported by more than one sense (hearing voices and seeing things for which there is no external stimuli).

Someone who is experiencing a visual illusion will accept that they have misinterpreted an image; someone who is delusional will not. Those with CBS are often quite aware that their perceived illusions are not real—they are able to rationalize that there cannot be miniature people standing in their living room. Some visions are surreal—small people, dragons, exotic animals—and other visions are realistic, such as seeing cows in a field.

CBS is most likely to affect someone soon after vision loss. The brain is still trying to interpret visual stimuli, even though the optic nerve and retina are no longer producing the images. Often, the brain will adapt to the loss of the incoming stimuli and the hallucinations will dissipate after 12-18 months, though some people have experienced CBS for many years.

CBS often goes undetected and undiagnosed. There is limited awareness of CBS—not just in the general public, but also in medical communities as well. Patients are often hesitant to report the symptoms of CBS because they fear being labelled “crazy” or mentally unstable. Most estimates suggest 10-30% of those with severe vision loss will experience CBS; the most recent study conducted by the CNIB (Canadian National Institute for the Blind) surveyed 2500 people with low vision, and found 18.8% had experienced hallucinations. Of those who experienced hallucinations:

- Most common hallucinations were of people, animals, shapes or patterns
- Most people hallucinated daily—but for just a few seconds or minutes at a time
- 1/3 could get rid of hallucination by blinking



Patient with diabetic retinopathy who has blurred vision and dark spots, but reports seeing small people dressed in funny outfits—like something out of Willy Wonka.

- 1/2 hallucinated in dim light, darkness, or while falling asleep
- 1/3 could not detect a pattern to their hallucinations
- 2/3 did not find their hallucinations to be bothersome

For many people, just knowing about CBS is a huge relief—it reassures them that they are not disconnected from reality, and that there is a real phenomenon to explain their experiences. Unfortunately, there is no cure or treatment for CBS, and there isn't one simple test to diagnose CBS. It is important that the doctor is alerted to hallucinations because it can be a symptom of other conditions, all of which should be ruled out before settling on a diagnosis of CBS.

While there is no cure for CBS, there are coping strategies such as:

- Closing your eyes or blinking rapidly
- Shifting eyes left to right every second for half a minute
- Adjusting lighting—some people need more light to reduce hallucinations; others find bright light causes hallucinations
- Watching TV or moving locations
- Explain to family and friends what you are experiencing

**with information from CNIB webpage: “What is Charles Bonnet Syndrome?” <http://www.cnib.ca/en/your-eyes/eye-conditions/Pages/Charles-Bonnet-syndrome.aspx>*



*...a mother & her daughters
providing meaningful
assistance to seniors*

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Warm Embrace Elder Care is owned and operated by a mother-daughter team, Brenda Hamilton and her daughters, Chloe and Avery Hamilton. Their goal is to assist seniors to remain independent for as long as possible through offering various services such as homecare, memory therapy, and one-on-one home exercise for seniors. Inspired by personal experience with family caregiving for Brenda's mother, this mother-daughter team understands firsthand the benefits of enlisting help while caring for a loved one. Warm Embrace believes that independence does not mean that you can do everything by yourself, but rather that you get to choose how everything is done—we grant our seniors the respect and dignity they deserve by helping them to live as they desire.

ORGANIZE YOUR ENVIRONMENT!

Do you ever wish you were more organized? If only you knew where to get started, you're sure you'd be the organized type? If you want to learn more about organizing your environment, then there's a series designed just for you! There is a monthly series of FREE workshops at the Kitchener Public Library hosted by the Professional Organizers of Canada. Here are the remaining dates and topics:

- **Organizing...Tots to Teens** by Rhonda Erb (Tues. August 16th, 6:30—8:30pm)
- **Effective Time Management** by Cathy Mendler (Wed. Sept 14th, 6:30—8:30pm)

Location: Kitchener Public Library, 85 Queen St. N. Kitchener

Cost: FREE

Registration: though the seminars are free, registration is required. Please call: 519-502-9015 or visit: www.KPL.org

COMING UP SOON—GRANDPARENT'S DAY

This is just a reminder for those of you who need a nudge—grandparent's day is just around the corner! Did you know that the first Sunday following Labour Day is officially Grandparent's Day? This year, Grandparent's day is Sunday, September 11th. Grandparent's day gives you an opportunity to celebrate the seniors in your life—your own grandparents, or a senior that you've adopted as a grandparent. A simple card, or spending the day together will mean so much to the important seniors in your life. So start thinking now about what you can do to celebrate with your favourite seniors on Grandparents Day, September 11th!

