Hendrix's Legacy *Fighting for every Staffy*

Noticing neurological changes: a guide for groomers

What to look for during a groom, how to talk to owners, and when to suggest a vet visit

Summary

- Neurological disease can show itself first as behaviour. In a related breed, owners of dogs with one such disease reported less tolerance of grooming or bathing, sensitivity to loud sounds, anxiety and aggression, alongside problems with balance and sight.[1]
- Hendrix's Legacy began after Hendrix, a Staffordshire Bull Terrier, died in September 2026 from what we believe was a neurological condition. It has not been identified, and nobody yet knows what its signs are.
- Groomers handle dogs closely and see them regularly, so you may notice changes before anyone else does.
- You cannot tell from a groom what is wrong with a dog; only a vet can diagnose. What you can do is notice, keep a note, tell the owner and suggest a vet visit.

Why this matters to groomers

Neurological signs often come on slowly. A dog you have groomed happily for years can change, and because you see the same dog every few weeks, you are well placed to spot a pattern.

What to look for during a groom

Behaviour. In one study of American Staffordshire Terriers with NCL4A, a known neurological disease that has not been reported in Staffordshire Bull Terriers, owners reported:[1]

- Less tolerance of grooming or bathing
- Increased sensitivity to loud sounds
- Anxiety
- Aggression towards other dogs and people
- Compulsive circling

On the table and in the bath. Physical signs can be subtle:[1,2]

- Unsteadiness, loss of balance or a wide stance
- Hesitation on steps, ramps, or getting in and out of the bath
- Startling at a hand or tool that was in plain view, or bumping into things
- A hunched ("roached") back

In everyday terms, a new fear of the dryer, clippers or bath may be the first thing you see. That is our practical example, not a published finding.

Red flags

These are our guidance, drawn from published signs and from Hendrix's history. Any of these is worth raising with the owner:

- A dog that used to cope well becoming steadily less tolerant over several visits
- A snap or bite that comes with no growl, snarl or other warning
- A behaviour change together with any change in balance, movement or sight

Talking to the owner

These signs have many possible causes, including pain, skin and ear problems, age and past experiences. Diagnosing disease in animals is legally part of veterinary surgery, which is restricted to vets.[3] So describe what you saw, not what you think the cause is. For example: "He was unsteady in the bath today and didn't like the dryer, which isn't like him. It might be worth mentioning to your vet."

If the owner wants to know more, point them to our guide "Recognising neurological warning signs".

When to suggest a vet visit

- When you see one or more of the red flags
- When a change is new, or is getting worse from one visit to the next
- When behaviour changes and physical changes appear together

Keeping you and the dog safe

Bite risk is real. If a dog becomes distressed, it is reasonable to stop and finish another day rather than push on. A short note after each visit, with the date and what you saw, can help the owner and their vet see a pattern. This is our practical suggestion.

Hendrix

Hendrix was a Staffordshire Bull Terrier who died in September 2026. **Hendrix was never diagnosed.** He was never DNA tested and no sample was kept. Over the years, baths and grooming became more and more frightening for him. For his last two years only leave-in foam shampoos were possible, and in his last nine months he would not tolerate even those. He also became increasingly sensitive to loud bangs, although as a young dog he had shown no sensitivity to noise at all. His most serious bite came without warning. The professionals we asked considered a neurological cause likely; at the time NCL4A was thought the most likely explanation, but specialists have since pointed out that other conditions, including ones not yet identified, can look similar. The people who groomed him did their best with what they knew. This guide is about giving the next groomer more.

Next steps

- Read our guide for owners, "Recognising neurological warning signs".

This guide is for information only and is not veterinary advice. Information correct as at October 2026; check the sources for updates.

Sources

1. Kick GR, Marzano SL, Ota-Kuroki J, Bullock G, Katz ML. Retinal function deficits in American Staffordshire Terriers with a late-onset neurodegenerative disease associated with an ARSG variant. *Veterinary Sciences*. 2025;12(11):1078. Published 12 November 2025.

https://doi.org/10.3390/vetsci12111078

2. Orthopedic Foundation for Animals. Neuronal Ceroid Lipofuscinosis (NCL-4A section). Page modified 6 March 2026. https://ofa.org/neuronal-ceroid-lipofuscinosis/
3. Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, sections 19 and 27. legislation.gov.uk, no outstanding effects shown at 4 October 2026. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1966/36/section/27