

Pet Health: Recognizing and Managing Pain



Recognizing pain in animals is notoriously difficult. Not every animal responds to the same type of pain with the same behavior. Some animals may be vocal and others more withdrawn. Cats, in particular, are very good at hiding pain and illness. But generally, any injury or surgical procedure that would be painful for humans, will be painful for animals. Here are some of the signs that indicate your animal may be in pain and that you should contact your veterinarian.

- Eating or drinking less
- Hiding, lethargy or decreased human/animal interaction
- Seems painful when touched
- Unusual whining, vocalizing, or aggression
- Cat hissing or growling that is unusual
- Inappropriate urination or defecation
- Limping or other abnormal walking or sitting
- Sleeping less or not at all, or restlessness
- Excessive grooming, licking, or chewing
- Panting, trembling, or shaking
- Altered facial expressions including squinting, flattened ears, or dilated pupils

To understand the source of your pet's pain, your veterinarian will perform a complete physical exam and ask pertinent questions. The doctor may also ask for additional tests. There are several types of pain control available to help your pet, frequently used in combination. These medications include non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), opioids, and topical anesthetics.

NEVER use human pain medication for your pet. Animals have different metabolisms than humans and medications created for us could be very harmful to animals. Your veterinarian may make recommendations for physical therapy and weight loss for some types of chronic pain.

If you are concerned that your pet may be experiencing pain, don't wait to see if it goes away. The hormones released during stress and pain can delay healing and make your pet sick in other ways. Be sure to consult with your veterinarian and follow all instructions to get your beloved animal on the road to recovery.