

Recognizing Pain in Dogs and Cats

Pain and suffering are clinically significant symptoms that can adversely affect an animal’s quality of life. Our pets share the same anatomical and biochemical pain pathways that we do; therefore, we can expect their level of discomfort with certain conditions to be similar to ours. Unfortunately, they cannot tell us with words how they feel or where they hurt, but they do give us clues about their level of discomfort.

Determining how painful our pets are can be very confusing and difficult. Pets can be affected to varying degrees by their pain depending on their personality type, just like humans. While there is tremendous variation in the ways pets express pain—differing from species to species, breed to breed and even individual to individual—you can use basic cues to determine discomfort.

Here, we list some behaviors that are indicative of pain in pets. Some painful animals show no signs, while others with anxiety or other behavioral problems may actually mimic signs of physical pain. Pain relief takes many forms in pets, including medication, nutraceuticals, acupuncture and physical therapy.

It is important to remember that what works for one pet may not work for another. The first step in treating pain is recognizing and acknowledging it.

Listed below are some of the signs associated with pain in pets. Painful individuals may have one, several or none of these symptoms.

Dogs

* Tail between legs
* Arched or hunched back
* Lying flat for extended periods, reluctance to move
* Drooped head
* Protection of painful area
* Aggression or irritability
* Growling or biting, especially when painful area is touched
* Hiding or trying to escape
* Howling, moaning or whimpering
* Carrying one leg
* Lameness or limping
* Unusual gait or inability to walk
* Reluctance or inability to jump
* Little interest in food or play
* Chewing or licking painful area

Cats

* Tucked belly or legs
* Arched or hunched head or back
* Lying flat for extended periods, reluctance to move
* Drooped head
* Slumped body
* Aggression, irritability or biting
* Hiding or trying to escape
* Crying, screaming or moaning
* Hissing or spitting
* Carrying one leg
* Lameness or limping
* Unusual gait or inability to walk
* Reluctance or inability to jump
* Attacking or hissing, especially when painful area is touched
* Failure to groom
* Dilated pupils
* Little interest in food or play