



The Pet Oncologist

15 signs that your pet is in pain



Is my pet in pain? How can I recognise pain and discomfort?

Pain is a debilitating and unpleasant feeling that can cause emotional distress to pets and their owners. It is important to recognise pain so you can intervene early rather than waiting for your pet to show signs of discomfort. This is particularly important in cats who are excellent at hiding their pain, and thus, can suffer pain in silence. Dogs are pack animals, so are more likely to vocalise their pain and discomfort. But some dogs can be stoic and also hide their pain. Pets communicate mainly through body language, so you need to look closely to determine if your pet is painful.

Here is a list of 15 things you can look out for, to determine if your pet is in pain.

1. Increase aggressiveness, such as biting and scratching. This may be more evident when you touch a painful area.
2. Breathing changes. Faster or more shallow breathing pattern than normal. Heavy panting.
3. Heart and pulse changes. Increase heart rate or pulse rate, which may be more noticeable when you touch a painful area.
4. Vocalisation. Unusual vocalisation or increase purring in cats.

5. Eyes Changes. Larger (dilated), small (constricted) pupils, squinting, or bloodshot eyes.
6. Changes to the feeding and drinking habits. Pets usually eat and drink less when they are in pain.
7. Grooming changes. Cats may show a decrease in self-grooming, or a pet may groom themselves more excessively in a painful area.
8. Lower energy levels or sleeping.
9. Hidings, particularly in cats.
10. Decreased mobility may be seen in pets that suffer from arthritis or painful limbs.
11. Toilet changes. Cats with a painful back or limbs may have trouble going in and out of the litter tray and dogs may toilet in unusual places.
12. No longer wants to play or jump.
13. Loss of interest in people, other pets and activities.
14. Restlessness, particularly at night.
15. Changes in posture such as a sawhorse-type stance or prayer position. Dogs with a tucked tail may be in discomfort.

I hope this information helps pet owners recognise pain and discomfort in their pets. If you think your pet is in pain or discomfort, please contact your veterinary health care team.