



Recognizing Pain in Senior Pets



As pets age, subtle signs of pain can easily be mistaken for “just getting older”. Pets feel pain just like we do, they just don’t always show it in ways we expect. Because animals instinctively hide discomfort, even subtle changes in behavior can be important clues. Understanding how dogs and cats express discomfort helps you keep them comfortable, active, and happy.

Why Early Pain Recognition Matters:

Untreated pain affects your pet’s mood, movement, appetite and quality of life. Pain management and early recognition can greatly improve mobility, comfort, happiness, overall health and even extend their lifespan.

Common Signs of Pain

Changes in Behavior:

- Becoming more quiet/less vocal, withdrawn, or hiding
- Increased clinginess or seeking more attention
- Irritability, growling, hissing, or snapping when touched
- Purring more than usual (cats may purr when in pain or to try and self-soothe)
- Restlessness (especially at night) or difficulty getting comfortable
- Increased panting or shallow, rapid breathing
- Trembling or shaking

Changes in Appetite or Drinking:

- Eating less or not at all
- Dropping food, chewing abnormally, or favoring one side (possible dental pain)
- Increased or decreased water intake

Mobility and Body Movement Changes:

- Limping, stiffness, or difficulty standing up
- Reluctance or hesitation to jump or reducing the height/size of a jump
- Avoidance of stairs or change in approach to stairs (stopping midway, zigzag pattern)
- Reluctant to go for walks or tiring more easily on walks
- Holding the body in an unusual position (hunched back, head lowered)
- Licking, chewing, or scratching a particular spot, especially with dogs
- Neglecting grooming or appearing unkempt especially in cats along their back or tail area
- Reluctance to use scratching posts and/or overgrown nails

Bathroom Habit Changes:

- Accidents in the house or outside the litter box
- Straining to urinate or defecate
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Difficulty squatting or lifting a leg

How We Can Help:

We tailor pain management plans to each pet and the changes they are showing. Our goal is to help your pet stay happy, active, and comfortable. Here is a brief overview of the pain-management options we offer.

- Joint supplements and prescription pain relievers
- Weight and diet management
- Comfortable home adaptation recommendations
- Referral for rehabilitation
- Regular physical exams



How To Support Them At Home:

- Offer Soft bedding to help support their joints
- Use non-slip rugs especially when on surfaces that do not offer much grip
- Ramps and steps for furniture and cars
- Raised food and water bowls that are easily accessible
- Easily accessible litterboxes with a low entrance
- Vet recommended home exercises
- Supplements (ensure to consult your veterinarian first)
- Keep track of changes and good vs. bad days
- Avoid runs, long walks, jumping and rough play
- Offer gentle activity/short, controlled walks to help maintain strength
- Maintain a healthy weight to help avoid additional stress and strain on your pets joints

Ongoing Care

Because senior pet needs change over time, regular check-ins help us keep their pain well controlled and adjust treatments as needed.