

How Do I Know if my Cat is in Pain?

Feline Pain Management



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Behavior changes in your cat are the primary indicator of pain. As the person who knows your cat best, you are an important member of their healthcare team and key in helping to detect the signs of pain as soon as possible. The signs may be subtle because cats hide signs of discomfort and illness which could make them appear vulnerable to their enemies. This trait comes from their wild ancestors who needed to avoid becoming another animal's prey. This can make it difficult to recognize if your cat is sick or in pain. Veterinary professionals have been trained to evaluate these subtle behaviors and physical health changes.

RECOGNITION AND ASSESSMENT OF PAIN

It is difficult to recognize subtle signs of pain because the behavioral changes can be easily overlooked or mistaken for other problems. Because cats are non-verbal and cannot self-report the presence of pain, your veterinarian relies on you when they obtain a thorough patient history to help determine abnormal behavior patterns that may be pain related. When you observe any problematic behavior change in your cat, contact your veterinarian.

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It is important for you to have a good understanding of your cat's individual normal temperament and behaviors. Just the slightest change could indicate your cat is sick or in pain.

If your cat displays any of the following changes, contact your veterinarian immediately.

- Decreased appetite or no interest in food
- Withdrawn or hiding
- Reduced movement or mobility, or hesitation to climb steps or jump
- Diminished exercise tolerance and general activity
- Difficulty getting up, standing, or walking
- Decreased grooming
- Changes in urination or defecation habits
- Squinting
- Hunched or tucked-up position instead of curled-up when sleeping
- Sensitivity or vocalization to petting or touch
- Temperament or other substantial behavior changes for your cat (e.g. seeking solitude, aggression, loss of appetite)



MANAGEMENT OF PAIN

Appropriate pain management requires a continuum of care by creating a veterinary plan. Your veterinarian may include medication, physical therapy, or environmental changes such as using special bedding or ramps in the pain management plan. Your veterinarian is committed to developing a strategy that provides compassionate care; optimum recovery from illness, injury, or surgery; and enhanced quality of life.



Monitoring

Once a veterinary plan has been developed, you may be asked to monitor your cat at home. It is important that you receive verbal instructions, written instructions, and ask for a hands-on demonstration of how to administer medications and handle your cat at home. For more information, see catfriendly.com/giving-medication.

Home care also includes recording subtle behavior changes and scheduling follow-up appointments. Be sure to alert the veterinary practice right away of any changes, questions, or the early signs of adverse reactions. Continuous management is required for chronically painful conditions, and for acute conditions until pain is resolved.

When pain is not recognized or managed, it can result in what may be considered unfavorable behavior changes such as those listed on the opposite page. Cats do not act out of spite and any behavior change can be a sign of pain or another health problem. Proper recognition and management of pain can be as life preserving as any other veterinary medical treatment. Preventive care examinations or check-ups for all cats should occur a minimum of once yearly, and more frequently for senior cats and those with chronic conditions. These visits are important to your cat's individualized healthcare plan as your veterinarian will assess many important health considerations including pain and behavior at every visit.



CATEGORIES OF PAIN

Acute pain

This is pain that exists during the normal time of inflammation and healing after injury (up to 3 months). It can be caused by injury, trauma, surgery, and acute medical conditions or diseases. Acute pain generally begins suddenly and usually doesn't last long.

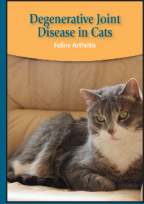
Chronic pain

This is usually described as either pain that persists beyond the normal healing time or pain that persists in conditions where healing has not or will not occur.

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Chronic pain (continued)

Degenerative joint disease (DJD), or arthritis, is an extremely common, chronic, painful disease in cats, with as many as 92% of all cats exhibiting some clinical signs. It is also one of the most significant and under-diagnosed diseases in cats. For more information on DJD, please access the brochure, Degenerative Joint Disease in Cats, at www.catfriendly.com/djd.



Persistent pain

Cats with persistent pain may need palliative care. Palliative care is the all-encompassing approach that provides cats who have a disease that is not responsive to curative treatment, with a plan to provide an improved quality of life with pain control being the principal feature.

For more information on feline pain management, visit www.catfriendly.com/pain-management.

**You are an important member of your cat's healthcare team.
You are instrumental in helping with the success of
treatments and healthcare for your cat.**

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This brochure was developed from the 2015 AAFP/AAHA Pain Management Guidelines for Dogs and Cats.
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