

## Signs Your Dog May Have a Health Problem

**Two veterinary groups provide insight into the cues dogs may give when feeling pain.**

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Pets suffering from an illness or injury and may not show obvious signs of pain, however advancements in science have allowed veterinary professionals to decode subtle cues of pet distress, according to American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) and the Association of American Feline Practitioners.

The two veterinary organizations released "Pain Management Guidelines for Dogs and Cats," which was published in the September/October 2007 issue of the Journal of the American Animal Hospital Association. The guidelines focus on both veterinarians' and pet owners' roles.

The groups caution that dog owners should be aware of:

**Abnormal chewing habits:** Dropping food or chewing on one side of the mouth can be a symptom of a dental disorder or a mouth tumor.

**Drastic weight change:** Pain influences dogs' eating habits. For example, dogs who have arthritis or muscle soreness may not want to eat because bending down is uncomfortable, or it could be why they avoid exercise.

**Affection/handling avoidance:** This could be a sign of a progressive disease, such as osteoarthritis or intervertebral disc disease, due to the added pressure of petting or handling.

**Decreased movement and exercise:** Degenerative joint diseases are a common cause of pain, which may cause a pet to avoid climbing stairs, playing, or exercising. Extra weight may add to joint injuries, and losing the extra weight can help decrease pressure and reduce pain.

**Accidents:** Dogs with sore joints or arthritis may have problems using the bathroom due to obstacles such as stairs. Accidents may also be a sign of a urinary tract infection.

If dogs exhibit these symptoms, pet owners should consult a veterinarian.

"Addressing contemporary approaches to manage pain gives us the ability to fulfill our veterinary duty to alleviate the suffering of animals," said veterinarian Thomas A. Carpenter, president of AAHA. "These new and helpful guidelines will give veterinarians and pet owners common ground to diagnose and manage pain that affects cats and dogs."