

Ten Red-Flag Puppy Behaviors

When is a puppy quirk a symptom of something serious?

Joan Hustace Walker

You've owned your puppy for a couple of months and suddenly she starts doing something, well, downright odd. What do you do? Chalk it up to puppy weirdness? No, say the experts.

"Call your veterinarian; any unusual or odd behaviors should be investigated," says Steven L. Marks, BVSc, MS, MRCVS, Diplomate American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine, associate professor and head of Small Animal Medicine at the Department of Veterinary Clinical Medicine, University of Illinois, College of Veterinary Medicine. "If the puppy is showing an abnormal behavior, we would always want to rule out disease first," Marks says. "Sometimes the only visible aspect of a disease to the pet owner is the [abnormal] behavior. When the veterinarian examines the pet more fully, other abnormalities can be detected."

As an observant owner, you may pick up on behavior changes before physical symptoms of a disease manifest themselves. And, the sooner your sick pet receives veterinary help, the better her chances of recovery.

Ten behaviors that might trigger a call to your veterinarian include:

1. Very frequent urination or urinating or defecating in places where she normally doesn't: This could signal a possible urinary tract infection or other disease.
2. Lack of eye contact or apparent inability to hear you: The puppy could have a sensory problem, blindness or deafness, for example.
3. Appearing to startle easily: May signal deafness.
4. Aggression without a visible cause: Biting, snapping, and snarling are all common responses to pain; aggression is also linked to thyroid imbalance, brain tumor, and other diseases.
5. Constant licking and/or chewing on self: Common response to allergies; may also be a symptom of an obsessive/compulsive disorder.
6. Decreased interaction: A disinterest in people and other pets could be disease-related.
7. Head shaking: Possible ear infection or other disease.
8. Lethargy or exercise intolerance: The puppy doesn't want to play, or when she does, abruptly tires; this could be a sign of heart problems.
9. Increase in water consumption: May signal diabetes or renal disease.
10. Sudden loss of appetite: a symptom of many diseases.