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Pets Feel Pain: Learn How To Manage It
By Dr. Erin Forbes

September is Animal Pain Awareness Month. Pain comes in many forms: arthritis, cancer, post surgery, acute injuries, and chronic injuries. Acute pain is obvious and distressing and hard to miss. Think of a broken leg or an injury from falling down the stairs. Chronic pain can be subtle: some may just think their pet is getting old. However, while old age is not a disease, pain is and can be treated. There are many options to treat the various causes of pain in animals including pain medications, physical rehabilitation, and integrative medicine options--acupuncture and chiropractic.

Common signs of pain can vary among animals. In dogs these include decreased social interaction, an anxious expression, whimpering, decreased appetite, self mutilation, and changes in posture. In cats, we see reduced activity, loss of appetite, loss of curiosity, changes in urinary/defecation habits, hiding, excessive grooming (especially over joints), stiff gait, or matted fur. In horses, they might arch their back, shift their weight, stand abnormally, and be very stiff when moving.

The good news is there are multiple ways to treat pain in animals. No longer is it limited to one medication that not every pet can tolerate. Veterinarians now have a variety of medications, specifically made for animals, to help treat pain. This can range from non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs to joint injections to medications that treat neurological pain. Further, it is important to incorporate exercise and physical therapy into pain management. There are professionals who have specific training in physical

therapy for companion animals. There are facilities with underwater treadmills and agility courses specifically meant to increase our animals strength and decrease their pain.

Another area of veterinary medicine that helps control pain is integrative medicine: this includes therapeutic laser, chiropractic manipulation and acupuncture. Veterinary Chiropractic can often eliminate the source of acute or chronic pain syndromes. It can be used to treat chronic musculoskeletal problems, such as arthritis, or acute problems such as tension or stiffness. It can help enhance performance ability of sport animals, and as a complementary treatment for chronic lameness. Acupuncture is based on the idea that bodily functions are regulated by an energy called qi which flows through the body. To fulfill its functions, qi has to steadily flow from the inside of the body to the "superficial" body tissues. Disruptions of this flow are believed to be responsible for disease. The goal of acupuncture is to correct imbalances in the flow of qi by stimulation of anatomical locations on or under the skin. Acupuncture can be used to treat chronic and acute pain, post-operative pain, and many types of inflammation. Therapeutic Laser is a non-invasive treatment that can make your pet more comfortable and give them a better quality of life. The analgesic effect of laser is caused by inhibiting cellular function of nerves. The light suppresses receptors that send pain signals to the brain and the production of endorphins and enkephalins are increased, which are the body's natural painkillers.

There are many signs of pain in animals, but also many different ways to treat pain. One should never ignore signs of pain in their animals and bring any concerns they have to their veterinarian's attention. Please contact your veterinarian to discuss any questions or concerns you might have.

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