

## Is My Cat in Pain?

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One of the most common questions I hear from clients is, "Is my cat in pain?" Sometimes, the answer is an obvious "yes," but occasionally it is more difficult to tell. Cats are very good at [hiding signs of pain](#) — an instinct picked up from the wild where the sick and the weak don't survive long.

As a general rule, we can assume that a limping cat or a cat with a cut or a tumor is in pain. Pain also commonly results from [bad teeth](#), a bite wound, diseases (like [pancreatitis](#) or [arthritis](#)) or any type of surgery.

Cat pain is very subjective and notoriously difficult to assess. Signs depend on the individual, the breed, and the age. For example, we frequently see patients with bone fractures. You might think that all of these patients come in with obvious pain: moaning, panicking and biting. Some do, however, others simply purr! It's a common misconception that a purring cat is happy or comfortable one.

### What are common symptoms of cat pain?

#### Pain may be represented by:

- An unusual posture (hunched back, sitting, resting or laying abnormally)
- The head or tail hanging down
- Abnormal movements (lameness, stiffness or thrashing)
- Vigorous attempts to escape
- Aggression
- Hyperventilation (rapid, shallow breathing)
- Hiding in unusual places
- Vocalization (crying, hissing)

- Inappropriate or difficult urination or defecation
- Difficulty getting up (often mistakenly attributed to arthritis)
- Difficulty grooming
- Lack of appetite
- Licking a wound or a surgical incision

### Arthritis in cats

Arthritis deserves a special mention, because cats respond to it differently than dogs. Dogs typically limp, whereas cats rarely do. Instead, the most common sign of cats with arthritis is a reluctance or inability to jump up or down.

#### Other signs include:

- Personality changes
- Sleeping more
- Hiding
- Stiffness
- Decreased grooming
- Muscle loss in the affected leg

### Good and bad pain medications

No matter how much pain you think your cat is in, never give him [human drugs](#) (or "doggie" drugs that have not been prescribed by your veterinarian). Not only can they be seriously harmful or deadly (e.g. aspirin, Tylenol® and other anti-inflammatory drugs), they can prevent your vet from using a whole category of other drugs. Veterinarians now have several pain medications that are safe for cats but don't use anything that hasn't come from your cat's doctor.

Another common mistake is to use leftover drugs that your vet prescribed "last time" or for another pet. Using a medication because you paid good money for it last year is a dangerous idea. All drugs can have serious side effects or could be contra-indicated given your pet's new situation.

No matter what the signs are, it's important to have an open discussion with your veterinarian to describe what you notice at home. Ask if your cat might be in pain based on what you've observed. Ask what you can do to decrease the pain. Ask what pain medications might help.

If the pain medications you're using are not helping, tell your vet. You and your veterinarian are your pet's best

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advocates. Please make good use of this privilege.

*If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.*

