

Pain Assessment



Pain – we’ve all felt it, and so have our pets. It’s hard to feel positive, productive or happy when you’re hurting, whether it’s from a headache, a cavity, an ankle sprain or a surgical procedure. Pets feel the same way you would about these things.

Painful behavior can range from these obvious behaviors to the animal just being quiet and hiding; please don't assume that just because they're not crying or "acting painful," that they aren't.

Pain is useful in so far as it teaches us to avoid situations that will hurt us, such as touching a hot stove, and to guard or protect injuries. Beyond that, pain isn't helpful – in fact it has many adverse consequences. These include elevations in heart rate and blood pressure, inability to rest or sleep, slower healing time, immune system suppression, which can lead to infection, and many others. In fact, death rates are much higher after serious injuries and surgeries if pain is not adequately managed.

Chronic pain is also problematic. It drains the joy from your life, and can do the same to your pet. Here at Best Friends Veterinary Center, we believe strongly that pain should be aggressively managed. It's not only the most compassionate kind of care, but also the highest quality care from a medical standpoint. We believe that pain management is what every pet needs and deserves.

Scoring pain, and teaching you, the pet owner, to understand how pain manifests itself in your pets, helps us to achieve our goals of minimizing pain and maximizing quality of life. Animals don't always demonstrate pain in ways their owners expect. Here's how to judge your pet's pain level, so that you can help us to tailor and adjust our pain management plan, depending on your pet's individual response to treatment.

Visual Analog Pain Scale

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
 Pain Free		Hurts a Little		Hurts a Little More		Hurts Even More!		Hurts a Whole Lot		 Hurts Like Crazy!

Recognizing Pain Behaviors in Canines

Posture: tail between legs, arched or hunched back, twisted body to protect painful site, drooped head, prolonged sitting position, tucked abdomen, lying in a flat, extended position

Temperament: aggressive, clawing, attacking, biting, escaping if painful area is touched or handled

Vocalization: barking, howling, moaning, whimpering are occasionally seen; many times painful pets will **not** make any noise

Locomotion: reluctant to move, carrying one leg, lameness, unusual gait, unable or unwilling to walk or move

Other: unable or unwilling to perform normal tasks, attacks or withdraws from other animals or people, inappetance

Recognizing Pain Behaviors in Felines

Posture: tucked limbs, arched or hunched head and neck or back, tucked abdomen, lying flat, slumping of body, drooping of head

Temperament: aggressive, biting, scratching, chewing, attacking, escaping, hiding if painful area is touched or handled

Vocalization: crying, hissing, spitting, moaning, screaming; many times painful pets will **not** make any noise

Locomotion: reluctant to move, carrying one leg, lameness, unusual gait, unable to walk, inactive

Other: attacks if painful site is touched, failure to groom, dilated pupils, no interest in food or play

Caring People Helping Pets:



Descriptive Pain Assessment Scale

0 = No Pain: Patient is displaying normal behavior, Running, playing, eating, jumping, walking normally. Affectionate response to caregiver. Normal heart rate. Grooming normally.

1 = Probably No Pain: Patient appears to be normal, but condition is not as clear cut as above. Heart rate may be normal or slightly increased due to excitement.

2 = Mild Discomfort: Patient still eats and sleeps but may not dream. May limp slightly, have difficulty jumping or rising, or resist palpation of a surgical wound or arthritic joint but otherwise shows no other signs of discomfort. Not depressed. There may be a slight increase in respiratory rate; heart rate may/may not be increased. Dogs continue to wag their tails, and cats still purr during interaction with caregiver. May need an analgesic.

3 = Mild Pain or Discomfort: Patient limps, has difficulty rising, seems sore after exercise or tires easily. Patient guards incision, or the abdomen may be slightly tucked up if abdominal surgery was performed. May look slightly depressed. Cannot get comfortable or may tremble or shake. Appears to be interested in food and may eat small amounts or be somewhat picky. Needs analgesics, at least a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) such as Rimadyl or aspirin. This level of pain is common with arthritis. **(NEVER give Tylenol or Ibuprofen to pets!)**

4 = Mild to Moderate Pain: Pain is mild to moderate with the patient resisting touch at the operative site or injured area. May have a painful abdomen, or pain when stretching legs. May look, lick, or chew at the painful area. The patient may sit or lie in an abnormal position and not look relaxed. May tremble or shake. May or may not appear interested in food. May start to eat and then stop after one or two bites. Respiratory rate may be increased or shallow. May whimper or give a plaintive meow, may be slow to rise or unable to jump, up or may let the tail hang down. There may be no weight bearing or only a toe touch on a surgical limb. Will be somewhat depressed in response to the caregiver. Cats may lie quietly and not move for hours. Needs analgesic, at least a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) such as Rimadyl.

5 = Moderate Pain: Patient may be reluctant to move, depressed, or inappetent and may bite or attempt to bite when the caregiver approaches the painful area. Trembling or shaking with the head down may be a feature. May vocalize, have a tender abdomen or be unable to bear weight. Ears may be pulled back. Patient may lie down, but doesn't really sleep. Needs analgesic, possible opioid or narcotic such as morphine, as well as NSAIDS.

6 = Increased Moderate Pain: Patient may vocalize or whine frequently without provocation and when attempting to move. Heart rate may be increased. Respiratory rate may be increased or breathing may appear deeper. Pupils may be dilated. Aggressive pain management is needed.

7 = Moderate to Severe Pain: includes signs from levels 5 and 6. Patient is very depressed and not concerned with its surroundings but usually responds to direct voice. The patient urinates or defecates without attempting to move. May cry out spontaneously or continually whimper. Occasionally, an animal at level 7 does not vocalize. Aggressive pain management is needed, pain is compromising pet's health and prognosis for recovery.

8 = Severe Pain: Signs as for level 7. Vocalizing may be more of a feature, or the patient is so consumed with pain that it does not notice another presence and just lies there. With severe trauma the patient may not be able to move or cry due to the increased pain caused by that activity and, therefore, remains motionless and extremely depressed. The patient may thrash around in the cage intermittently. With some traumatic or neurologic pain, the patient may scream when approached. Treatment is essential!

9 = Severe to Excruciating Pain: As in level 8, but patient is hyperesthetic (extremely touch sensitive). When any part of the body in proximity to the wound, injury, etc. is touched, the patient trembles involuntarily due to severe inflammatory pain. This degree of pain can cause death.

10 = Almost Comatose: As in level 9, but patient emits piercing screams or is nearly comatose. The patient is hyperesthetic/hyperalgesic (everything hurts). The whole body is trembling, and pain is elicited wherever the patient is touched. This degree of pain can cause death.

This document was partially plagiarized from Pfizer's "Managing Pain in Dogs and Cats, Small Mammals and Birds."

Pain Assessment Chart

Please complete this chart at the end of each day.

Pain Intensity: How bad was your pet's pain today?
 3 = Severe 2 = Moderate 1 = Mild 0 = None

Pain Relief: How much pain relief has the medication give your pet today??
 C = Complete G = Good M = Moderate S = Slight 0 = None

Side Effects: Has the treatment upset your pet in any way?

Notes: What did your pet do today? (Whimpering, not eating, listless or reluctant to walk, etc.)

Date	Pain Intensity		Pain Relief		Side Effects/Notes
	a.m.	p.m.	a.m.	p.m.	

Overall, how effective was the alleviation of pain in your pet this week?

Poor Fair Good Very Good Excellent

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	a.m.	p.m.	a.m.	p.m.	

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