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# SITS & WIGGLES

The Newsletter of the Animal Clinic of Chardon

WHAT'S INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

*Chronic Vs. Acute Pain in Dogs*

*Everyday Signs of a Cat in Pain*



## CHRONIC VS. ACUTE PAIN IN DOGS

Pain can be a tricky thing to identify in your dog. Pet owners often think of their dog's pain as their inability to move or activity level – lower activity levels may equate to more pain. Although true, pain may be present in many other forms other than movement, like behavior. Dogs tend to hide their pain, often showing only subtle physical and behavioral signs. This makes it difficult for you to notice they're suffering and potentially prolonging their discomfort.

There are two primary types of pain in dogs— acute and chronic. Here is some more information on each.

### **Acute Pain in Dogs**

Acute pain is pain that has just come on or has only been present for a short amount of time. It's typically associated with an illness, injury, or surgery, and helps the brain signal that an area should be protected to allow for healing. (Continued on next page)



# CHRONIC VS. ACUTE PAIN IN DOGS

Acute pain typically causes behavior changes, such as not wanting to be touched, hiding, or keeping weight off an injured paw. These behaviors are protective in that they can reduce the pain signals that travel to the brain. Acute pain can also be known as adaptive pain because it's normal pain that heals and has a return to function. A cut to the paw is an example of adaptive/acute pain. If the pain is not addressed, or the wound is untreated, this can get worse and transition to chronic pain. The beginning of joint damage is another example of adaptive pain and will transition to chronic pain if left untreated.

## Chronic Pain in Dogs

Chronic pain can cause severe stress to your dog and greatly decrease the joy they get out of life. This is often called “maladaptive pain” because it doesn't appear to have any sort of protective purpose. Arthritis is a good example of maladaptive pain because it's not a disease that can be cured—the injury and inflammation are always present. This leads to a constant bombardment of the brain with pain signals, and without recognition and proper management, the pain can take on a life of its own. Without recognition and proper management, chronic pain can progress, firing painful signals to the brain even in different parts of the body and when no pain-inciting stimulus is present.

Osteoarthritis (OA) is a common cause of chronic pain in dogs (and not just older dogs). It's estimated to occur in nearly 40% of all dogs. Hereditary and other congenital factors can cause OA in even very young dogs, and it can develop following a severe injury to a joint. OA can occur in dogs of all different breeds and mixes, and of all different sizes and ages.

Signs that can indicate osteoarthritis pain in dogs include:

- Limping
- Less willing to jump up or down
- Less willing to climb stairs
- Less active or “slowing down”
- Stiffness
- Slower getting up after sleep or a nap



## Treatment of Acute Pain

Depending on its severity and cause, acute pain is often treated with a combination of veterinarian-prescribed pain medications and rest. Acute pain typically only lasts for a short period of time unless it's associated with the onset of OA or the cause of the pain is not determined and treated – at which point it can become chronic pain.



## Treatment of Chronic Pain

Chronic pain associated with OA is not curable, but it can be managed. With proper medication, the pain signals that travel to the brain are reduced, giving the nervous system a chance to recover. This helps to keep your dog comfortable, reduce their stress, and allows them to engage in activities they love like playing fetch, being pet, and going on walks with you.

If your dog is showing signs of pain, take note of them (using this [OA checklist](#)) and continue to monitor and evaluate if their pain signs are returning. Your veterinarian can help you determine the cause of your dog's pain and get them on a proper pain management plan — giving them their quality of life back. Written by Joyce A. Login, DVM

## EVERYDAY SIGNS OF A CAT IN PAIN

Cats love the bird's eye view – jumping up to the window sill for birdwatching or finding that perfect sunny spot. When those favorite spots seem out of reach for your cat, they may be showing you signs of pain due to osteoarthritis.

Chronic pain, like that from osteoarthritis (OA), is surprisingly common in cats. Clinical studies have found signs of osteoarthritis in 61% of cats over the age of six and in 90% of cats over the age of 12. 40% of those cats showed signs of pain. Chronic osteoarthritis pain can become a serious health problem for your cat — without treatment, the pain will continue to get worse. Helping your cat begins by talking with your veterinarian and coming up with a medical treatment plan to relieve your cat's pain.

Recognizing signs of a cat in pain can be difficult because cats hide their discomfort as much as possible (it's a survival strategy left over from when they lived in the wild). But there's good news — because you know your cat's playful ways and what they love better than anyone, you're the best person to spot when changes in these behaviors could be signs of osteoarthritis pain.

### Everyday Changes in Your Cat That Could Indicate Pain

An analysis of around 300 cats with osteoarthritis conducted at the North Carolina State University College of Veterinary Medicine identified six everyday behaviors that – when they change – strongly correlate with the presence of osteoarthritis pain[4]. These include:

- How your cat jumps up onto a higher surface
- How your cat jumps down from a higher surface
- How your cat climbs up stairs
- How your cat climbs down stairs
- How your cat looks as it runs
- How willing your cat is to chase moving objects

What these changes might look like in your cat is animated in this [Cat Osteoarthritis Checklist](#)



### Other Signs of a Cat in Pain

One or more of these changes could also indicate osteoarthritis pain in cats:

- A decrease in overall energy and activity levels
- Less interactive with family members (human or pet)
- Less interested in playing
- Urinating or defecating outside their litter box
- Grooming themselves less
- Licking or chewing a certain spot
- Purring more (purring can actually be a sign of pain)
- Changes in personality (more irritable or withdrawn)
- Flinching or meowing when being petted or picked up
- Scratching or biting
- Sleeping in a hunched position

### Share Your Observations With Your Veterinarian

Cats hide almost everything, especially pain. They're masters at disguising their discomfort as part of their survival instinct; this is especially true in the veterinary exam room. Your veterinarian relies on you to report changes in your cat's behavior seen at home for more accurate diagnoses. It's a great idea to take videos of your cat doing these activities so you can show your vet next time you see them.

Using an objective screening tool like the [Cat OA Checklist](#) is a good first step in measuring where your cat is on the spectrum between "healthy" and a cat with joint disease. Share the results with your veterinarian. If your cat is diagnosed with osteoarthritis, your vet can recommend a safe and effective pain management protocol, which can greatly improve your cat's outlook and quality of life — not to mention your peace of mind. Written by Joyce A. Login, DVM

***“Dogs do speak, but only to those who know how to listen.”***

***Orhan Pamuk***

## ACOC Birthdays

Kim 3/6

Terri 3/15

Dr. Stephanie 3/24

