

Specialist Referral Service
Willows Information Sheets

Pain management (analgesia)





What is pain?

Pain is an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience. Different animals (like different people) will have very different experiences of the same pain. Acute pain is necessary in terms of survival and signals a threat to the animal. However, pain that is ongoing does not usually have any beneficial effect and needs to be treated. The longer our pets live and the more we can do for their medical care, the more important it becomes for us to recognise and treat pain.

How do we know when an animal is in pain?

Pain management in animals is obviously very difficult because our pets cannot tell us what they are feeling. Instead we have to interpret changes in their behaviour and use our own experiences to decide that a pet is in pain. It is very likely that cats and dogs feel pain in a very similar way to us, and this allows us to anticipate to some extent what may prove to be painful for a dog or a cat.

As an owner you may see changes in your pet's sleeping patterns, the development of lameness and other behavioural changes depending on what area is affected and also on the nature of the discomfort. It is important to consult with your veterinary surgeon, as sometimes it is difficult to distinguish the behavioural changes associated with pain from some medical conditions.

Why do we have to treat pain?

Ongoing pain does not generally have any benefits to a patient, and in fact it has many disadvantages. For example, if we do not control such pain a pet may take longer to recover from a surgery and will have a greater risk of complications.

How do you treat pain?

The drugs that we use to treat pain depend on the type and severity of the pain your pet is experiencing. For example we will administer morphine type drugs when your pet undergoes surgery, but these may not be necessary for a disease such as arthritis. There is no doubt that, as a disease progresses, we may have to alter the medication your pet is on and possibly add more tablets.

There are other things that can be used to help decrease the level of pain your pet is experiencing e.g.:

- Comfortable bedding
- Exercise regulation, as discussed with your veterinary surgeon
- Physiotherapy appropriate to your pet's condition
- Complementary therapy such as acupuncture

One of the most important things is to realise that pain management, especially in chronic conditions, requires a team approach between the owners and the veterinary surgeon. The pain management plan may well need to be regularly reassessed as your pet's condition changes.

If you have any concerns at any stage after your pet's operation, please do not hesitate to [contact us](#).

Specialist Referral Service
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