

Elburn Animal Hospital Newsletter

November, 2009

Welcome

This month's newsletter focuses on recognition and management of pain in our pets. Nobody wants to see their pet in pain. It changes their attitude, makes them less active and playful, and can even keep a pet from eating regularly. Pain from surgery can cause pets to act strangely and can even cause the healing process to take longer. Arthritis, knee injuries, and herniated vertebral discs are all chronically painful conditions that can reduce the quality of life for any pet. But there are several ways to help keep your pet feeling its best, including dietary changes, nutritional supplements, holistic treatments and chemical pain reduction agents. In this issue, we'll discuss how to recognize pain in an animal, what you can do at home, and what we can do at the office. Any questions can be addressed to a member of our staff at (630) 365-9599, or you can contact us via email at 3lburn@sbcglobal.net.

November: Pain Management Month

How to Recognize Pain in Your Pet:

Pets are able to conceal their pain amazingly well. Very rarely do we see pets that whimper or yelp, unless the pain they are experiencing is sharp and unexpected. But there are ways to tell if your pet is experiencing pain.



Some of the most obvious signs of pain in a pet are those that signal joint pain. When a pet is slow to rise in the morning or after a nap, or if he seems stiff when walking for a few minutes after rising, this is an indication that his joints, muscles, tendons or ligaments are painful. To what degree he is painful depends on the individual dog—some are simply more sensitive to pain than others. Other signals your pet may give are more subtle—he may “bunny hop” when he runs, which is when he uses both his hind legs at once while running or using the

stairs. You may also notice that, when he shakes his body, the shake does not travel the full length down the spine to the tail.



Other signs of pain are less specific. Shivering as if cold may be one symptom, although some small dogs shiver naturally and others shiver when they are nervous. Heavy breathing or excessive panting is another sign of pain. If your pet is not behaving normally, such as seeking more attention from family members, or seeking less attention from family members, he may be painful. If his eating or drinking habits change he may be too painful to care much about food. A change in elimination behavior may also signal pain. Being aware of your pet's routine, and watching for deviations from that routine, are excellent tools to help you recognize when your pet is not feeling his best.

What You Can Do at Home:

There are several techniques you can use at home to help keep your pet from suffering painful conditions. First of all, give him exercise but don't let him overdo it. Second, feed him an appropriate food. Last, you may add nutritional supplements to his diet.

Make sure your pet gets adequate exercise. Exercise has been shown to support a strong musculo-skeletal system, and to help keep joints flexible as pets age. At the same time,



supervise your pet's playtime and make sure he doesn't overdo it. Keep your dog on a leash when walking and keep him contained in the yard so he is less likely to experience injuries. Cats need playtime, too, but keep them inside where it's

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safe, and do not let them jump onto or off of exceedingly high places such as the top of the refrigerator. Birds should have their wings clipped to prevent them from flying into windows, walls and mirrors and injuring themselves. If you have a “pocket” pet, be sure his housing reflects his needs (don’t give a guinea pig a four-story cage, for example).

Another prevention technique is to feed your pet a high-quality food. A good diet has been



shown time and time again to help prevent chronic conditions that may cause pain, including arthritis.

The first quality to look for in a dog or cat food is a high percentage of meat protein (meats should make up 4 of the first 5 ingredients on the panel). Also look for foods with no grains, no dairy products, and no soy products. These ingredients may cause an inflammatory response, that can contribute to many painful conditions. If a food has added glucosamine or fish oil, that certainly won’t hurt (although most foods with these added ingredients do not have near enough added). Birds should eat as much fresh food as possible, as should small exotic pets. A diet that is geared towards an adequate intake of foods they would be exposed to in their natural environment is usually the healthiest. For instance, rabbits, which naturally eat grasses and hays, should not be fed fruit.

The last prevention technique is to use nutritional supplements. Glucosamine, with chondroitin or MSM, is a supplement you can give your pet to help prevent and ease joint pain. Fish oil, especially from fish such as salmon, anchovy or mackerel, has



benefits not only for the joints, but for skin and other body systems as well. Doses for each of these supplements are weight-dependent, so talk to a veterinarian before starting these supplements.

What We Can Do at the Office:

All pets should receive routine veterinary care. This is how we catch disease processes early on, and ensure that our pets stay as healthy as possible as they age. It is always easiest and most cost-effective to prevent a painful condition from occurring in the first place, and regular medical check-ups help in this process. Once a pet has been diagnosed with a medical condition, there are several steps we take to keep the pet from hurting for as long as possible.

At Elburn Animal Hospital, we begin discussion of pain management by assessing the amount and location of the pain. We perform a full “Range of Motion” test, checking joints, ligaments and bone structure, as well as the routine physical exam, in which we can note internal pain. Blood work and/or radiographs may be recommended to further assess the problem.



Once we have evaluated the pain felt by a patient, we begin looking at diet. As mentioned before, a high-quality diet is extremely important to health. But if a pet is already on a good diet, we will discuss ways to make it even better—perhaps by changing the primary protein source, or by adding nutritional or herbal supplements.

Holistic treatments, including herbal medicines, acupuncture and/or chiropractic treatments are another avenue open



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to help treat pain in our pets. Depending upon the type and level of pain experienced by your pet, the doctor may suggest different treatments, or a combination of modalities. Often, the first holistic treatment can be performed at the initial consultation visit. Subsequent visits are timed according to what the doctor feels the pet can handle and what is beneficial for the particular condition we are treating.

The last option we use at EAH is traditional chemical pain reducers. There are several effective pain medications that we have available to help our patients. We often use these after surgical procedures, and also for pets with chronic pain conditions. Blood tests must be performed before using these medications. If a pet will be on pain medication for an extended time period, blood work should be performed at least twice each year so we can track the function of the organs that process these drugs.



One last note in treating a pet in pain—please do NOT give medications without first discussing it with a veterinarian. Many of the over-the-counter medicines available to humans are toxic to pets. Even those that are labeled specifically for animals must be given in a dose and a manner that is consistent with what that pet can process in its system. Giving a medication without having a veterinarian assess the pet beforehand can be extremely dangerous. So always speak with a veterinarian or a veterinarian's representative before giving your pet any drug.

If November is the start of the holiday season, of course December is the holiday hey-day! Next month we will discuss holiday joys and hazards,



and why giving your child/parent/significant other a pet for a gift is a big no-no! If you have a holiday picture you'd like to submit for next month, please email it to us at 3lburn@sbcglobal.net. If you have any questions or concerns, or would like more information, visit our website at www.elburnanimalhospital.com, or give us a call at (630) 365-9599. If you would like to opt out of receiving our newsletter, please send an email to us at 3lburn@sbcglobal.net.

November Special: Mention this ad and receive a "Range of Motion" test along with your routine examination for half price. A \$16.50 savings! ☺

October Open House: We are proud to report our open house was a great success! Thanks to all of you who were able to attend, and hopefully we'll see even more of our clients next year!

Upcoming Events: Beginning in mid-November we will have a Santa Paws box available in the front entranceway for donations to TAILS, a local animal shelter. We will post the want list with our December newsletter as well as on our bulletin board at the office.

Do you have an idea for a newsletter? A question you'd like answered about caring for your pet? Email us at 3lburn@sbcglobal.net and let us know! We are always interested in what you have to say, and what you want to know.