

This Behavior Indicates How Secure Your Dog Feels at Home

All dogs have certain canine quirks. And you may wonder about their hidden messages. Here are three we haven't discussed recently ... including one that can be a tip-off as to how comfortable and secure your dog feels in your home.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dogs curl up when they sleep for warmth and security
- Dogs typically twitch in their sleep because they're dreaming
- Dogs circle before lying down to "trample" imaginary grass and leaves to create a nest

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It's more of the rule, not the exception, to wonder about your dog's quirks. And, yes, they all have them ... although they may vary widely from pet to pet. As I mentioned in last tell-all about why your dog does that (you fill in the blank), dogs have unique personalities that account for many of their individual traits.

Just as some humans adore tennis and others are die-hard comic-book fans... some dogs live to play tug-of-war while others count down the hours until their next scratch on the back. However, being a canine does come with its own set of peculiarities, which aren't so peculiar after all when you learn the reasons behind them.

So if you've ever wondered, "Why does my dog ...?" – keep reading to find out the answers to some common doggy conundrums.

Why Does My Dog Curl Up in a Ball When He Sleeps?

Many dogs curl up like a caterpillar when they sleep, even when they've got plenty of room to stretch out. It might seem uncomfortable, but it's a cozy, secure position for dogs, sort of like the "fetal position" for humans.

In the wild, dogs dig a nest and curl up in a ball for warmth to sleep. This not only conserves body heat, it also protects the bulk of their organs from predators. Many dogs particularly enjoy having a blanket to "dig" in and curl up on (or under). If your dog often sleeps stretched out, it means he's either hot or very secure in his surroundings.¹

Why Does My Dog Twitch While Sleeping?

Have you ever noticed your dog start to twitch or quiver in his sleep? His feet may even start to move and he may let out a small bark or grunt. He's dreaming! Dogs go through three stages of sleep, non-rapid eye movement (NREM), rapid eye movement (REM), and short-wave sleep (SWS).

It's during REM sleep that dogs dream and the body movements that go along with them are thought to be your dog's way of "acting out" the dream. If your dog curls up when he sleeps, you might see such movements less often, since his muscles will be more tense than a dog sleeping stretched out.²

Generally, you can leave your dreaming dog to dream in peace, unless he seems distressed. You may then want to call his name softly to wake him up. If it seems he's had a nightmare (yes, some dogs have nightmares), speak to him in soothing tones to help him calm down.

There are a couple of less common reasons why dogs may twitch in their sleep as well. If your dog is cold, twitching can be his body's way of warming up. In this case, move your dog to a warmer location and provide a blanket.

Twitching can also be a sign of a seizure. Initially, if you're not sure, call your dog's name to wake him up. If he wakes up, he was dreaming. If he continues to twitch and tremble, feels stiff, and does not respond to his name, he's having a seizure. In this case, you should seek medical attention. Once you know what it looks like when your dog is dreaming, you'll be able to identify it when it happens in the future.

Why Does My Dog Walk in a Circle Before Lying Down?

Your dog's ancestors slept in the wild and probably trampled down a "nest" of grass, leaves, or snow to sleep in. When your dog circles before lying down, he's displaying this ancestral tendency, which is basically a way to get comfortable and feel safe.

Your dog may also dig or scratch at your couch or carpet prior to lying down. This, too, is an ancestral behavior, as wild dogs dig holes to lie in. The hole help keeps dogs cool in the summer and warm in the winter.³

Most dogs only circle a few times before getting comfortable. If your dog seems to circle endlessly and has trouble settling down, this could be a sign of arthritis or a neurological problem and should be checked out by a veterinarian.

Sources and References

[Vet Street August 22, 2012](#)

[Vet Street April 15, 2013](#)

[Vet Street March 19, 2012](#)

¹ [Vet Street August 22, 2012](#)

² [Vet Street April 15, 2013](#)

³ [Vet Street March 19, 2012](#)
