

## Five Signs of Pain That Owners Often Overlook – Are You Missing Them?

Your pet can't tell you in words where or how much they hurt. Pets do tell us, but not always in recognizable ways. It's up to you to be on the alert and to pay attention so you won't miss your pet's pleas for help. Here are the best go-to remedies to provide natural relief for animals in pain.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Arthritis is the most common mobility issue in dogs, and signs of discomfort can often be subtle
- In addition to stiff movements and sometimes a limp, less recognizable symptoms include changes in your dog's grooming, eating or exercise habits and/or changes in personality or interaction with family members
- There are many natural substances and therapies that can be very beneficial in relieving your dog's joint discomfort

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The most common mobility issue in dogs is osteoarthritis, also called degenerative joint disease (DJD). And while arthritis is primarily related to aging and is more prevalent in large and giant breeds, it can affect dogs of all ages and sizes, male and female.

Unlike people with arthritis, dogs can't tell us where or how much they hurt, nor can they seek relief for their pain. That's why it's up to dog parents to stay alert for signs of discomfort, as well as subtle changes in a pet's habits and behavior that might also signal a problem.

Most people are aware that a dog with arthritis may limp, is likely to move more slowly or stiffly and can have difficulty standing up after lying down. But there are other, less noticeable signs that dog parents should also watch out for.

### Five Subtle Signs Your Dog Has Mobility Issues

1. **Changes in grooming habits** — It's certainly not as obvious as when kitty grooms herself, but dogs also engage in certain grooming activities such as shaking their entire body when they're wet or to get rid of excess hair.

For obvious reasons, a full body shake will be difficult or impossible for a dog who is stiff and sore with arthritis, so you'll want to help your dog through regular brushing sessions, and **towel drying after a bath** or swim.

Many dogs also clean the area around their backsides and genitalia, which will be less likely for a dog with joint problems. Also, arthritis discomfort can prevent your pet from getting into the proper posture necessary to pee or poop, which can result in self-soiling. Make sure to check your pet's back end and undercarriage regularly and help with cleanup if necessary.

Dogs with painful arthritis don't move around as much healthy dogs, so their nails tend to grow longer, faster. This can make walking even more difficult for a dog already dealing with mobility issues, so be sure to clip your dog's nails on a regular basis to keep them short.

2. **Changes in eating habits** — Your dog may begin eating less not because she isn't hungry, but because there's a problem getting to her food bowl. A slippery floor, a staircase or a long walk to the bowl can make getting a meal a bigger challenge than she can handle comfortably.

Make sure your dog's food and water bowls are located in a spot that's easy for her to get to, and if you have hard floors, put a small mat or rug down to stabilize both bowl and dog. Also consider raised bowls if your pet seems to have difficulty bending down.

3. **Changes in exercise or play habits** — One of the hallmark signs of progressive DJD in dogs is a decrease in physical activity.

Your dog may be less playful than he once was, or he may not want to travel as far as he used to on your daily walks. If he loves to play fetch, you may notice he seems to be tiring out before your arm does.

Since exercise is important for every pet, even those with arthritis, be sure to continue to get your dog out for a walk or a visit to the dog park every day while respecting the decrease in his energy level and endurance.

4. **Changes in interaction with family members** — Because your dog can't get around as effortlessly as she once could, you may notice changes in the way she interacts with you.

She may no longer be waiting at the bottom of the stairs to greet you when you come through the door. She may not follow you from room to room anymore, or jump up next to you when you sit in your favorite chair.

To ensure your dog continues to feel a part of things, make the effort to go to her when she doesn't or can't come to you. For example, make a point to find her and greet her when you come home. Place a comfortable dog bed on the floor in the rooms where you spend most of your time.

Slippery hard floors can be intimidating for a pet with mobility issues, so be kind to your dog and put down carpet runners and area rugs so she feels confident navigating around your home. For dogs with fuzzy paws, Dr. Buzby's ToeGrips are also beneficial for many dogs.

5. **Changes in personality** — If your dog is uncomfortable much of the time, he'll probably show some irritability. If the pain is allowed to persist and worsen, he might even show some aggression if he's bumped or jostled, or if it hurts when you pick him up or try to move him.

A dog who has never shown aggression and suddenly does so is definitely suspicious for a painful condition.

Typically, dogs who behave aggressively due to pain only do so when sore joints are handled or manipulated, or when they're being forced to move in a manner that is painful.

Situations requiring extra caution include when you're lifting your dog, and when there are children around who might accidentally bump into or fall on him.

## Relieving Your Dog's Discomfort

There are many natural substances and therapies that have been shown to be beneficial for pets with arthritis.

In addition to a high-quality omega-3 supplement (like krill oil), there are several other natural supplements that when added to your dog's diet can provide the raw materials for cartilage repair and maintenance, including:

- Glucosamine sulfate, perna mussel, MSM and egg shell membrane supplements
- Homeopathic Rhus Tox, arnica and others that fit the animal's symptoms
- Turmeric or curcumin
- Supergreen foods, such as spirulina and astaxanthin
- Natural anti-inflammatory formulas (herbs such as boswellia, proteolytic enzymes and nutraceuticals such as SAME)
- Injectable joint support, such as Adequan and polysulfated glycosaminoglycans
- Raw, frozen, fresh food prescription diets containing several joint supportive foods

Natural therapies that can be tremendously beneficial to arthritic pets include:

- Chiropractic care. Proper alignment prevents your dog's body from shifting into unhealthy positions to compensate for an injured or painful area, which can create problems down the road.
- Massage is an excellent way to treat tissue inflammation and prevent secondary compensation in your dog's body.
- Stretching your dog can reduce degeneration and prevent soft tissue injury.
- Acupuncture treatments can be very beneficial for some dogs with degenerative joint disease.
- There are several types of physical therapy that can benefit arthritic dogs. For example, gentle hydrotherapy in a pool or on an underwater treadmill can build and maintain muscle strength and endurance with minimum stress to painful joints. Also helpful are therapies that focus on coordination, flexibility and balance.

Cryotherapy (cold packs) and heat therapy, extracorporeal shockwave therapy (ESWT) and low-level laser therapy can also be extremely beneficial in keeping an arthritic pet comfortable and mobile.

- Chondroprotective agents (CPAs), which protect the joints, are a must for any dog with osteoarthritis. The type, form and dose of CPA your veterinarian prescribes will be based on your dog's individual situation. Since each animal responds differently to CPAs, sometimes it's necessary to try a variety of products to find the ones most beneficial for a pet's specific symptoms.

Unfortunately, arthritis is a progressive disease, so it's important to routinely monitor your dog's symptoms and adjust her arthritis protocol to meet the changing demands of her body.

## Sources and References

