



Gina E. Meekins, DVM

Dr. Meekins was born in Columbia, SC and was raised in Greensboro, NC. She earned a BS in Animal Science from North Carolina State University and her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from North Carolina State University in 1995. While attending veterinary school she worked in the avian disease research lab and spent a summer doing an internship with the Animal Health Division of the American Cyanamid Company. Her senior year she received the Pfizer Scholarship Award for Research Excellence.

Upon graduating from Veterinary School, Dr. Meekins worked for three years in a small animal practice in Kernersville, NC and then spent three years working at an emergency clinic before coming to Cobb Animal Clinic. Currently she shares her home with her husband Hayes, their two sons Hayes and Ryan, and Riley their daughter. They also enjoy spending time with “Beason” their Golden Retriever and “Kuechly,” their kitten adopted from Cobb Animal Clinic!



If symptoms of pain are not recognized and treated, our pets will continue to suffer in silence, robbing them of a good quality of life.

Recognizing Chronic Pain

“Doc, I just don’t want my pet to be in pain.” As a veterinarian, I have heard this statement many times. Usually it is after an animal suffers an acute injury, illness, or in an end of life situation. I think we all feel this way. I mean, who wants to watch their beloved family member suffer? Acute pain is usually obvious, and when we see our pets in pain, we treat it.

What if we did not recognize their pain, however? Chronic pain, also known as maladaptive pain, can be much harder to see in our pets. This pain, caused by such things as cancer, degenerative disease, or arthritis, can be slow in onset, continuous, or intermittent. Just as people who experience chronic pain can continue to function daily, animals continue with their routines. They may still greet you with a wagging tail, chase a ball, squirrel, or bird, and go on their nightly walks, all without obvious complaint. This is because it is common for animals to mask their pain. Instinctively, this can be protective, since showing weakness can make an animal more vulnerable to a predator. Because of the difficulty in recognizing the symptoms, chronic pain often goes unnoticed and it is assumed our pets are just “getting older” and “slowing down.” If not recognized and treated, our pets will continue to suffer in silence, robbing them of a good quality of life.

So how do we know? What do we look for? Well, signs in dogs and cats can differ slightly. Dogs may show a reluctance to jump on the bed or couch, or into the car, and show a hesitation going up or down stairs. They may not play ball as long, or walk as far as they used to. Some may be stiff in the morning, reluctant or slow to get up, or even have a slight limp which they walk out of during the day. Panting excessively, or restlessness at night can also be a sign. Some dogs sit or lay in odd positions to take the pressure off of their joints, while some just seem to sleep more than normal. Behavioral changes such as irritability, aggressiveness, or snapping when touched or groomed in certain areas can also indicate pain. Interestingly, crying or whimpering is not the most common response.

It may be even more difficult to assess pain in a cat than a dog. Cats are masters at hiding pain. In some studies, it was shown that as many as 1 in 3 cats suffer from arthritis, but only around 7% are actually treated. Why is this? Cats like routine, and they are motivated to continue their routine. It is easy to miss the signs when a cat is doing their best to compensate. Subtle signs may include not jumping up to their favorite perches, hesitation before jumping, or not quite making their jumps and climbing up the rest of the way. They may also stop grooming themselves because it hurts, or miss the litterbox because painful hips make it difficult to climb over the edges. Chronic pain may also cause personality changes in a cat. A once personable and friendly cat may become moody or hide from physical interaction. Just the opposite, a once aloof cat may now overtly seek attention or cuddling. Like dogs, crying is not frequently seen.

“Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional.”—Unknown

So, what do you do if you suspect that your pet is in pain? The best approach is to take them to your veterinarian for a good physical exam. Even then it still may be difficult to determine the extent of pain an animal is in. In this case, it may be worth treating for pain and observing the response. There are many options available to treat pain such as medications, dietary supplements, rehabilitation and alternative therapies including laser and acupuncture. Your veterinarian can help you decide on the right treatment for your animal.

It is important to be proactive in detecting pain in animals. The earlier we intervene, the better chance we have at providing our pets with a long active and happy life.



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