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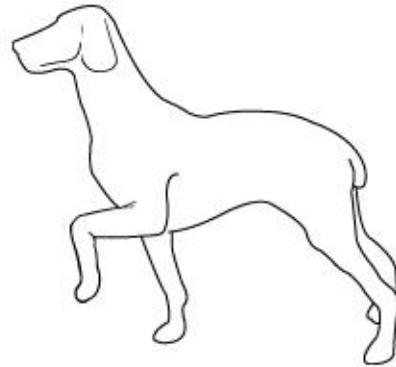
## **PAIN MANAGEMENT IN DOGS**

### **GENERAL INFORMATION**

In recent years, veterinarians have made great progress in understanding how dogs feel pain and the best ways to manage that pain. Many dogs will instinctively hide their pain as a survival mechanism, which, in the past, led to incorrect assumptions about the ability of dogs to feel pain. Because we now understand more about how dogs feel pain, we now know how to recognize and manage it.

#### ***What is pain?***

Pain has as many definitions as there are injuries, conditions and individuals. Many experts define pain as “an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage.” Pain is very subjective and difficult to measure. Since dogs instinctively hide their pain to prevent potential predators from targeting them when they are injured, pain assessment in dogs can be challenging. The manifestation of pain is widely variable from dog to dog. It is important to note that just because a dog doesn’t cry, limp or show other obvious signs of pain, it doesn’t mean that they aren’t in pain. A good general rule of thumb is that if it would hurt you, it most likely hurts them.



#### ***How can I tell if my dog is in pain?***

With obvious injuries or after surgical procedures, we can reasonably assume that the dog will experience pain. Although the signs may be subtle, careful observation will often reveal signs of pain in most dogs. Most dogs experiencing pain will change their behavior patterns. You often will see a reluctance to climb stairs, a decrease in activity levels, or notice that the dog resists being held or picked up. These subtle signs may be our only clue that the dog is hurting.

Arthritic pain is common in older dogs and anyone who has witnessed an older dog struggle to rise or be unable to stand after lying down can imagine the discomfort these dogs must endure.

Other signs of pain include:

- They may be violent and vocalize – or be quiet, withdrawn and inactive.
- They may be aggressive when approached, as they try to protect themselves from further pain, or they may be subdued or withdrawn.
- Their ears may lie flat against their head.
- They may lick the affected area.
- Decreased activity
- Reluctance to walk, run, climb stairs, jump or play
- Stiffness
- Limping
- Difficulty rising from a resting position
- Lagging behind on walks
- Soreness when touched
- Yelping or whimpering in pain
- Acting aggressive or withdrawn
- Exhibiting other personality changes, such as hiding, not greeting family members, not playing as much

### ***How is pain treated in dogs?***

If your dog is undergoing a surgical procedure, do not be afraid to ask about the type of pain management provided for your dog. There are many types of drugs used to prevent and lessen pain. Your veterinarian will make appropriate drug choices based on your pet's specific needs. Some common veterinary pain-relief medications include:



**Non-Steroidal-Anti-Inflammatory-Drugs (NSAIDs)** – These drugs interfere with the body's production of inflammatory molecules that trigger pain and swelling. NSAIDs must be used with caution because there is potential for stomach, intestinal, and liver and kidney problems. NSAIDs by themselves are used for low to moderate pain and discomfort. Bloodwork will help to decide if these are appropriate for your pet.

**Opioids** – Used for more severe pain, this class of pain relief medication includes morphine, codeine, fentanyl, buprenorphine, butorphanol and hydromorphone. They are also used in advanced cases of cancer or severe arthritic pain. Opioids have a place in selected cases where the quality of life for the dog can be maintained. These can be used in conjunction with the NSAIDs. They block pain at the brain level.

**Corticosteroids** – Cortisone and synthetic cortisone-like drugs such as prednisone, prednisolone, methylprednisolone, and dexamethasone are potent anti-inflammatory medications and can have a very profound impact on the patient. However, they have potential long-term side effects and you should consult with your veterinarian when they are given on a long-term basis to reduce arthritic, allergic or dermatologic discomfort.

Pain is something that no pet should experience needlessly. By closely observing your pet for subtle signs of pain and by working with your veterinarian, your pet can enjoy a long, pain-free life!

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*This client information sheet is based on material written by Ernest Ward, DVM.  
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