

How To Tell If Your Pet Is Sick

NEW YORK, Jan. 15, 2005

For any proud pet owner, nothing could be more important than the health of their little loved one. But excluding cartoons, a dog or cat isn't able to tell you what they're thinking or feeling, especially when they're not feeling well.

There are, however, ways to find out if your pet is sick, says resident veterinarian **Debbye Turner**. She offers some helpful hints on ***The Saturday Early Show***.

It's important to know the signs of healthy behavior and when that behavior changes. The best, most effective way to treat illness and disease in our pets is to catch it as early as possible. So here are some clues to when Fido or Tigger might be feeling a bit under the weather.

Vomiting Or Diarrhea

Vomiting:

Vomiting is a sure sign that all is not well with your pet. While it may be a single, isolated, unexplained event, it may mean a host of far more serious scenarios. Vomiting could indicate a metabolic problem, digestive problem, infection, heartworms, and even cancer.

While this sounds unappetizing, it is important to notice the character of the pet's vomit. Is it yellow, black, red, etc.? Is there undigested food in it? Is it liquid only? All of these answers provide clues for your veterinarian to determine what is going on. Also, how often the pet vomits, and what behavior precedes the vomiting are important.

Diarrhea:

Loose stool could just mean that your pet ate a meal that didn't agree with his system. But prolonged diarrhea can create a loss of electrolytes that could lead to other serious problems like diabetes, distemper, pancreatitis, infection, inflammation, or cancer. Although this is really gross, your veterinarian will need to know what the diarrhea looks like. Is it black? Tinged with blood? Is there mucous? These are all important clues.

Change In Appetite

Decreased appetite:

When a typically enthusiastic eater doesn't want dinner, then something is definitely up. It could be just a small case of gastritis (tummy ache) or it could mean something much more serious is going on. Call your veterinarian right away and tell her/him about the situation.

Increased appetite:

In some cases, a suddenly ravenous pet could mean something is wrong, as well. Particularly with older cats, this is a tell-tale sign. A common disease of geriatric cats is hyperthyroidism, an over-

activity of the thyroid gland. A hallmark sign of hyperthyroidism is a cat that eats constantly, but isn't gaining weight or has even lost weight.

Also, a pet that begins to eat weird things could be meaningful. If your dog suddenly starts eating dirt, feces, vegetation, wall plaster, etc., then there may be a nutritional deficit in the animal's diet.

Weight Loss

If your pet seems to have lost a lot of weight (and you don't have him on a diet) then there is cause for concern. You should not be able to see any of the bony protuberances of the spine (back bones), ribs, or hips. This could mean that your pet is "wasting muscle," which is very serious.

Change In "Normal" Activity Level

In this case, it is essential that you know what "normal" is for your pet. Does it meet you at the door every day? Does it play constantly? Does it sleep the day away? Whenever your pet's normal behavior deviates from the usual, that's a big clue that something is going on. A normally active pet that suddenly doesn't want to move, or a normally calm, sedate animal that is suddenly running around frantically is indication that something is wrong.

Clumsy Or Disoriented Behavior

This could mean a neurological disorder, liver disease, problems with sight, or even an ear infection. Other causes may be ingesting poisonous plants, or hazardous chemicals (like antifreeze at this time of year).

In all cases, if you observe anything that is out-of-the-ordinary, of concern, or unusual with your pet, call your veterinarian right away. Do not wait a few days to see if things get better (note that many people wait till it's too late before acting)! Remember, the best chance your pet has for recovery is early diagnosis.

Change In Urination

Frequent Urination:

If your dog is asking to go outside a lot more than normal or your cat is using the litter box more often, then something may be going on. Of course, the kidneys may be malfunctioning, but there could be infection or crystals in the bladder. And a hallmark sign of diabetes (just like in people) is frequent urination. Again, the color and character of the urine is important in helping the veterinarian figure out what is wrong.

Straining to Urinate:

If you see your pet squatting to urinate, but nothing comes out, run (don't walk) to the nearest veterinary clinic. An animal that cannot void his urine constitutes a medical emergency! This could be due to infection, blockage by urine crystals or other objects (i.e. abnormal growth in the bladder), problems with the prostate, for example. If this blockage is not cleared in a timely manner, the obstruction could be fatal. Do not wait to see if Fido will feel better. Call your veterinarian right away.

Unusual Odor

I know that this will sound impossible to tell, but if your pet's breath is abnormally smelly, there could be something going wrong. Really foul breath could mean tartar on the teeth, gum disease, or even a foreign body lodged in the mouth. Smelly ears could signal infection or infestations. And a metabolic condition called ketoacidosis can produce a "fruity" odor to the breath. Skin infections can also cause a foul odor.

Runny Eyes Or Nose

A runny nose doesn't usually mean your dog has a cold, but it could mean a host of other serious illnesses like respiratory infection, sinus infection, tooth abscess, or cancer. Runny eyes could mean conjunctivitis (inflammation of the eye) or infection.

Hair Loss

Hair loss could mean flea infestation, skin parasites, metabolic disease (like Thyroid disease), nutritional deficiencies, contact with a caustic chemical or even cancer. Less serious reasons for hair loss are late pregnancy, or nursing a litter.

Other

Limping or Sensitivity to touch

Limping could indicate that your pet has stepped on something sharp (that may still be lodged in the foot). It could also indicate arthritis, or other joint malady (like hip dysplasia, torn ligament in the knee, or shoulder). Your pet may have been hit by a car, stepped on, or in a fight. If you are petting your dog or cat and she yelps or turns to nip at you when you touch a particular area, there's a good chance that there is an injury of some kind in that area.

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