

How to Recognize Pain in Your Cat

Cats can feel pain just like people. All animals have specialized nerve endings called *nociceptors* that, when activated, send signals to the central nervous system, which then generates pain.

Trust Your Instincts. If you think your cat is in pain, it probably is. Minimizing animal pain, wherever possible, is important both ethically and legally. Consult your vet as appropriate.



Signs to Look for:

Some Changes in Appearance

- Apprehensive facial expression
- Creased forehead
- Ungroomed appearance

Some Changes in Behavior

- Crying, yowling, growling, or hissing if approached or made to move
- Hiding or separating itself from other cats
- Seeming unusually quiet
- Incessant licking
- Lack of appetite



Some Changes in Posture or Movement

- Limping or holding up a limb with no attempt to use it
- Stiff and abnormal posture, varying with the site of pain:
 - Pain in the head or ears can cause a cat to tilt its head toward the affected side.
 - Generalized pain in the chest and abdomen might cause a cat to appear crouched or hunched.
 - If the pain is in the chest, a cat might extend its head, neck, and body.
 - A cat with abdominal or back pain might stand or lie on its side with its back arched or walk with a stilted gait.



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This factsheet is based on the National Research Council report *Recognition and Alleviation of Pain in Laboratory Animals* (2009), which helps scientists, veterinarians, and animal care staff understand the basis of animal pain, recognize its presence and evaluate its severity, and appreciate the means by which pain can be minimized or abolished. The Institute for Laboratory Animal Research (<http://nas.edu/ilar>) evaluates and disseminates information on issues related to the scientific, technological, and ethical use of animals in research, testing, and education.