

Signs of Pain

Most of the acute or chronic clinical signs are not an absolute indication of pain as they may be associated with other problems, e.g. diseases. Experience and professional judgment must be used, along with specific laboratory tests, to determine the cause and severity of the problem. It is imperative that research and animal care staff receive adequate training in how to recognize clinical signs of pain. If signs of pain are evident after discontinuing analgesics, please consult veterinary personnel in Comparative Medicine or the Primate Center as appropriate for evaluation.

Signs of pain which are common for many species include anorexia with subsequent loss of weight, abnormal posture and self-mutilation. Listed below are additional signs of pain for individual species and can be utilized to assist investigators and animal care staff in recognizing some degree of pain.

Bird

Birds hide signs of pain better than most other species. This, and the fact that the feathers make it difficult to visually assess the animal, means that by the time changes are evident, the bird is quite debilitated. Clinical signs of pain in birds may include:



- Decreased activity
- Ruffled feathers (puffed up appearance)
- Not perching or perching in abnormal locations in the cage
- Decreased appetite
- Weight loss
- Abnormal vocalization or no vocalization
- Dehydration
- Changes in stool appearance (color and consistency)

Cat

Cats in pain are generally silent but may howl or hiss when approached. Clinical signs of pain may include:



- Tendency to hide
- Still posture and may sit hunched in sternal recumbancy with reluctance to stretch out
- Howl and show demented behavior with desperate attempts to escape
- Ungroomed appearance, with a change in normal temperament
- Dilation of pupils, with increased pulse rate and panting
- Behavioral changes

Dog

Dogs in pain are generally quieter and less alert with stiff body movements and an unwillingness to move. Clinical signs of pain may include:



- Lying still or standing crouched
- Restlessness
- Shivering, increased respirations with panting
- May whimper or howl when left alone, or growl without apparent provocation and become vicious when handled
- May bite or scratch at painful regions
- Behavioral changes

Ferret

Ferrets are normally very curious, inquisitive, and active in the exploration of their environment and interactions with cage mates and people. If these behaviors are absent, it may be an indicator for pain. Other clinical signs of pain may include:



- Lack of interest/interaction with environment
- Lethargy
- Anorexia
- Vocalization when handled
- Rough/ungroomed appearance
- Mutilation of painful area
- May become aggressive when handled

Goat and Sheep

Sheep and goats may appear dull and depressed with little interest in their surroundings. Clinical signs of pain may include:



- Teeth grinding
- Rapid and shallow breathing
- Sudden drop in milk yield
- Violent reaction to handling or rigid posture designed to immobilize the painful region
- Changes in facial expression, grunting or grinding of teeth
- Changes in gait or posture

Pig

Pigs normally squeal and attempt to escape when handled but these behaviors may be accentuated by pain. Clinical signs of pain may include:



- Changes in gait or posture, "dog sitting"
- Unwilling to move and may hide in bedding
- Decrease in appetite
- Overall acts depressed

Primate, Non-Human

Non-human primates show little reaction to surgical procedures or to traumatic injury. Obvious signs of pain are not readily seen. However, signs of pain may include:



- Reduced appetite and/or reduced interest in food treats
- Huddling in a crouched posture, head pressing, touching, pushing or scratching affected areas, favoring limbs, reduced movement, increased or decreased aggressiveness toward care givers, and other changes in behavior
- Avoid companions
- Poor or absent grooming
- Increased attention from cage mates
- Facial contortions, clenching of teeth
- Restlessness and shaking accompanied by grunts or groans
- Self-mutilation

Rabbit

Rabbits in pain may be apprehensive, and assume a hunched posture or unwillingness to move. Other clinical signs of pain include:



- Exaggerated reactions to handling, sometimes with vocalization
- Excessive scratching or licking
- Teeth grinding
- Increased respiratory rate
- Dilation of pupils
- Anorexia

Rodent

Rodents in pain usually exhibit decreased exploratory behavior, piloerection, hunched posture, rough and ungroomed hair coat and ungroomed appearance.

It must be emphasized that these signs are also associated with illness. Consult Veterinary Services for evaluation. Other clinical signs of pain may include:



- Excessive scratching and licking
- More aggressive when handled
- Vocalization when handled
- Weight loss
- Porphyrin tearing (rats)
- Twitching of the back and flank (following laparotomy)
- Mutilation of painful area
- Hunched posture
- Decrease in grooming behavior
- Decreased Activity