

PET TALES

Who will stop the PAIN?

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Just as with human medicine, advancements in the way we think of and treat pain for animals is improving the quality of life for pets, with veterinarians now being able to choose from a wide array of products and strategies to ease the hurt.

"Animals can feel all the same aches and pains that we can because they share the same physiologic structures," says Dr. Robin Downing, owner of Colorado's The Downing Center for Animal Pain Management.

Treating pain doesn't just make the hurting stop: It also promotes healthy healing. Untreated pain slows healing time, interferes with sleep and depresses the immune system. The treatment of pain improves respiration, shortens post-surgical hospitalization times, improves mobility, and can even decrease the spread of cancer after surgery.

Most veterinarians prescribe pain medication when needed, but some still believe a pet will move around less during recovery from surgery or injury if in pain — a belief no longer supported by studies. If an animal needs to be restrained, it's better to use a leash or a crate.

Still, many owners don't give pets pain medications — even if they are prescribed — because of concerns about side effects. All drugs can cause unwanted effects, but those risks need to be balanced against the problems caused by untreated pain. Side effects can also be minimized by using drugs appropriately.

The family of drugs known as NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) can cause

ulcers and damage the kidneys in pets, just as they can in humans. But in the same way that people continue to use these drugs for everything from headaches to back injuries, NSAIDs have a valuable role to play in the management of animal pain.

When NSAIDs are needed, it's essential to follow label recommendations for veterinary testing and monitoring of liver and kidney function. Pet owners should review all potential side effects with the veterinarian and stop giving the drug immediately if vomiting or lethargy is observed, or if the pet stops showing interest in eating.

Pain-management experts also suggest asking the veterinarian about the human drugs misoprostol and sulcralfate, which can help protect the stomach lining and prevent ulcers. For dogs, the prescription of Tramadol has been on the increase, and many dogs unable to tolerate NSAIDs have benefited. Tramadol can also be used with NSAIDs and can be taken with steroids, which NSAIDs cannot.

Complementary and alternative medicine also has much to offer dogs and cats suffering from chronic pain. Acupuncture, physical therapy and supplements such as glucosamine and chondroitin can relieve arthritis pain. The veterinary drug Adequan Canine, an injectable relative of glucosamine, can target inflamed joints and help



Aggressive pain-control measures make post-surgery care easier on pets.

rebuild cartilage.

Some dogs and cats, such as those with certain kinds of cancer, need the powerful pain relief that only opiates can provide. Owners often dislike these drugs because they make pets groggy. Fortunately, if long-term use is necessary, the sedation effect usually lessens after a few days.

Opiates can also cause nausea and lack of appetite. A bit of catnip often takes care of this for feline patients, while peppermint or ginger — even in the form of a gingersnap — can make a dog feel better. There are also prescription medications that can help control nausea.

Downing is one of just a handful of veterinarians worldwide credentialed in human medicine's American Academy of Pain Management, as well as being a certified veterinary acupuncturist and physiotherapist. Her approach to pain takes into account the pet's lifestyle and family issues as well as the actual source of the pain.

"I certainly leverage all the tools I can for fighting pain," Downing says. "But my long-term strategy is always maximum comfort and mobility with minimum negative impact on the body. We rely on physical medicine techniques, adapted from human medicine, to complement what we accomplish with medication as well as nutrition."

Pain control is never a "one size fits all" prescription, and there are dozens of drugs that can be used alone and with other medications to relieve all but the most extreme pain in animals.

When a veterinarian isn't sure how to get to the bottom of a pet's pain, it's always worth asking for a consultation with a specialist to design a safe, individualized pain-management program. Veterinary specialists in oncology, surgery and anesthesia are usually most familiar with the wide variety of drugs available today and their safe use. ■

Joint disease often untreated in cats


• An article in Veterinary Practice News compared the written medical records of 100 cats older than 12 years to X-rays of the cats taken at North Carolina State University's College of Veterinary Medicine. The study found that while only four records contained mention of degenerative joint disease (DJD) by veterinarian or owner, X-rays found DJD in 90 percent of the cats. The study concluded that DJD occurs in most geriatric cats and is overlooked and undertreated.

• Dogs bit 4.7 million people in 2006. The American Veterinary Medical Association offers tips on preventing bites on its Web site at www.avma.org.


• Pigeon flocks cannot be eliminated through methods such as trapping or poisoning. Los Angeles is one of the pioneers in using new methods of controlling these messy urban nuisances. The Animal Radio Network reports that a product called OvoControl is administered to birds in treats from rooftop dispensers. OvoControl, which has also been used successfully to control populations of Canadian geese, causes changes in the egg so that it cannot develop or hatch. — Dr. Marty Becker ■



The painful degeneration of joints in old cats may go unnoticed by owners and veterinarians.



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
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