

# How to Recognize Pain in Your Dog

Dogs 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 dog 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 and Behavior

- Stiff body movements
- Unwillingness to move
- Lying still or adopting an unusual posture
- Biting, scratching, or guarding particular regions of the body
- Lack of appetite
- Shivering
- Increased panting



### Some Changes in Alertness

- Appearing less alert (more common in more severe pain)
- Restlessness or appearing more alert (more common in less severe pain)

### Some Changes in Response to People

- Abnormal aggressiveness or apprehensiveness when handled
- A change in the way your dog responds to you, such as a lack of tail wagging

### Changes in Vocalization\*

- Quieter than normal
- Whimpering or howling, especially when unattended
- Growling without apparent provocation

\*These are only guidelines: lack of vocalization or excessive vocalization are not always reliable indicators of pain.



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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.

For more information about pain in pets, farm animals, and laboratory animals, visit:  
<http://nas.edu/pain>