

# Recognizing and Caring for a Sick Pet

When a beloved pet seems a bit “off,” it might be more than just a bad day; it could be a sign of mild sickness or a more serious illness. Here are some tips for recognizing the symptoms of sickness in pets and getting your pet the care he needs to recover.

1. Keep in mind that animals will generally attempt to mask signs of illness. This behavior is a natural instinct that is used for protection in the wild, where any animal showing signs of weakness is likely to be shunned by its own kind or attacked by predators.
2. Be aware that any subtle change in your pet’s appearance or behavior could indicate illness. Some signs to watch for include:
  - Decrease in or loss of appetite
  - Decrease in energy or activity level
  - Hiding
  - Vomiting or diarrhea
  - Blood in the urine or stool
  - Bloating of the abdomen
  - Straining or inability to urinate or defecate
  - Increased shedding or bald patches
  - Excessive scratching or licking of the body
  - Foul odor coming from the mouth, ears or skin
  - Lumps or tumors
  - Discharge from the eyes or nose
  - Limping
  - Seizures
  - Reluctance or difficulty in getting up or going up and down stairs
  - Abnormal vocalization (whining or crying)
3. Know which signs indicate an emergency that requires immediate veterinary care and which require veterinary care if they continue for more than a day or two. Symptoms that indicate an emergency include the inability to urinate, a bloated hard abdomen, excessive vomiting or diarrhea, seizures, and the inability to stand up. Other less severe signs of illness should be checked by a veterinarian within 24 to 48 hours.
4. Once you have taken a sick pet to your veterinarian, you may need to continue medical care at home in the form of medication, special foods or supportive physical care. Here are some tips on handling the daily care of a sick pet:
  - Make sure you know the correct dose and understand how to give medications prescribed by your veterinarian. Your veterinarian knows that medicating a pet can be challenging and will be glad to give you a demonstration and some extra coaching if you need it.
  - Keep in mind that a sick pet should be kept in a quiet environment and may prefer to be left alone. Make sure that young children and other pets

do not bother him. You may need to keep your sick pet in a separate room or area of the house.

- If your veterinarian has prescribed a special food for your sick pet, make sure that you feed him separately from other pets. Also be sure that all members of your household are aware of your pet's special dietary needs and understand that even small amounts of treats or other types of food could be harmful.
  - Be aware of any special physical needs that your sick pet may have. Some medications may cause your pet to drink and urinate more, so you may need to walk him or clean his litter box more frequently. If your pet is having difficulty walking or going up and down stairs, you may need to help him. Ask your veterinarian to show you the correct way to assist your pet so that you will not hurt him.
5. Report any worsening symptoms or new symptoms to your veterinarian immediately, as these could indicate that your pet's illness has become more serious. New symptoms could also be side effects of your pet's medication. Your veterinarian may want to re-examine your pet, or he may simply change your pet's medication.
  6. Be sure to finish all medications as prescribed by your veterinarian and take your pet back to your veterinarian for any recommended re-check exams or diagnostic tests. Even if your pet seems completely better to you, it is very important that you adhere to your veterinarian's instructions. Even if your pet does not look or act sick anymore, there could still be an underlying illness that could recur if you don't follow through on all of your veterinarian's recommendations.