

How to spot signs of pain, and what to do about it.

Adam Piaseczny, DVM, CVA. September 4, 2014

Pain: sensation that lets us know when our tissues are being damaged (perception of noxious stimulus).

Types of pain:

- nerve pain: sharp, strong sensation when stretch receptors in tendons, heat and pressure receptors in skin etc are overstimulated
- inflammatory pain: results from activation of nerve pathways by inflammatory substances released as a consequence of tissue injury

Causes of pain:

- trauma/injury: sharp pain which eventually subsides or (if tissue sustained actual damage) turns into inflammatory pain
- degeneration: breakdown of tissues and organs resulting in inflammation
- infection: damage to tissue caused by microbial overgrowth or invading pathogenic microbes

Common sources of pain:

- joints: activation of stretch receptors in joint capsule and ligaments; degeneration of cartilage and connective tissue leading to inflammation and resultant pain
- teeth: inflammation of periodontal ligament
- mucous membranes: ulcers in stomach, colon, conjunctiva, bladder lining, gums

How to spot pain:

- depression/lethargy
- avoidance behavior: avoiding activities that may trigger pain
- decreased performance, agility, and stamina
- changes in posture
- changes in eating patterns: favoring parts of mouth, inability to chew tough or whole foods
- disruption of proper digestion:
 1. Gastritis: inflammation of stomach lining manifesting as abdominal pain and stomach acid overproduction leading to heartburn, retching/gagging, acid reflux, vomiting and either loss of or ravenous appetite/pica.
 2. Colitis: large intestinal diarrhea, manifests as loose stools with frequent mucus or even blood. Frequently accompanied by cramping, gas, and urge to go/inability to hold BM's.

Cases:

1. JJ, 4 yo FS Border Collie.

HX: stray from Tracy, adopted by Muttville in Sept 2013; much resistance to physical restraint, had to be sedated for initial physical exam and blood draw/vaccination; when adopted out guarded about being touched on the back/snappy; tense hot back over middle of rib cage/tight gait, occasional grunting when getting up.

TX: series of massage sessions before and after walks, cold laser therapy, glandular tonics (joint supplements: SP MusculoSkeletal Support), Metacam, fresh foods (home made diet and whole raw foods); gradual resolution of back pain over 3-4 week, but still dislikes to be picked up

DX: ?

2. Ocean Blue: 11 yo FX Australian Shepherd

RX: relapsing back pain, triggered by strenuous activity; last major episode following a series of agility training sessions; caretakers observed hunched stance/stiff gait, reluctance to jump in the car, poor energy and stamina on walks, decreased appetite/gastritis

TX: cold laser therapy, massage, significant restriction in activity level for 7-14 days; Carprofen (NSAID), Pain Plus (herbal anti-inflammatory), Gabapentin (analgesic): steady improvement of activity and stamina over 2 weeks.

DX: ?

3. Daisy: 3 yo FS Min Poodle

HX: acute trauma at age of 1: collision with much larger dog, loud cry followed by stiff gait. Some initial improvement with massage. Owner describes Daisy as 'lazy', loving to sleep on the couch all day, slow or even stalling on walks, unwillingness to jump in the car/needs to be coaxed but prefers not to be picked up. Biting incidents when suddenly picked up or placed on side or back.

TX: home-made diet, Vit B complex supplement, Omega-3 EFA supplement, Pain Plus (herbal anti-inflammatory). cold laser therapy series, twice daily back massage. One week after initial exam reported mild-moderate improvement in activity level, and requested stronger pain medication. A 7 day course of Previcox (NSAID) was prescribed, owner reported significant improvement in activity level, playful behavior, and running 2 days after starting therapy

DX: ?

4. Gizmo, 5 yo MN Shih Tzu

HX: chronic skin allergies resulting in frequent skin, ear, and foot infections. Owner reports severe food reactions since very young age, stools are not very well formed even on grain free hypoallergenic diets. Common symptoms include severe skin itch especially on chest, armpits, inner thighs, all 4 feet, tail base/perianal area, ear infections, pawing at ears/eye and muzzle.

TX: diet to address underlying gut inflammation and poor digestive function (home-made diet mixed with digestive enzymes and herbals targeting intestinal inflammation).

HX2: 90% reduction of itch after 2 weeks of diet therapy. Gizmo still paws at his face, chin, and ears.

Owner reports head shaking, eye redness and discharge, facial fold and lip pyoderma, and bumps on chin/loss of hair.

TX: 7 day course of oral antibiotic: symptoms resolve completely by day 3, but relapse within 48 hrs after finishing medication. Second course of treatment involved dental x-rays under general anesthesia and extraction of 7 infected teeth. 3 days after dental surgery owner reported 95% improvement in facial itch/head shaking. Symptoms did not return after finishing a 10 day course of post-operative oral antibiotics.

DX: ?