**Evaluating Pain in Your Pet**

Pain, like the topic of fleas, is a very sore subject for many pet guardians. Owners often don’t want to acknowledge that their pet may be uncomfortable (or have a parasite). However, both fleas and pain are more common that what some folks would like to admit.

Just because an animal needs to have an issue addressed does not mean their guardian is not caring, competent, and attentive. Below are some tools to help you gain some perspective on the subject of soreness.

Pain can range from chronic to low grade, dull and aching to sharp and sudden. Usually we hear animals vocalize for sudden, sharp pain. However, more subtle symptoms will not necessarily garner such dramatic reactions. Consider that wild instinct is to disguise or hide pain and weakness so as not to be picked out by another predator or bully.

Subtle signs of pain include:

* Limping
* Reduced activity, lethargy or sluggishness
* Reduced appetite or changes in eating patterns
* Increased or decreased drinking
* Restlessness
* Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
* Whining or increased vocalization
* Hesitancy or refusal to jump, exercise, or play
* Grumpiness with others or changes in other behavior and social interactions
* Cloudiness of mentation or eyes
* Purple or lavender tongue color, scalloped tongue, teeth marks or veins pulsing in the tongue
* Muscle spasms or tightness
* Digestive upset such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or constipation
* Increased dream activity
* Abnormal elimination or litter box habits
* Reduced or excessive grooming or chewing fur
* Tail ducking or sinking in the rear end posture
* Obsessive-compulsive behaviors
* Bad breath, flatulence or other offensive body odors

Each animal is an individual and will therefore display unique symptoms, so the take-home advice is to look for any significant changes. If there is no other reasonable explanation—such as digestive upset after a diet change—then a pain evaluation might be wise.