

What Your Cat *Isn't* Telling You:

Top 10 Signs of Sickness

Margie Scherk, DVM, DABVP

catsINK

Vancouver, Canada

If you see any of these signs in your pet, it's time to call the veterinarian. Even subtle changes can be really important.

1. That's not where he should be "going"!

When cats avoid the litter box, they are trying to tell you something. The message may be one of physical discomfort or psychological distress.

2. He's not acting like himself.

Changes in a cat's interactions with people, other animals, or the environment may indicate pain or distress.

3. Is he just getting older?

A decrease in energy may be abrupt or gradual. If your pet is healthy, he or she shouldn't be "just getting older". Activity changes could be a result of dehydration, pain, or some other underlying illness. Acting young for his age may also be a sign of a problem, such as hyperthyroidism.

4. What's up with his sleeping?

Has the pattern (times of day and night), places, or posture of sleeping changed? Is your pet yawning at night? This can be caused by a decline in vision or hearing, high blood pressure, hyperthyroidism, pain, or dementia.

5. He's not eating or drinking the way he used to.

This refers to quantity *and* changes in behaviors associated with eating and drinking (eg, where, how often, amount at each instance, enthusiasm, body posture).

6. His weight seems to be changing for no reason.

Even when on a diet, weight loss is normally very gradual. Things that could cause rapid weight loss include dental or oral disease. Weight gain, meanwhile, often results from eating too many calories, but it could also be caused by fluid accumulating in the chest or abdomen.

7. He won't stop grooming! And is that a hairball?

Nonstop grooming is a sign of skin irritation (eg, itching, dryness, pain) or distress. However, a decrease in grooming is often associated with mouth, joint, or back pain. If you are finding hairballs, these may be a sign of skin or intestinal problems, psychological distress, or pain.

8. Is he stressed?

In addition to inappropriate elimination and over grooming, signs of distress include hiding, chewing on nonfood items, tail flicking, and holding ears farther back than normal.

9. His vocalization is changing.

Changes in vocalization (eg, tone, pitch, urgency, frequency) should be evaluate by your veterinarian.

10. He has bad breath.

Many conditions in the mouth cause bad breath. Periodontal disease is very common in cats, but bad odors can also come from infected ulcers, tumors, abscesses, and from grooming anal sacs or an infected body region.