

## Pet Health: 7 Sneaky Symptoms You Shouldn't Ignore

How do you know when your dog or cat is sick? Of course, most pet owners head straight to the veterinarian when obvious signs of illness are present (vomiting, diarrhea, refusal to eat). But not every condition comes with such telltale symptoms-especially in the early stages. Here are some sneakier warning signs that your pet may not feel well; these symptoms are equally deserving of a trip to the vet.



### 1. Increased Thirst

It's a good idea to monitor your pet's water consumption and be aware how much your pet typically drinks in a day. Thirst, of course, can fluctuate somewhat with weather conditions and activity levels. But if you suddenly notice that you're refilling the water bowl much more often, it's time to have your pet checked out. A long list of conditions is associated with increased thirst; the more common culprits are kidney disease, diabetes, Cushing's disease, urinary tract infection, and thyroid disease. Blood and urine testing can help to determine the cause.

### 2. Increased Appetite

Some pets are programmed to always be hungry, while many are content with their daily portion of food. In either case, if you notice your pet looking for more food with unusual frequency, take him or her for an exam. A sudden increase in appetite (that does not coincide with a new jogging schedule) can be a sign of diabetes, Cushing's disease, thyroid disease, parasites, or inflammatory bowel disease.

### 3. Bad Breath

The medical term for bad breath is halitosis, and contrary to popular belief it is not normal in pets. Dogs and cats should not have much odor emanating from their mouths. If their breath is noticeably unpleasant all of the time, then pet food cannot be blamed either. Instead, bad breath is generally a sign of periodontitis, a tooth root abscess, or an oral tumor. Periodontitis is an infection of the mouth involving the structures that support the teeth. This condition can be painful and can lead to irreversible damage, including tooth loss. Not all pets with periodontitis will show obvious pain when eating, but that doesn't mean you should delay treatment.

### 4. Unexplained Weight Loss

We expect pets to slim down a little when put on a new diet or exercise program. When nothing has changed and slimming is noticed, then further investigation is warranted. Your veterinarian will be looking for, among other things, the same culprits that cause increased appetite.

### 5. Unexplained Weight Gain

If a pet is eating a reasonable amount of food for his activity level (as directed by your veterinarian) he should not suddenly start to gain weight. Metabolic disorders such as thyroid and Cushing's disease, as well as internal tumors, might be to blame.

### 6. Sleeping Changes

Pets who are suddenly having trouble getting comfortable for sleep, or who are seeking different sleep positions/locations may be showing subtle, early signs of breathing trouble-either caused by a respiratory disorder or a heart condition. Signs of a nighttime cough, even if very mild, should also never

be ignored. Another consideration associated with sleeping changes is back, neck, or joint pain. A physical exam will generally determine what the culprit may be.

### **7. Hair Coat Changes**

A pet's hair coat is affected by just about every system in her body. All hormones and glands need to be functioning properly, and all food needs to be digested and absorbed properly, in order for a hair coat to look its best. Cats are especially telling with their hair coat, since they groom themselves independently. Anything that affects their ability to groom—from oral disease, to arthritis, to just plain not feeling well—can manifest as a dull coat, which should be examined.