The realization that a pet is in chronic and likely uncontrollable pain is what leads many pet owners to start to think about euthanasia. Of course there are other factors that might lead to euthanasia, but recognizing the symptoms of pain in a pet is important in order to decide on a course of action. For most pet owners it is heartbreaking and unacceptable to witness a beloved friend in constant pain. Animals lack the ability to speak our oral language; therefore, we feel compelled to serve as their advocate for preventing, controlling, and ending their pain. The veterinary profession and animal divisions of pharmaceutical companies have greatly increased the options available for pain management in pets. Once pain is identified, your veterinarian will be a valuable expert on medications to manage your pet’s pain and will help you define the circumstances in which medications or procedures no longer exist to alleviate your friend’s pain.

Once you recognize your pet is in pain, it is often difficult to determine the level of discomfort he is experiencing. Despite being domesticated species that share our homes, our pets still rely heavily on their instincts, and it is often their instinct to hide pain and illness as long as possible. This chapter is designed to help your recognize body changes and symptoms of pain an animal will display when he is in his home. Your veterinarian is proficient in diagnosing pain in animals, but he or she is at a disadvantage. The fear and anxiety that most pets experience at the veterinary clinic can disguise symptoms of pain. Being educated on the symptoms of animal pain will allow you and your veterinarian to work as a team to keep your pet as comfortable and as pain free as possible and to help make an informed euthanasia decision if need be.

Because of inherent behavioral and physical differences between the canine and feline species, their symptoms of pain will be discussed in separate sections.

**Recognizing pain in dogs**

Throughout the process of observing your dog for symptoms of pain, a reoccurring theme will appear. With each symptom under consideration, it will be important to compare it to how the dog behaved or appeared throughout its life before he or she became sick or old. Consider the example of a dog’s appetite. Labrador Retrievers are infamous for having a voracious appetite, and a food loving Lab who refuses a meal for the first time may be experiencing pain from an underlying serious illness. On the other hand, Toy Poodles are often finicky eaters and missing a meal may not be a major clinical symptom of pain for them. It is important to consider your pet’s normal attitude, behavior, and expressions when deciding if he is displaying symptoms of pain.

Pain symptoms displayed in dogs will be discussed systematically beginning at the head of the dog and continuing toward the tail. Starting at the dog’s muzzle, a change in vocalization or barking may indicate pain. A dog in pain may show an increase in whining, groaning, or whimpering. The pet may begin barking at people that attempt to come near him. A pet who is usually friendly and vocal when greeted by people may become shy and quiet when in pain. An abrupt increase in drooling can be a symptom of nausea or visceral (intestinal) pain. A reduction of appetite can be a symptom of pain not only in the GI tract but anywhere in the dog’s body. Dogs in pain may develop changes in their eyes or facial expression. Severe pain can sometimes cause dilation or widening of the pupil (center black circle of the dog’s eye). The pupil is intended to control the amount of light that enters the eye. In sunlight or bright indoor light, the pupil will be small because there is a surplus of light. In a dimly lit space, the pupil will be larger to allow more light to the back of the eye. An owner needs to observe how her pet’s eye changes in multiple light settings. If the pet’s pupil is very large in a well lit space, then the pet could be displaying a symptom of pain. A dog in pain may stare at an inanimate object or wall. Sometimes his ears will be pulled back toward the neck.

**Lots of people talk to animals.... Not very many listen, though.... That’s the problem.**

~ Benjamin Hoff, *The Tao of Pooh*