

HERVEY BAY VETERINARY SURGERY

Owner Information Series

WHEN TO VISIT THE VET

We often get phone calls from clients who are concerned about the symptoms their pet are showing, but are unsure whether it is a sign of something more sinister or if things will resolve on their own. Animals are very good at pretending to be well and only showing a few subtle signs that there is any problem at all.

Outlined below are 10 of the most common illness symptoms we often see in pets.

- 1. Vomiting and diarrhoea**
- 2. Lumps or bumps**
- 3. Limping**
- 4. Bad breath**
- 5. Coughing**
- 6. Appetite or drinking changes**
- 7. Urine or defaecation changes**
- 8. Eye or ear problems**
- 9. Itching/ Skin irritation**
- 10. Lethargy/ Change in demeanour or activity levels**

In general, if your pet is showing any of these signs or you are not sure, it is best to make an appointment with your veterinarian for a thorough check over to identify the possible cause of the symptom and assess the best treatment plan.

1. VOMITING AND DIARRHOEA

Vomiting and diarrhoea are both non-specific signs that could be caused by a number of factors. If your pet vomits once or twice and there is nothing else unusual about their behaviour or health and they return to normal straightaway, then chances are your pet is probably ok so there is no need to panic. However, if your pet continues to vomit, then seek veterinary attention promptly to ensure your pet does not become dehydrated. See Vomiting Dog and Vomiting Cat for more information.

If your pet has diarrhoea, contact your vet immediately. If left untreated, even diarrhoea caused by mild illnesses may have a severe impact on the wellbeing of your pet. Treatment is essential early to prevent severe fluid and nutrient loss.

Your vet will ask you questions about the vomit or diarrhoea and any changes in your pet's behaviour or health, so be prepared to provide as much information as possible. The answers to the questions accompanied with a thorough clinical examination will enable your vet to advise you on the possible cause and then the most appropriate tests and the treatment options available.

2. LUMPS OR BUMPS

There are many different things that can cause lumps or swellings including bruising or fluid build-up, abscesses, things attached to the skin (e.g. parasites), insect bites (e.g. wasp or bee stings) and, of course, cancers. If you find any unusual lump or swelling on your pet you should ask your vet to have a look at it. They will be able to examine it, measure it and then possibly get a sample from it to give you a better idea what the lump may be. Although most lumps are harmless, some can be very dangerous if left untreated, especially if they are cancers.

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3. LIMPING

In the animal world, limping or a change in gait suggests that walking is painful, similar to humans who have hurt a joint, muscle or bone. The age and breed of your pet along with other key information including how long your pet has been limping and how your pet became lame, allows us to advise you on the most likely problem and also recommend appropriate tests and treatment. Often this will include an x-ray to view the painful joint or bone as well as administering pain relief. Other severe cases may require surgery to fix the problem.

Your pet's limping could be a result of:

- arthritis
- fractured bones
- cruciate ligament rupture
- patella luxating
- muscle soreness
- spinal problems
- growth abnormalities
- bone tumours

4. BAD BREATH

Many pet owners comment that they have noticed their pet has bad breath. The most common cause of this is dental disease due to the build-up of plaque and tartar on the teeth. Your vet will look in your pet's mouth and may recommend either dietary changes or a dental procedure to clean the teeth and remove any teeth that are causing pain. Bad breath can also be noticed in an unwell (or ketoacidotic) diabetic or with advanced kidney disease, both of which require urgent attention.

We offer free dental check up with our nurses so contact us to make an appointment. Learn how to care for your pet's teeth and gums at home here.

5. COUGHING

Coughing can be distressing for your pet as well as for the household. It is a non-specific symptom with multiple possible causes, of which will require assessment, testing and treatment by your vet reasonably urgently as they don't tend to resolve on their own. Whilst it may not sound like a serious problem, sometimes coughing is a sign of a significant disease.

Some of the reasons your pet might be coughing include:

- Kennel Cough (in dogs) or an upper respiratory tract infection/ irritation
- heart disease
- heartworm disease
- asthma - Feline Bronchial Disease
- lung disease due to an infection, degeneration or neoplasia
- foreign body in trachea
- breed-related problems with the upper respiratory tract (e.g. collapsing trachea or a long soft palate)

6. APPETITE OR DRINKING CHANGES

The amount your pet eats and drinks may be an early indicator of some systemic diseases. These diseases develop more commonly in older animals which is why when you have a senior cat or dog, your vet will ask you about their appetite and thirst

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levels. If your pet is not eating or drinking at all, or if you notice an increase in appetite or water consumption, you need to call and make an appointment with your vet urgently.

The lack of appetite and drinking could be a sign of:

- kidney disease
- liver disease
- hyperthyroidism
- hyperadrenocorticism - Cushing's disease
- diabetes mellitus
- senility or ageing changes
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7. URINE OR DEFAECATION CHANGES

Changes in toileting may involve amounts or colour of urine/ faeces, frequency or even location of toileting. If it looks like your pet is straining or struggling to urinate or defecate, urinating more frequently or in unusual places, or there is blood in the urine/ faeces, your vet would be able to determine the cause and select the best test to perform.

Common causes include:

- urinary tract infections
- bladder stones
- kidney disease
- hyperthyroidism
- diabetes mellitus
- inflammatory bowel disease
- constipation (megacolon)
- behavioural issues

8. EYE/ EAR PROBLEMS

Any problems noted with the eyes or the ears should be urgently attended to. Signs to look for include irritated eyes that are red, watery, swollen or your pet squints uncomfortably. For ears, your pet may shake their head, scratch at their ears, have red ears, unpleasant odour, or unusual discharge.

There are a multitude of problems that can occur with the eyes and ears, and should be urgently assessed and treated by your vet to ensure your pet is comfortable and pain-free. Early treatment will help reduce damage to the ear canal that increases the likelihood that your pet will have repeated ear infections.

9. ITCHING/ SKIN IRRITATION

Once skin becomes itchy or irritated it doesn't take very long for your pet to damage and break the skin as they scratch or bite themselves, thus causing an infection to develop. If you notice your pet is scratching a lot, biting their feet, redness on the skin or hairloss/bald patches, get your vet to check it out as soon as possible. Prompt assessment and treatment allows for your vet to identify a possible cause and start treatment to reduce the irritation and the resulting infection.

Some of the most common causes we see are:

- insect bites
- contact allergies (e.g. grass seeds, Wandering Jew plant, dust mites)
- flea allergy dermatitis

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- yeast or bacterial infection

10. LETHARGY/ CHANGE IN DEMEANOUR OR ACTIVITY LEVELS

If you feel your pet has been sleeping more, is not active or is behaving differently, this may be an indicator that they are not well and should be examined by a vet.

It is possible that they could have one of the following:

- elevated temperature
- senility changes,
- systemic disease (e.g. low red blood cell count, liver or kidney disease)
- painful joints or spine
- neurological problems

As you can see any one symptom can have numerous causes. It may be that further tests need to be performed such as a blood, urine or faecal test, but this can be discussed with your vet after the initial examination. With most of the problems listed above, early diagnosis and treatment allow for better outcomes, so if you are concerned about your pet or are unsure it is best to make an appointment with your vet to have them checked over.