

PAIN MANAGEMENT in the DOG and CAT

By Mona Miller, DVM



Mona Miller and her yellow Lab Kenna

Photo provided

The recognition of suitable pain management in veterinary medicine has evolved a great deal in the past 20 years. In preparing this article, I reviewed some of my veterinary school textbooks and found information that I would now consider outdated! Medications now considered dangerous because of side effects and no mention of alternative modalities such as acupuncture or chiropractic medicine are just a couple of examples.

Pain can be difficult to recognize in our pet animals. Some dogs and cats can tolerate a large amount of pain without obvious expression. I commonly hear from clients that their old arthritic dog doesn't cry at all. For this dog, pain may manifest as less activity, general crankiness, decreased appetite or panting. One definition of pain that appeals to me is an "unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage or described in terms of such damage."

There are different types of pain (heat/cold, chemical release such as histamine or inflammation, mechanical trauma) and as such, there are different and complementary methods to treat pain. Many studies have shown that treating pain allows for quicker healing. Two important concepts in effective pain management are "pre-emptive analgesia" (anticipating and treating pain before it occurs, as in surgery) and using medications from different drug classes simultaneously.

The most common types of pain medication are local anesthesia (often used in dentistry or small skin biopsies), narcotics (opioids) that act on spinal cord and brain receptors, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) that block tissue production of harmful inflammatory chemicals, corticosteroids that act similarly to NSAIDs (but often have more side effects), and alternative/complementary methods. This latter category includes "nutraceutical" products such as glucosamine joint supplements, essential fatty acids (the omega 3 and

6 oils), anti-oxidants, chiropractic and acupuncture modalities.

NSAIDs deserve a bit more attention here, since their use is fairly popular in veterinary medicine. First, not all human drugs are safe to use for dogs and cats – most notably, ibuprofen and Tylenol can cause significant liver and kidney disease, even be fatal to our furry friends. It is important to check with your veterinarian before using any of these drugs! Also, even approved veterinary drugs may cause gastro-intestinal problems in dogs and cats. If your pet is taking one and develops signs of nausea, not eating, vomiting or diarrhea, it is best to check with your vet right away. Most veterinarians recommend regular blood work checks (every 6-12 months) for pets who use these drugs chronically.

Dr. Mona S. Miller lives in Lafayette with her 3 year old son and her yellow Labrador Retriever. She has worked at Four Seasons Animal Hospital in Lafayette since moving here in 2001. She attended Cal as an undergrad, and received her DVM from U.C. Davis. She can be reached at Four Seasons, 938-7700, or by email to MonaSDVM@aol.com.