

# Pawsitive Press

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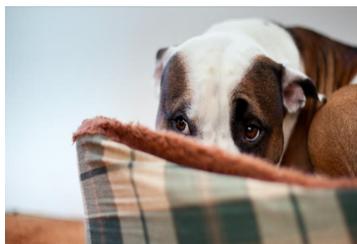
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### Behavior Issues

By: Sandra Iruueta, DVM

Behavior issues in pets can be frustrating and difficult to deal with. There are multiple behavior issues that we commonly see including separation anxiety, protective behaviors, elimination changes and fears of thunderstorms or fireworks. Some of these issues may be caused by underlying medical conditions that may be treatable. This is why it is always important to have your pet seen by a veterinarian anytime there are behavioral changes that occur unexpectedly. We can also help you manage some unwanted behaviors and help you decide if your pet needs additional intervention from a specialist.



Some concerning behaviors that we should evaluate and manage when noticed include:

- Fear, withdrawal, or aggression to people or other animals



- Repetitive or ritualistic behaviors such as overgrooming, licking, or suckling
- Changes in urination, defecation or eliminating in inappropriate areas
- Increased reactivity in certain situations
- Profound changes in activity levels

Fear, withdrawal, or aggression can have several underlying causes including traumatic events, individual personalities, and general anxiety. Just like people, when pets are anxious or frightened, they will exhibit fight or flight responses where they will try to hide or freeze

or can become aggressive out of fear. The longer that these behaviors go unmanaged, the more potential they have to continue escalating and can become dangerous for the pets and their owners as well. These types of behaviors are best addressed quickly to avoid this becoming the pet's automatic response to any stressful event. Addressing these fears can include behavior modifications, distraction, anti-anxiety medications and training.



Repetitive or ritualistic behaviors can be due to underlying issues like anxiety, skin disease, or neurologic disorders, among other things. Anxiety can cause repetitive behaviors like licking, overgrooming, or suckling. Licking and overgrooming can cause secondary infections of the skin. Licking or sucking other materials like blankets or bedding can have the potential to cause GI issues, like foreign bodies if your pet ingests pieces of materials or strings.

Sometimes neurologic disorders like seizures can present like repetitive motions like licking or biting at the air. These are most concerning if you cannot distract your pet or stop the action when they are performing these repetitive motions.

Changes in elimination or eliminating in inappropriate places can indicate underlying medical conditions such as urinary tract infections, kidney infections or incontinence. These are all medical conditions that can be treated or managed with medications. Urinary tract or kidney infections should be treated sooner rather than later to prevent kidney damage from infections and discomfort for your pet. Other urinary conditions like bladder or kidney stones can also cause pets to have changes in their urinary habits. Stones can cause blockages in the urinary tract. Urinary blockages generally prevent urine passage or drastically reduced urine passage. This is urgent because if left untreated, it can lead to potentially fatal outcomes for your pet. Other medical conditions that can cause changes in your pet's elimination habits include diabetes, kidney disease, thyroid disease, and Cushing's disease.

While there is no cure for these diseases, we can help manage them and/or slow their progression with medications and therapies to help extend your pet's life. Increased reactivity in certain situations can be caused by underlying medical issues as well. If your pet is in pain or has increased sensitivity it can cause them to react in ways that are not common, like biting or scratching.



They may react to being pet in a certain area or may not enjoy being touched in areas they commonly don't mind being touched. Some examples include pets crying when their head or necks are touched when they have an ear infection, being painful in the abdomen area with a urinary tract infection, and having increased itching on their bodies due to allergies. All of these causes can make your pet uncomfortable and should be treated medically. That pain and discomfort will only resolve once the underlying issue is resolved.

Profound changes in activity level is another behavioral issue that can be due to underlying medical conditions. Pets that are not feeling well can become lethargic, less excited about their favorite thing, and have less energy. A less common sign of a medical issue that needs treatment is pets that suddenly have increased energy than normal and this can be due to underlying thyroid disease. Some pets can also experience changes in activity levels due to stressors in the household, anxiety, or depression and just like humans, may need medical management to overcome these issues. Behavioral issues can be caused by several things and allowing your veterinarian to evaluate changes you notice can help keep your pet as healthy and happy as possible. This allows us to help determine if there are underlying diseases that need treatment or management. We may also be able to offer advice on how to help change your pet's unwanted behaviors and also help guide you if we think your pet needs something more involved, such as a trainer or specialist.

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