



## Animal Cancer Care and Animal Behavior\*

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When pets are diagnosed with cancer, it's not unusual to notice changes in their behaviors, as well as in their physical appearance. Behavioral changes can be difficult to cope with as they may seem to change your pet's personality and, in turn, change your relationship.

The following list is a brief overview of some of the behavior changes you might observe in your pet. Please speak with your veterinarian if you have concerns about any of these behaviors.

### Loss of Appetite:

Be aware that pets often develop an aversion to food if they are feeling nauseous due to cancer treatment or advanced disease. While it's human nature to want to feed and nurture your pet, it's not realistic to expect them to eat large amounts of food during this time. If your pet does not seem to be interested in food, veterinarians often suggest you:

- warm small amounts of food and feed by hand.
- offer your pet baby food (chicken and turkey flavors seem to be the most palatable).
- drizzle a small amount of melted butter on a small amount of warmed food.
- mix cooked brown rice and fried ground beef together without any spices, sauces, etc. Add a drizzle of melted butter, if needed, and feed by hand.



### Lethargy:

It's normal for pets to feel lethargic as their bodies cope with the medical or physiological changes brought on by treatment and/or disease. If your pet has little or no energy:

- allow your pet to rest and try not to push him/her to perform normal routines. provide extra brushing and washing if your pet seems to require help with grooming.
- consider hiring a pet sitter who can care for your pet in your home if you must be away for long lengths of time.
- if you need to be out of town, ask a friend to care for your pet in your home or hire a home-care pet sitter rather than boarding your pet at a kennel.
- be aware that some pets may seek different places to rest (a dog may choose to rest somewhere cooler than your bedroom where he usually sleeps; a cat may become more independent or aloof and avoid contact with you). Try not to take this personally. Think of your pet's quality of life and accept what makes them the happiest at this time. →

*\*Peer reviewed and adapted from Morehead D., Lagoni L., et al. Guidelines for Bond-Centered Practice, Argus Institute, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO, 2001. (Out of print.)*

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Laurel Lagoni is a nationally recognized veterinary grief expert and the former Director of the Argus Institute at Colorado State University's Veterinary Teaching Hospital. She is Co-founder of World by the Tail, Inc., and creator of the Veterinary Wisdom® Resource Centers at [www.veterinarywisdom.com](http://www.veterinarywisdom.com).

(Cont.)

### **Aggression/Irritability:**

While true aggression (snarling, biting, growling) is relatively uncommon during cancer treatment, your pet may show signs of irritability if he/she is feeling pain or experiencing discomfort. If you're concerned about aggressive behavior in your pet:

- contact your veterinarian immediately.
- avoid any situations that may cause your pet to become agitated.
- notice where and when your pet seems to experience pain or discomfort and relay this information to your veterinarian.

A pet's cancer can cause changes in the behaviors of other family members, too. If you have other pets, be aware that the stress of their buddy's illness may also cause them to need extra support and attention. While it's tempting to want to "spoil" pets while coping with illness, please be cautious. In general, pets cope best when their routines are kept as normal as possible.

Other human family members, especially children, may also need additional support and stability during this time. And, of course, it's important that you don't neglect your own personal needs. As your pet's primary caregiver, you will have more patience and energy to give him/her if you make time to take very good care of yourself.

For more information, visit the Veterinary Wisdom<sup>®</sup> Resource Center at [www.veterinarywisdom.com](http://www.veterinarywisdom.com)

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