



Debbie Hawkins  
B. Sc., DVM

## **Hawkins Animal Hospital** **Debbie Hawkins B.Sc., DVM** **Doctor of Veterinary Medicine**

**550 Ontario Street South,**  
**Milton (Pizza Hut Plaza)**  
**Phone (905) 875-6888**  
**Fax (905) 875-6853**



# **PET BEHAVIOUR AND ILLNESS**

You would not be alone, if at sometime you thought that the change in your pet's behaviour was due to the pet being 'naughty', when in fact the behaviour change was a symptom of illness or injury.

Most commonly, we hear from clients that their cat is urinating or having poops around the house, or the dog is making puddles in the kitchen, or elsewhere. These elimination problems could be an indicator of any number of medical problems, including a simple urinary tract infection, kidney disease or diabetes. Speaking of elimination problems, other misread symptoms I often hear of are "my dog's got bad gas" or "my cats/dogs breath really stinks". Simply put, these problems (gas) could relate to intestinal parasites, allergy to foods or some other problem in the gastro-intestinal tract, and bad breath can be caused by gum disease, a rotten tooth or a tummy upset.

A normally friendly dog, or cat, may behave quite the opposite, even to the point of being aloof, unfriendly or even aggressive, if they are ill or injured. A painful toothache or an infected ear can be excruciatingly painful and can cause humans to be less than pleasant. Our pets react in the same way. Their body language will say to you, "leave me alone". The pet might flinch when stroked, or go to snap at the hand that strokes. If one is unaware of a medical problem going on, then one might easily think that the pet is simply behaving badly, and reprimand the pet.

Another complaint I hear is that the pet is being finicky about food - will only eat soft food. In the first instance I would check the mouth for injury, and may find a broken or infected tooth as the culprit.

Sometimes a client will tell me that their normally active pet is "just being lazy" but often this laziness or lethargy can be a symptom of illness. Similarly, a normally peaceful, laid back kitty that suddenly becomes restless and overly energetic would make me suspicious of a condition called hyperthyroidism. (Over active thyroid gland.)

Unaccountable weight loss is a great indicator of illness. If you notice that your pet is losing weight, get your veterinarian to examine your pet, before your pet becomes really sick. Many illnesses can be successfully remedied with early diagnosis and treatment.

You, as the owner, know your pet better than anyone else does, and any subtle or sudden changes in behaviour should be investigated. If you have any concerns about your pet's health, contact your veterinarian immediately.

Finally, to prevent personal injury, you must exercise caution when examining a sick or injured pet.