

Why Does My Dog Sleep so Much?

Dogs are wired to sleep a certain number of hours each day, and older dogs require more hours of shut eye as they age. But how can you tell what's normal for your dog and what may constitute lethargy, a symptom of many disorders that can affect pets, including underlying illness?

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dogs naturally sleep several hours a day, so it can sometimes be difficult to tell if your pet is lethargic
- It's important to observe your dog for signs of lethargy because it's a symptom of many health and behavioral conditions that affect companion animals
- Some common underlying causes for lethargy in dogs include an underlying illness, toxin ingestion, veterinary drugs, and emotional stressors, including recent rehoming or grief over the loss of another pet in the family

Dogs are wired to sleep somewhere in the neighborhood of 10 to 12 hours a day and require even more shut-eye as they age. This is why it may seem as though every time you lay eyes on your canine BFF, he's snoozing.

Given his need for lots of sleep, it can be difficult to tell when your dog is actually **lethargic** and not just drowsy-as-usual. That's why it's so important to have a good understanding of what constitutes "normal" for your pet — normal behavior, normal eating patterns, normal sleeping patterns, **normal poop**, normal pee, and so on.

When you know your dog's "normal" like the back of your hand, you'll recognize immediately when something is off, such as when he's more sluggish than usual.

Lethargy is a symptom of many disorders that affect pets, including behavioral problems. Some of the most common causes are explained below.

5 Common Reasons for Lethargy in Dogs

1. **An underlying illness** — A decrease in your pet's activity level can indicate an underlying health problem that needs investigation. This is especially true if there's also a change in her appetite, elimination habits, and/or interaction with family members or other pets in the household.

A dog who is sick will often be unusually quiet and sluggish, so if your pet is lethargic for 24 hours or so, it's time to give your veterinarian's office a call. Depending on her symptoms, you may be asked to bring her in right away.

For example, lethargy accompanied by persistent vomiting or bloody vomit, stool, or urine is cause for immediate concern. A pet's refusal to eat is another red flag.

The sooner you get your pet diagnosed and begin treatment the better her chances for a full recovery.



2. **Ingestion of a poison** — This frightening scenario can occur both outdoors, especially during the warmer months of the year, and indoors if your pet happens to eat the wrong people food (e.g., chocolate or anything sweetened with xylitol), gets into a bottle of NSAIDs, or samples a **toxic houseplant**.

If your dog suddenly grows lethargic or has other symptoms of toxicity (e.g., vomiting) and you know or suspect he's eaten something potentially poisonous, get him to your veterinarian or the nearest emergency animal hospital immediately.

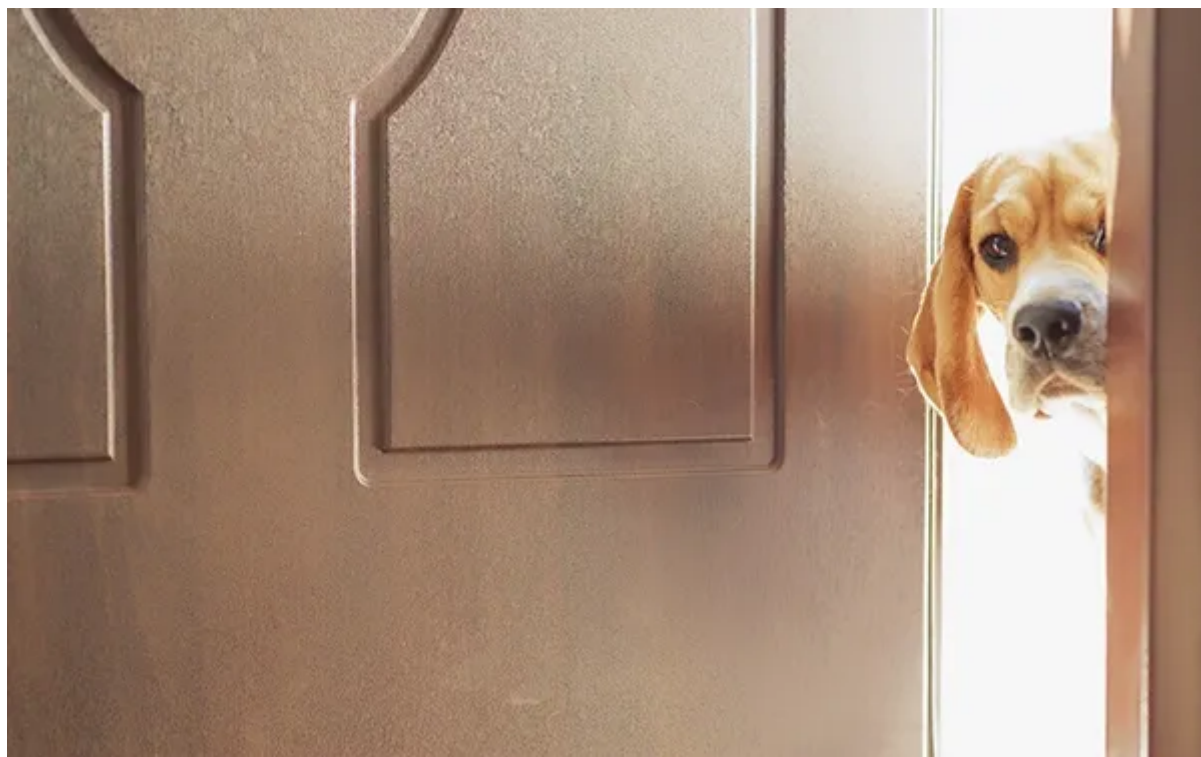
3. **A new medication** — If your veterinarian has put your canine family member on a new or different medication and she suddenly seems lethargic, the drug is quite likely the cause. All medications have short- and long-term side effects that can range from mild to life-threatening.

If you see any change in your pet's behavior after starting a new medication, report it to your veterinarian immediately.

I also recommend finding a **holistic or integrative vet** who may be able to suggest safer, less toxic remedies, especially if your dog is taking a particularly problematic drug (e.g., **prednisone**) or long-term medication for a chronic condition.

4. **Your dog is new to your family** — Dogs who are stressed, anxious or frightened can appear lethargic, so if you just brought your pet home, he'll need some time to adjust to his new environment and family. He could be acting sluggish simply because he's in unfamiliar territory and a bit overwhelmed.

Give him lots of positive TLC and avoid overstimulation in his first few weeks with you. If he's otherwise healthy, his activity level will naturally increase as he **learns to trust you** and gets comfortable in his new surroundings.



5. **Your dog has lost a friend** — When two pets are closely bonded and one of them dies, the surviving dog may experience what experts refer to as a "distress reaction" that is similar in many ways to human grief.

In addition to lethargy, some of the signs include changes in sleep patterns; changes in eating habits; lack of interest in normal activities; reluctance to be in a room or home alone, or away from human family members; and wandering the house, searching for their lost friend.

If you suspect your animal companion is mourning the death of another pet, I recommend reading **10 tips for helping your surviving pet deal with a loss.**

Sources and References

[Whole Dog Journal, September 25, 2023](#)
