

# If Your Pet Suddenly Yelps, This May Be Why

Without treatment, trigger points can evolve into an unrelenting cycle of dysfunction and pain. Difficult to diagnose, seldom treated, rarely mentioned in vet schools, and often overlooked. Now that you're in the know, suggest it to your vet so together you can fix your pet's pain.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Myofascial pain refers to pain in the muscles, typically as a result of one or multiple trigger points
- Trigger points, sometimes described as knots, in your pet's muscles are focal points of inflammation and pain
- It's important to identify and relieve myofascial pain in your pet, but it's not always easy to uncover. Pets tend to hide pain very well, so you'll need to watch closely
- Without treatment, trigger points and myofascial pain can turn into a chronic and worsening condition for your pet
- Recurrent trigger point problems can be a result of an underlying chiropractic issue, so if your pet isn't getting better, consider getting a chiropractic evaluation

***Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published September 23, 2016.***

Myofascial pain is common in pets, but because it doesn't show up on X-rays or other diagnostic tests, it's often left untreated. The end result is that your pet may be suffering needlessly from significant, chronic muscle pain. Myofascial pain refers to pain in the muscles, typically as a result of one or multiple trigger points.

Trigger points, sometimes described as knots, in your pet's muscles are focal points for inflammation and irritation. They may be in an active or latent phase. In the active phase, a trigger point may be very painful for your pet.

If pressure is applied, pain may radiate from the trigger point to other areas of your pet's body, such as down the limbs (this is known as referred pain). Your pet may also have latent trigger points that are sensitive, but not as acutely painful as active trigger points.

However, even latent trigger points may lead to problems for your pet, including stiffness and restricted range of motion.

## What Causes Myofascial Pain?

There are many scenarios that may lead to this type of pain. Some of them may occur suddenly, such as an injury. If your dog makes an unexpected wrenching movement, falls or receives a blow to a muscle, it may lead to myofascial pain.

Oftentimes, however, the development of such pain, and its related trigger points, is gradual. Just like in humans, dogs may suffer from muscle pain as a result of overuse or muscle imbalance.

For instance, if your dog runs along a fence every day or favors one hind leg due to arthritis, some muscles are being overused and others underused, leading to muscle imbalance and the development of trigger points.

When the pain and related dysfunction becomes chronic, it's known as myofascial pain syndrome (MPS). Unfortunately, MPS is rarely mentioned in conventional veterinary schools, so it's often overlooked and left untreated. DVM 360 reported:<sup>1</sup>

*"Myofascial pain syndrome is a difficult-to-diagnose and seldom-treated condition in dogs. This is despite the fact that it's been a recognized pain issue for more than 400 years and entered mainstream human medicine almost 80 years ago. It's rarely taught in the university setting ..."*

## A Cycle of Pain and Dysfunction

It's important to identify and relieve myofascial pain in your pet, but it's not always easy to uncover. Pets tend to hide pain very well, so you'll need to watch closely.

Potential signs of myofascial pain include weakness, muscle tension and stiffness and lameness, or your dog may jump from pain or twitch if you happen to press on a trigger point.

Without treatment, trigger points and myofascial pain can turn into a chronic and worsening condition or, as the magazine Dogs Naturally put it, a cycle of dysfunction and pain:<sup>2</sup>

*"A trigger point affects the muscle by keeping it tight and weak. At the same time, a trigger point maintains a hard contraction on the muscle fibers it's embedded in.*

*In turn, these taut bands of muscle fiber keep constant tension on the muscle's attachments, often producing symptoms in adjacent joints. The constant tension in the fibers of the trigger point itself restricts circulation in the immediate area.*

*The resulting accumulation of the by-products of metabolism and the reduction of oxygen and nutrients can create a cycle of pain, dysfunction and constriction in the muscles, which can last for months and sometimes even years."*

## Treating Myofascial Pain by Relieving Trigger Points

If you suspect your dog is suffering from myofascial pain, see a holistic veterinarian who is experienced at detecting trigger points. Once they've been located, there are a couple of options for treatment.

One, which is fairly invasive, is dry needling. This involves using an acupuncture needle that is pushed through your pet's skin to stimulate the trigger point. This may release the tight muscle bands associated with the trigger point, leading to decreased pain and improved function.

Dry needling has been found to reduce myofascial pain related to trigger points,<sup>3</sup> but it has risks involved. Electro-acupuncture and acupressure may also be helpful for some dogs with myofascial pain. Cold laser therapy and ultrasound therapy may be beneficial for dogs that won't tolerate acupuncture.

Another less invasive option is manual manipulation of trigger points using trigger point massage or trigger point therapy. Dogs Naturally reported:<sup>4</sup>

*“Canine massage therapists use only manual therapy to deactivate trigger points. Manual therapy has more specific effects on the trigger point than dry needling and carries much less risk to muscle attachments.”*

The success of manual treatment often depends on the skill level of the practitioner, so be sure to choose a canine massage therapist that has experience with MPS, and continue sessions until your pet has an easier time moving around, appears less stiff and no longer flinches when you touch the area where the trigger point appeared.

Recurrent trigger point problems can be a result of an underlying chiropractic issue, so if your pet isn't getting better, consider getting a chiropractic evaluation.

Remember, your pet can't tell you where he hurts, so it's up to you and your veterinarian or rehab therapist to figure it out. Myofascial pain doesn't show up on X-rays like a fracture, but that doesn't make it any less severe to your pet.

If you suspect your pet is suffering, seek help from your holistic veterinarian or a person trained in rehabilitation modalities to relieve his pain.

## Sources and References

[DVM 360 May 25, 2016 \(Archived\)](#)

<sup>1</sup> [DVM 360 November 1, 2012 \(Archived\)](#)

<sup>2,4</sup> [Chicago School of Canine Massage January 22, 2015 \(Archived\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Journal of Orthopaedic & Sports Physical Therapy, 2013 Volume: 43 Issue: 9 Pages: 635–635](#)

---