

## Pets' Sleep Disorders Are No Laughing Matter

**Owners of older cats should pay attention to waking, restlessness, pacing.**

Posted: September 7, 2009 3:00 a.m EDT

Cats showing sleep-pattern changes should be taken to the veterinarian for checkups. A popular YouTube video prompted veterinarians at the Texas A&M University's College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences to speak out about sleep disorders in pets.

Titled "Sleepwalking Fail," the video shows a sleeping dog that starts to "run" horizontally in his sleep, then suddenly jumps up and slams into a wall. A release from the university notes that while the video is comical, it also might show a dog with a sleep disorder.

In order to educate pet owners, Texas A&M released information about sleep disorders that affect pets.

An animal with narcolepsy may suddenly collapse with no movements and appear asleep, according to the release. In cataplexy, the animal is alert but can't follow motion with eye movements and can be aroused with petting, external stimuli and loud noises.

Neither disorder is curable.

"These two sleep disorders are usually a congenital and inherited condition that can be brought on by excitement such as playing, eating, drinking or greeting owners and can last seconds to minutes, many times a day, or infrequently," said Dr. M.A. Crist, a clinical assistant professor at the university.

Owners of older cats may want to be on the lookout for sleep cycle changes or waking in the night, restlessness and pacing, according to the release. These symptoms can be related to senility, but may also be signs of hyperthyroidism, a treatable disease in which the thyroid gland produces too much hormone.

The university advises pet owners to be vigilant so they can address sleep disorders before they become too severe.

"If owners notice their pets having changes in their sleeping patterns, they want to take them to their veterinarian for a complete physical examination and laboratory analysis," said Crist, who also recommends that pet owners consider special diets for animals with sleep problems.

Behavioral consultation may be useful as well, Crist said, as sometimes sleep problems are associated with obsessive compulsive disorder, which can be treated with selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor antidepressants. Regular checkups are the best way to catch sleep problems before they affect a pet's health, she said.