

The Rat

Rats are generally docile and less aggressive towards members of their own species and man than mice. Acute pain or distress is usually accompanied by constant vocalization and struggling. Rats will often lick or guard a painful area. Increased scratching can indicate chronic pain. Rats will often sit crouched with head into abdomen and sleeping periods will be disturbed and increased if pain or distress are present. Poor coat condition and weight loss will accompany pain or distress. During repeated painful or distressing procedures animals may become more aggressive and resist handling.

Potential Responses	Increased level of response with increasing pain or distress.
Physiological Signs	
OCULAR	Eyelids rapidly assume half closed or almost closed position, eyes may appear sunken, ocular discharge common, often progressing to red-stained hematoporphyrin stained exudates indicated by 'spectacle' eye.
RESPIRATORY	Increased respiratory rate associated with sneezing where respiratory system is affected, nasal discharge is sometimes bloody.
APPEARANCE	Increasing piloerection-'staring coat.' Guard hairs show increasingly untidy appearance-maybe some hair loss. Poor skin tone, evidence of muscle wasting along back-evidence of dehydration and weight loss. In albino animals the pinna may appear pale if the animal is anemic.
DEFECATION/ URINATION	Both take place as immediate fear response, less evident if pain or stress maintained. May see increasing constipation or diarrhea depending on systems affected. Urination decreases with reduced water intake but frequency may increase where urinary infection or hormonal disturbance is present.
BEHAVIOR	Animals initially show increased awareness/aggressive responses and tendency to bite but eventually become depressed and unresponsive. Some response on handling due to sudden increase in discomfort.
ABNORMAL ACTIVITY	Sleep patterns progressively disturbed. Ceases to eat and drink normally. Reduced exploratory behavior. Aversive behavior towards other animals. Possible self-mutilation of affected parts in later stages.
POSTURES	Gradually assumes recumbent position often hunched up with head tucked into abdomen. Abdominal contraction if pain present in abdomen.
LOCOMOTION	May be increasing pain associated with locomotion. Lameness in one of the limbs or simply careful gait. Stilted movements associated with abdominal pain. 'Waddling' gait where abdominal enlargement due to obstruction or ascites. Circling where balance is disturbed.
VOCALIZATION	Initially increased angry or aggressive vocalization, especially on handling, gradual reduction in vocal response as pain or stress continues and movement ceases unless a sudden painful stimulus is experienced.
GENERAL	Hypothermia indicates significant deterioration, pale appearance can indicate anemia or blood loss.

Key Signs: Vocalization, struggling, licking/guarding, weight loss, piloerection, hunched position, hypothermia.