

Anxiety Problems in Dogs

1. Types of Anxiety

Situational anxiety may not require pharmacologic treatment. Counter conditioning, habituation, and desensitization (CC, H, and D) are best used as the most beneficial tools in managing situational anxiety. It is important to remember that CC, H, and D are unlikely to show immediate results and can take several months to show improvement in behavior issues. For some dogs, situational anxiety may require medications. Many of the same medications used to treat a behavior problem should also be combined with behavior modification or training tools to achieve the desired goal. Regardless of the cause of anxiety, your veterinarian will work with you to provide the best recommendation for treating it.

There are three main types of anxiety in dogs: situational, behavioral, and pathologic. Situational anxiety is the most common type of anxiety in dogs and is caused by a specific event or environment (e.g. loud noises such as thunderstorms or fireworks). Thunder phobia tends to be very common in certain breeds, such as golden retrievers, poodles, and some terrier breeds. Similarly, separation anxiety is another form of situational anxiety and occurs when dogs are left alone, resulting in stress or panic. Behavioral anxiety is a learned experience in which dogs are conditioned to certain stimuli or experiences leading to anxiety or fear. An example of this would be associating a specific set of keys with car travel and the resulting car sickness, leading to fear or anxiety during travel. Behavioral anxiety could also be due to past negative experiences such as being attacked by another dog while out for a walk. Finally, pathologic anxiety is an underlying cause of anxiety. Although less common than behavioral anxiety, pathologic anxiety can occur when the neurotransmitter balance that plays a role in anxiety becomes impaired. Certain medical conditions can also play a role in pathologic anxiety, making it vital to rule out such factors when performing a behavior assessment.

1.1. Separation anxiety

If the animal's anxiety is very severe, fear of being left alone can occur even before the owner leaves the animal, as the dog knows that time alone is imminent. Common symptoms of separation anxiety also include incessant barking, howling, jealousy, inability to rest, agitation, repetitive activities without purpose or goal, and not being able to remember prior training when alone. Telephone complaints from neighbors, escape attempts, attempts to rejoin the owner, and permanent salivation, as well as not wanting to eat, even refusing treats, are also some of the possible symptoms of this condition. When owners are gone, the animal feels not only anxiety, but also a type of frustration and sense of permanent attachment. If left untreated, separation anxiety can easily become a chronic condition, leading to deteriorating behavior.

Separation anxiety can occur in many dogs and results from the fact that dogs are very social animals. These animals are not able to adapt to leaving their "family" behind. Some dogs are more prone to this problem, for example, young dogs, adults who are accustomed to having a "companion", sick dogs, dogs with emotional problems, and dogs whose owners are only at home occasionally. If a dog with this disorder is denied a visual, auditory, olfactory, or physical communication with its owners, symptoms can appear in a few minutes or wait up to at least half an hour before the process of coping begins, which is often referred to as learned helplessness. This can manifest as whining, scratching, chewing or eating inappropriate and harmful things, or even vomiting or diarrhea.

1.2. Noise anxiety

Correlation of regular anxiety and noise anxiety in dogs can lead to comorbid psychological problems. Noise phobia occurs frequently in dogs. In recent years, it appears that the predisposition to noise phobia has increased compared to a decade ago. Dogs can be afraid due to a variety of noises. Noise phobia in animals has been discussed since the early 1900s. In severely affected dogs, human extreme noise phobias can cause irritation of long-term caregivers. Dogs with noise anxiety are particularly bothered by the unpredictable and audible aspects of the noise, similar to humans with noise anxiety. Although the relationship between noise phobia and other anxiety-related behaviors has not been clearly determined in dogs, the interpretation of dogs of the same household can show signs of fear or fear.

Noise anxiety is caused by an association of a negative experience and disturbing noises, and its incidence seems to be increasing. It's the most common noise anxiety that humans and dogs share together. This type of noise phobia is often hereditary due to the genetic susceptibility of noise-sensitive puppies. Like most dogs, dogs with noise anxiety are afraid of the unpredictable loud sounds that come from vehicles, trains, fireworks, and other sources. In severe cases, treatment is hardly possible without medication because conventional desensitization and counteraction methods are hardly successful. Canine noise phobia sounds similar to phobia in other species. Some characteristics such as its nature, physiology of panic attack, treatment, and behavioral and emotional implications of noise phobia were presented.

1.3. Social anxiety

In other words, if not socializing from an early age, a part of dogs will not approach something new with mild curiosity, but will be aggressive. It is from this concept that it is understood that a dog that has social problems with the outside world can be helped to solve the problem by involving it in the social experiences it has and managing it, avoiding stress, at the same time being firm in imposing its balance when necessary. Socialization activities should be introduced when the puppies are ready (2-12 weeks). Staying home can partly work but in addition to attracting the puppy's attention and exercising them, a few fun and easily playful activities are better, they should be shared with the family, not only at certain times of the day, just like the normal interactions of the puppies.

This is when dogs experience feelings of fear in social situations and is often the direct result of experiencing less human contact or the company of other dogs. This might happen at times of change, such as during or just after confinement or early life. The lack of contact with the outside world, whether with its other congeners, other animals, places, etc., will lead to a dog that will associate everything new with something unpleasant, so it will tend not to react with inclusion but with aggression (the classic case of the dog that barks aggressively at everything that is out of the usual path too used to routine, order and well-being).

2. Behaviors Exhibited

Canine anxiety problems, an ever-increasing part of the primary care veterinarian's caseload, facilitates increased opportunity for pharmacological intervention. Dog anxiety-based conditions can come with significant levels of behavior problems, and 70-80% of dogs in the United States receive at least one psychotropic medication; up to 73% receive anxiolytic medication without behavior modification. Diagnosis of the canine with anxiety problems is variable, but potentially straightforward if anxiety behaviors manifest during a hospital visit. Dogs presenting to a veterinarian for acute injury, surgical emergencies, or routine vaccinations can display a range of pathophysiological changes consistent with fear or anxiety. In fact, 92% of dogs in one study had signs of behavioral distress of some degree during a routine examination visit. Professionals also commonly rely on owner report for diagnosis, yet owners underestimate the prevalence and severity of their dog's separation anxiety and other responsive anxiety behaviors when assessed using a diagnostic survey. Anxiety in pet dogs is exacerbated due to the stresses of daily living and a major contributor to the owner-dog bond.

Thunderstorm fear often develops by 3 years of age, and can be related to noise phobia in general, possibly in dogs that were not well exposed to noise during a critical developmental period. Dogs may become acutely distressed when ears full of heavy fur develop an ear infection. Progressive hearing loss makes older dogs less able to locate and identify individual sounds; this sensory loss can produce anxiety. Change in family caregiver is associated with acute, episodic anxiety in some geriatric dogs with canine cognitive dysfunction syndrome. Treatment with a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) for a minimum of 45 days up to 120 days led to reduced noise-associated anxiety behaviors in just under 40% of dogs in one study. In another study, treatment with a serotonin antagonist resulted in reduced anxiety-related behaviors in 90% of dogs over 15 years of age with canine cognitive dysfunction syndrome. More than one in five adult dogs examining for retained testes during routine neutering exhibited behavior suggestive of fear or anxiety.

2.1. Excessive barking

Anxious and worried dogs, in general, bark more. Therefore, it is important to get the dog to relax. The fact that the dog is barking is an expression of concern, and the concern must be addressed. One tip to reduce the amount of barking outside the window is through counterconditioning. The counterconditioning means that you associate something unpleasant with something pleasant. For example, when cars or people come, you can start with giving the dog something really delicious that he loves; such as dried beef and cheese or other good snacks. This is done a short distance from the window. If the dog loses interest or starts to feel worse, wrap up the treat. You can also train with the dog by feeding it close to the window, in order to create a positive association with a window or outside. Wrapping is important so as not to create any unnecessary negative associations, so keep the training sessions short and positive.

Anxiety problems in dogs. Chapter 2. Signs associated with anxiety problems and possible treatment methods. 2.1. Excessive barking. 2.2. Resource guarding. 2.3. Aggression. 2.4. Separation anxiety. 2.5. Fear of noises. 2.6. Fear of a car or accidental. 2.7. Jumping-up. 2.8. Excessive pulling on the leash. 2.9. Anxiety in connection with people. 2.10. Being afraid of strangers. 2.11. Fear of other dogs. Barking a lot can be a sign that the dog is concerned. Treatment: Determine the cause of the barking. Talk to your veterinarian for tips on treatment.

2.2. Destructive behavior

This manifestation, alongside destructive behaviour, is very common in anxious dogs. These animals do not want to ruin objects by performing destructive behaviour, but do so to try and relieve their anxiety. Dogs have 15,000 times more receptors for scent than man and many scents are capable of influencing neurological states. Indeed, since 1984 scents have been used as a first-line treatment for agoraphobia. Every day and also during periods of play, dogs carry out a series of very elaborate olfactory behaviour

sequences. It has been demonstrated that the dog relieves anxiety by performing destructive behaviour in a highly repetitive manner. It is known that, by olfaction or by ingesting food substances rich in caraway, the production of happiness neurotransmitters, such as dopamine and serotonin, increase.

One of the most common concerns when a new dog is brought into the home is how it will behave when left alone for the first time. It has been reported that 17% of dogs bite the furniture when left alone, whilst in general misbehaviour and destructive behaviour are amongst the most common reports to veterinary surgeons, dog trainers and animal behaviourists. Dogs, when left alone and/or in response to separation or social anxiety, may show a number of destructive behaviours which are capable of causing millions of euros in damage. Destructive behaviour of household items, furniture etc. can very quickly lead to the development of other serious pathologies. The most reported destructive behaviour involving the dog that has an anxiety disorder appears to be changing the surface with the dog's tail, chewing on chair legs and continuous shaking of the tongue.

3. Causes of Anxiety

These behaviors can be the result of instinctive or natural behaviors of the dog that we somehow stimulate either to tolerate them, to ensure safety, or to exaggerate them and that the dog's behavior goes to a degree of anxiety such as separation, or a physical response manifest as anxiety such as vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite or anything else for which a veterinarian should be asked for advice and therapy. The causes that can lead to the manifestation of a behavior that a veterinarian or a professional educator determine to be due to anxiety in our 4-legged friend can technically be due to emotional, physical behavior or environmental problems for the following reasons and others. Physical pathologies. In the case of dogs, physical complaints due to old organic defects (dysplasias, arthritis, etc.), new traumas (cruciate ligaments, sprains, etc.), a small problem such as a pebble in a paw, etc. do not go unnoticed by the dog.

Anxiety is an important problem for dogs. The cause of the anxiety may be due to an event that occurred, to an inborn lack of socialization, to the way the dog was raised, to an old organic defect, etc. In the case of a dog that is afraid of thunderstorms, the association between the loud noise and feeling the negative ions in the air that are loaded with electricity that some dogs feel, which makes them become anxious, can be added to the fact that it happened that, due to chance, the dog heard a loud noise.

3.1. Traumatic experiences

Trauma in the life of a dog may also cause stress and anxiety problems. Whether we are talking about dogs from a rescue or former soldiers, like dogs that would be casually abused by their owners. The affected dog may begin to feel stressed whenever it anticipates that triggers associated with the traumatic experience are re-encountered. For instance, if a dog was beaten by individuals using a baseball cap, she may feel stressed in the presence of individuals that wear them. That is one reason why early socialization to as many individuals as somewhat possible is crucially important while the dog is still a puppy.

The primary causes of anxiety problems in dogs are related to separation or abandonment. Dogs are pack animals - they live in close-knit social groups. Nonetheless, dogs can live with humans and after forming an attachment with the members of the household, they begin to see their human friends as a part of the pack. If the human friends go and leave the dog alone, she may either sense that she has been abandoned by the pack or that the pack has been divided into two groups. In both circumstances, the dog may panic and display stress-related behavior like pacing, destruction, anxious salivation, and many others. Once owners notice that their dogs won't settle down after they are left alone, it is likely that the anxiety has already reached intolerable levels. It is better to confront the issue early to stop the problem from increasing.

3.2. Lack of socialization

Walking a dog also provides an opportunity to socialize. Enrolling your dog in a dog training class could also be a helpful step in giving your pet the confidence it needs. It also provides an opportunity to spend time with and create a stronger bond between the dog and its owner. Not to mention, this gives the dog a chance to socialize with other dogs, especially unlikely breeds or breeds not typically associated with the dog that are being given the opportunity to spend time with the owner and interact with other dogs. Only practicing when out on walks can lead to a continual build of phobia in the dog, while practicing at home when there is nothing specific occurring while also involving treats, can allow the dog to accept the sound at its own pace and create positive associations with it.

Lack of socialization a dog that has had few life experiences will lack confidence and when exposed to something new and unfamiliar may respond with anxious behavior. Proper socialization is one of the most important aspects of puppy rearing, but many of us forget that socialization needs to be a life-long process. A puppy that has had little socialization or prior experience with different sights and sounds (such as fireworks, people, other dogs) during their first 3 months of age may also develop timidity. An adult dog with little exposure to our world can respond the same way. The dog not only fears the unfamiliar sight, but also the lack of control and the surprises that might come with it.

3.3. Genetics

Although the information is still very scarce, notable progress has been made over the last ten years in the comprehension of the causes of anxiety in dogs, including genetic factors. When choosing which dogs will reproduce, it is essentially the owner who decides the characteristics he wants for his dog and, therefore, it is the animals that meet such criteria that lead to reproduction, ensuring that the characteristics of the new litters approach those set by the one that directs the crosses of the litters. Included among these criteria, we find behavior, affecting the choice of breeds in which some characteristics are more pronounced, while others are surpassed due to them not being considered a priority. In this way, it is not difficult to understand that we tend to find a greater number of anxious and fearful dogs among some breeds.

Anxiety might be considered a minor deviation from normal behavior, particularly if interpreted from the ethological point of view. However, it should also be viewed as a continuum, with fears and phobias at the extreme end. With the purpose of preventing damage to both the patient and their environment, it will be necessary to take the degree of alteration into consideration for its handling. While it is normal for dogs to experience fear or anxiety in certain situations, some dogs are affected in a pathological way, developing phobias or anxiety disorders. Although little is known about the behavioral and genetic causes of anxiety and phobias in dogs, it is known that these behaviors are affected by genetic factors, so that certain breeds appear to be more prone than others. The aim of the present paper is to offer a review of the etiology, pathophysiology, diagnosis, and current treatment of anxiety problems in dogs, which will hopefully be useful for both veterinary practitioners and dog owners.

4. Treatments for Anxiety

Although it would not be appropriate to give a full description of any of these above treatments here, some details about each probably is useful. Based on a number of studies to date, anti-anxiety medication (clomipramine, fluoxetine, etc.) appears to be the most effective treatment for dogs with severe panic. Anti-anxiety medication can initially be given once per day, with increasing the dose once weekly if necessary up to as high of a dose as the dog can manage. After the owner reaches the tolerable dose, treatment often continues for several months. Renowned veterinary behaviorists also often recommend adding in a behavior modification component to the dogs' treatment plans although to date none experimentally have been shown to be helpful. In addition, there are some potential risks attached to treatment with anti-anxiety medication, including potential side effects such as increased anxiety, compulsive behaviors, and gastrointestinal problems.

There are a number of treatment options that have been shown to be effective in studies examining treatment of separation-related problems in dogs, although it is important to know that there are many more treatments that are widely recommended but unproven. The following have been proven to be effective, meaning that these treatments have been shown to work in experiments with dogs suffering from separation-related problems. In these studies, effects of treatment have been compared to an alternative treatment, an inactive treatment (placebo), or to no treatment. Usually, the result has shown that the recommended treatment is more effective than the inactive treatment, and as effective as the alternative treatment (typically an anti-anxiety medication). To date, the following treatments have been experimentally found to be effective when used alone: clomipramine, fluoxetine, and diazepam (although this is not a safe choice for long-term use). All other treatments require more research, but these might be options to consider. There are also studies that look at what treatments are the most effective, compared to placebo or idle waiting. It is also useful to know whether treatments work at all, for example compared to a placebo/active drug.

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4.1. Behavior modification

The therapeutic approach to separation anxiety consists of reducing signs of anxiety and teaching the dog to be alone. The use of sleep in shelters to reduce anxiety by reducing high activity levels or the intake of neuroprotective supplements has also been proposed. Previous studies combining the prior generation tricyclic antidepressant gabapentin with cognitive-behavioral therapy have shown that it can favorably modify the neural response to fear-provoking stimuli in dogs. Nonetheless, because of its potential for drug-drug interactions or adverse effects on the individual, gabapentin should be used at low initial doses and gradually increased. Finally, use caution when combining gabapentin with other sedatives such as acepromazine during the introduction phase of pharmacotherapy. Fluoxetine is often the medication of choice to be used for six to eight months in combination with training to help control or alleviate the anxiety problems. Other factors, such as age, sex, body weight, concurrent drug use, and underlying medical conditions, should be considered through individual drug titration of gabapentin or fluoxetine.

Despite more than two decades of clinical research on canine separation anxiety, it continues to be a difficult disease to treat, and only half of affected dogs successfully respond to therapy. In most cases, the management of an affected dog is a difficult task for dog owners and requires a team of veterinary

behaviorists, medical doctors, and behavior technicians. Separation anxiety can occur before reaching adulthood or it can appear later, in an older dog. The most affected breeds are the German Shepherd and the Golden Retriever. While other breeds may also be affected, older dogs are in the minority. The main characteristics of separation anxiety that can damage the animal's habitat and objects or annoy people causing shouts or complaints are barking, howling, moaning, making holes in carpets, curtains, or window blinds, scraping walls, trying to escape from houses or enclosures.

4.2. Environmental changes

A balanced activatory inhibition system plays an important role in the transmission, processing, integration of sensorial information, in the regulation of emotional responses, motivation, premotor, hypoxic and motor activity of the body. The nervous system allows a fast response by locating the threat in the environment, evaluating it based on the potential biological relevance, on the emotional charge achieved through past experience, and automatically responding with a suitable motor action. In animals that show an exacerbation due to an emotion and that have aggressive and anxious behaviour, also demonstrate changes in their sensory modulation. This change can occur due to a change in the amygdaloid connections, because this structure has an alert system, links the sensory input with the defence emotional mechanisms that can cause a rapid response to the imminence of stressors. Unfortunately, it has also been shown that not only there is an exacerbation or decrease in the response, but that these systems have changed their mechanisms, making the intensity and defensive capabilities of these animals be different. These changes alter not only the perception of fear or apprehension but also the sensory processes.

Every time an environmental stimulus occurs, the levels of the fear and anxiety mediators and regulators mechanisms are developed according to and influenced by its emotional value and emotional charge due to past experiences. Thereby, animals can acquire an exacerbated or deficient IESV response. When it comes to the anxious or fearful animal, the IESV response is usually dysfunctional. This statement is supported by the fact that, in an emotional response to a stimulus, the output of a certain neurotransmitter cannot be evaluated in isolation; everything is interrelated. Thus, either the noradrenergic or adrenergic systems can significantly increase the anxiety levels character of this type of situation. When there is a deficit in these systems, the individual tends to be more calm and underactive in situations that were once traumatic. An abnormality of these pathways also decreases the effect of a competitive agonist, such as clonidine or the α_2 adrenergic receptors, responsible for these mediators. Animals will start to have inhibitory control difficulties, such as not being able to control spontaneously their reactions, acquiring an overreactive IES response. However, since there is a continuous relationship between the amygdala and the hypothalamus that exerts influence on the corticotropin releasing hormone (CRF) and plays a major role in the modulation of the hypothalamic pituitary axis (HPA) functions, it has been shown that a lower functioning of these pathways can reduce anxiety, fight or aggressiveness.

4.3. Exercise

Although there is little time left, at least you have to make the most of it. Sure, it will be a very limited exercise compared to what it could perform. That is why you need to try to remove that accumulated energy through toys. At a minimum one or two hours of going for a walk in the morning, so that it barely has strength for what it does in that time and then take it out for another approximately 30 minutes or 1 hour and a half. Along with these two exits, the day can be made lighter. You can use a kong. This toy has a cavity where you can hide the dog's favorite food or treats. The dog will spend time until it gets dry by trying to get the reward. In turn, it will help relieve stress and anxiety. Do not be afraid to use them while you are at home, only in this way will the dog trust that you will return for him and will not generate separation anxiety.

There are different degrees of anxiety and in each of them, it will require different treatments and different guidelines to try to relieve what the faithful friend is suffering. Fortunately, it is a disorder that can be treated. It is not difficult to do and the dog will return to being the same as before in a few weeks. Due to the hectic pace of life we take, it is very difficult to offer the dog the necessary and advisable exercise. Especially those people who live in very large cities and have a small apartment. As soon as you come home from work and get out for your walk, the last thing you feel like doing is taking a long walk.