



Stress in our Dogs: Strategies for Stress Management

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Many dogs enjoy a “spoiled” lifestyle complete with plush beds, tasty treats, and lots of affection. But, despite these comforts and care, they also often experience stress.

Thunder, fireworks, a new baby, or other changes in a household can all have an impact on your dog. Beyond mental distress, these stressful events can have an influence on your dog’s physical health. They can lead to significant digestive upset, with vomiting and diarrhea.

If your dog appears to be experiencing stress, you should contact your veterinarian to schedule a consultation in which she can fully examine the situation. Your veterinary team is uniquely qualified to make a diagnosis and prescribe a comprehensive treatment plan for your pet.

Your veterinarian may recommend some combination or all of the following stress management strategies for your dog.

1. **Take steps to ensure your pet’s and family’s safety** – If your pet attempts to escape or run away during a stress trigger, it’s best to move him to a secure location. And if your dog exhibits an aggressive response, he should be physically segregated from any potential targets for his aggression.
2. **Avoid punishment of a dog showing signs of stress** – Not only is punishing a stressed or anxious animal inhumane, it likely will increase the dog’s stress.
3. **Identify and manage stress triggers** – While altogether eliminating stress triggers would be the ideal solution, it is often not feasible. For example, you can’t control thunderstorms.

But even when a trigger is unavoidable, you can minimize its impact through environmental modification. For example, during a thunderstorm, you can move your dog to an internal room and play background noise.

4. **Start a behavioral modification program** – You can work to desensitize your pet to a stress trigger by exposing him to a modified trigger stimulus, starting at a very low level and gradually increasing the intensity. Another strategy is counterconditioning: influencing

your dog to respond to a trigger in a positive way, feeling relaxed instead of stressed. This can be accomplished by pairing exposure to the trigger stimulus with something pleasurable, like food or toys. Desensitization and counterconditioning are often combined.

5. **Feed your dog clinical nutrition formulated for stress symptoms** – Your veterinarian may also recommend a change in diet, introducing a food like Hill’s® Prescription Diet® i/d® Stress to help manage stress-related digestive upset. Prescription Diet i/d Stress is a highly digestible nutritional solution formulated with hydrolyzed casein, prebiotic fiber, and ginger to reduce the risk of stress-related digestive upset in dogs up to 30 lbs.
6. **Consider lifestyle changes to reduce stress** – Just as in humans, regular exercise may contribute to overall stress reduction in your dog. Acupuncture or touch therapy may also be helpful.

There are also a number of helpful products on the market to reduce stress, such as pheromones and gentle pressure body wraps. During your consultation, your veterinarian might also discuss possible drug therapies.